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Chaucerian Ekphrasis: Power, Place and Image in the Knight's Tale

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Abstract

We first glimpse Chaucer's Knight in a portrait-like description of him that Chaucer the narrator relays in the General Prologue of *The Canterbury Tales*. Chaucer describes the Knight as embodying all of the necessary characteristics of a "verray, parfit gentil knight," true, complete and noble (GP 72). In addition to this, he is a veteran of crusades and has gained an outstanding reputation through his deeds. Despite the Knight's impeccable track record, he has a somewhat shabby appearance, which contrasts starkly with the ideals he embodies. Chaucer tells us "But for to tellen yow of his array,/ His hors were goode, but he was nat gay./ Of fustian he wored a gypon/ Al bismotered with his habergeon" (GP 73-76). This description calls into question the effectiveness of the institution of knighthood as a means of subsistence for the Knight, and invites a reappraisal of his own effectiveness as a knight. In essence, the picture Chaucer gives of the Knight is disjointed.

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**Chaucerian Ekphrasis:
Power, Place and Image in the Knight's Tale**

**by
Tara Fairclough**

**A Senior Thesis Submitted to the
Eastern Michigan University
Honors Program
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for Graduation
With Honors in English Language & Literature**

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Table of Contents

Part I: Introduction	1
The Enigma of Chaucer's Knight	1
The Knight's Tale	3
Main Points	7
Part II: Historical Context	11
The Importance of Travel and Architecture	11
Medieval Pilgrimages	12
How does Rome Apply?	14
Medieval and Modern Guidebooks to Rome	16
What Changed Medieval Views?	21
Chaucer's Experience with Medieval Visual Art and Architecture	22
The Colosseum and the Knight's Tale	25
Part III: Reading the Architecture	29
Overview	29
The Temples	30
How the Knight Effects the Tale	34
Theseus and Patronage	35
The Grove, Temples and Prison	41
Order and Chaos	46
Part IV: Conclusion	50
Works Cited	53

Part I: Introduction

The Enigma of Chaucer's Knight

We first glimpse Chaucer's Knight in a portrait-like description of him that Chaucer the narrator relays in the General Prologue of *The Canterbury Tales*. Chaucer describes the Knight as embodying all of the necessary characteristics of a "verray, parfit gentil knight," true, complete and noble (GP 72). In addition to this, he is a veteran of crusades and has gained an outstanding reputation through his deeds. Despite the Knight's impeccable track record, he has a somewhat shabby appearance, which contrasts starkly with the ideals he embodies. Chaucer tells us "But for to tellen yow of his array,/ His hors were goode, but he was nat gay./ Of fustian he wered a gypon/ Al bismotered with his habergeon" (GP 73-76). This description calls into question the effectiveness of the institution of knighthood as a means of subsistence for the Knight, and invites a reappraisal of his own effectiveness as a knight. In essence, the picture Chaucer gives of the Knight is disjointed.

The audience is pulled farther and farther away from the Knight due to an emphasis on unachievable goals and abstract concepts that have taken on a mythological proportion over time. As a crusader and an established knight of good reputation, the Knight embodies the ideals generally attributed to knighthood. Such concepts include, as Chaucer mentions, "trouthe and honour, freedom and curteisie" (GP 46). In *The Knight in History*, Francis Gies explains: "a knight should be courteous, generous, well-spoken, discreet, faithful in the service of love; he should have... excellence and worth, as well as good sense... brave, loyal, and honorable, and should perform deeds that would earn him glory" (Gies 77-78). She continues, adding the religious elements, "he must defend and maintain the church, and

widows and orphans” (Gies 79). These qualities combine to form quite an ideal picture of a masculine warrior, but what is Chaucer hinting at with the Knight’s shabby appearance?

Scholarly opinions on the Knight are divided in two. The traditionally accepted side of the argument, expressed by F. N. Robinson and John Matthews Manly, believes wholeheartedly in the ideality of the Knight as a perfect, Christian warrior. Manly argues that Chaucer was “giving us a figure at once realistic and typical of the noble and adventurous idealists of his day” (Manly 107). Terry Jones, a more recent author, chooses to debunk previous opinions on the perfection of the Knight, and claims that “the Knight’s career, instead of conforming to a pattern of Christian chivalry, has more in common with the mercenaries who ... brought the concept of chivalry into disrepute and eventual disuse” (Jones 2).

As Manly mentions in “A Knight Ther Was,” the historical situation surrounding Chaucer and his knight is precarious. The development of gunpowder weapons and a growing emphasis on commerce gradually squeezed the knight out of the socioeconomic picture to the degree that “when Chaucer painted this portrait, the figure which served him as a model and the ideals which it embodied were already doomed” (Manly 90). This raises the question: why would Chaucer imagine his knight as an idealized figure? The contrast between the decaying state of the knight and the idealized figure presented by Chaucer creates an enigma surrounding the character. As debate of the Knight is brought into question, looking at the Knight’s Tale brings further insight.

The Knight's Tale

Chaucer clearly considered the Knight to be a character of paramount importance regardless of what he is meant to represent. Although different manuscripts of *The Canterbury Tales* place the Tales in different orders based on how the ten fragments that compose the *Tales* are arranged, the Knight's Tale is always the first. The prominence Chaucer assigns the Knight is undisputed. This is known because of a segue located at the end of the General Prologue that sets up the Knight to begin his Tale. After all the pilgrims draw straws to decide who is to tell their Tale first, "were it by aventure, or sort, or cas,/ The soth is this: the cut fil to the knyght" (GP 844-845). Thus, whether by fate or luck, the highest ranking member of the social order begins the progression.

The Knight's Tale is a romance adapted from Boccaccio's *Teseida delle Nozze d'Emilia*, or *The Book of Theseus*. In the *Companion to Chaucer Studies*, a romance is summarized as "a story of adventure, fictitious and frequently marvelous or supernatural" ...most often, it reflects the ideals of chivalry, of knights dedicated to lord, to lady, and to Church— hence the emphasis upon bravery and honor, or themes of love or religious faith" (Rowland 229). It is notable that many of the changes Chaucer made from Boccaccio's version of the same story affect the reading of the Knight's Tale. Chaucer extensively changed the *Teseida* in order to fulfill his own purposes. He omitted several sections, such as a more elaborate telling of Theseus's dealings with the Amazons. Chaucer also added a courtly feel to Boccaccio's story.

The Knight tells a lengthy and highly detailed Tale, one of the longest of *The Canterbury Tales*. In it, the two main characters, Palamon and Arcite, are virtually indistinguishable and the narrative is interrupted for a lengthy description of architecture and

visual art. As I will argue, the Knight's Tale is inaccessible through its form and emphasis on idealized constructs, with a particular emphasis on architecture. The Knight's Tale reflects many of the elements that the Knight is supposed to possess himself. It celebrates chivalry and courtly love through the actions of Palamon, Arcite and Theseus. The Tale itself is divided into four parts, which chronicle the quest for Emelye's love.

The Knight's Tale begins with background information about Theseus, how he took his wife Ypolita and her sister Emelye back to Athens. On their return journey they come across lamenting ladies who urge Theseus to overthrow Creon, the tyrannical ruler of Thebes, in order for them to bury their dead husbands. Theseus does this, and after the battle is over finds two cousins, Palamon and Arcite barely alive, and locks them in prison. John Zhang addresses Palamon and Arcite's prison and its implications in "Medieval Visual Arts and the Barred Window in Chaucer's The Knight's Tale." Zhang mentions the religious symbolism involved in this scene as it relates to the window itself as well as the ideals of knighthood and chivalry that are invoked by the imagery of the bars on the window. It is in prison that the two first see and fall in love with Emelye. Arcite's stay in the prison is short, as he is let out by his friend Duc Perotheus, but is banished from Theseus's kingdom.

The second part of the Knight's Tale focuses on the lamenting of Palamon and Arcite as they long for Emelye. Arcite is able to return to the court of Athens as a disguised servant and gain closer proximity to Emelye this way. Palamon has remained in prison these seven years, and eventually escapes with the help of a friend. Palamon and Arcite meet again in a grove that the royal court passes through. The cousins find each other and agree to fight in the morning. The next day, the royal court passes through the grove again and finds the cousins fighting. Theseus wants to kill them on the spot, but Ypolita and Emelye plead for Theseus to spare them. He forgives their misdeeds and befriends them. Theseus proposes

that in order to solve the dispute over Emelye once and for all that the cousins meet back in fifty weeks with one hundred knights each. Whoever slays or drives out his opponent will win Emelye and Theseus will act as judge.

At the opening of the third part, the narrative voice undergoes a transition into first person. In this section, the Knight gives detailed descriptions of the lavish spending of Theseus, the architectural structure of the “noble theatre” in which Palamon and Arcite will fight, as well as the temples located in them. The Knight vividly describes the sculptures and portraits in each of the three chapels built in honor of Mars, Venus and Diana. In “Chaucer and the Visual Arts of his Time,” John Fleming focuses on Chaucer’s exposure to visual arts that were popular during his lifetime and observes that such images reflective of Chaucer’s time are common in his writings. This description in the Knight’s Tale is a prime example of the influence Chaucer’s artistic experience had on his writing. Eventually the Knight returns to the story of Palamon and Arcite, telling of their prayers to the gods. Part Three closes with a discussion between the gods, mediated unsuccessfully by Jupiter and resolved by Saturn, in which the resolution of the Tale is decided. Palamon prays to Venus and is assured that he will win Emelye, and Arcite prays to Mars and is assured victory in battle. Emelye prays to Diana, but is told that she will not be able to keep her chastity as she wishes, but will have to marry one of the cousins.

The fourth part of the Knight’s Tale contains the most action out of any of the parts; it tells of the battle. The battle between Palamon and Arcite is a grand affair with many spectators. Theseus decides that it would be a shame to lose so many wonderful knights, and decides there is to be no killing, but that knights who are clearly losing are to be removed from the battle. As the battle progresses it becomes apparent to Theseus that Arcite wins. However, because of Saturn’s intervention, tragedy strikes during Arcite’s victory ride and he

is mortally wounded. Arcite eventually dies and is given a grand funeral in the grove. Both Palamon and Emelye are distraught. After a few years, Palamon weds Emelye and they love each other.

Many scholars have chosen to focus on the characters of the Knight's Tale. As *The Oxford Companion to Chaucer* indicates, "the action of the poem raises some large questions concerning the human condition, and the characters involved comment on them" (Gray 272). The excerpt on the Knight's Tale focuses, as most articles do, on the contrasting opinions of the knight, comments on the balance between order and disorder, and the tragedy of the story (Gray 273). Nothing is mentioned about the intrusions that architecture makes into the Tale or any comments that Chaucer could be making through the prominent visual art in the text. I assert that the architecture described in the Knight's Tale attempts to answer the questions raised by the text, including those regarding the characterization of the Knight and Theseus and overall comments on the struggle between order and chaos.

Margaret Hallissy's, article "Writing a Building: Chaucer's Knowledge of the Construction Industry and the Language of the Knight's Tale" is the most directly applicable to specific claims I intend to make. In summary, Hallissy appraises Chaucer's personal connection with the architectural world and how this would affect his writing of the "noble theater" and Theseus as a master builder and patron. She also raises questions pertaining to the act of creation regarding to architects and writers. Hallissy chooses the conflict between order and chaos as her focus. I believe that, though this is a valid and important point, she misses the mark in her interpretation of Theseus's motives. He is not only a ruler attempting to bring order out chaos or to his misguided subjects, but rather a ruler attempting to demonstrate his power through concrete and monumental means. Theseus is ineffective in

his attempts to create order because the concrete demonstrations of his power incite chaos instead.

For the Tale, the conflicts between ideals and corruptions explored through the tension between order and chaos and the characterization of knightly figures, including Palamon, Arcite, Theseus and the Knight create a kind of inaccessibility in the Knight's Tale. The inaccessibility in turn causes an inability for the audience or any character within the Tale to decode the architectural and visual texts and the comments they make. The Knight is inaccessible because it is not clear whether he is really a "verray, parfit gentil knyght" or a mercenary. His Tale is inaccessible because of the courtly ideals it presents and unseats. The architecture in the Knight's Tale is inaccessible to the characters because the Knight describes it, and it is also inaccessible to the audience because the characters are removed from the scene. Ultimately, the combination of these inaccessible elements causes a misreading of the text that obscures Chaucer's comments on his own society.

Main Points

I would like to focus particularly on Part Three of the Knight's Tale. The most remarkable aspect of this section is a shift in the narrative voice. An omniscient narrator, the Knight, who is removed from the action of the story, tells most of the Tale. In this section the Knight becomes part of the story, telling the audience about images that the characters are supposed to see. The first person narration of this section affects how the architecture is seen. William Frost believes, as I do, that this seemingly separated section of the Tale serves as an abstract comment on the greater events in the Knight's Tale rather than a digression. Frost states:

These passages, among the most admired in Chaucer, are generally treated as set-pieces, in detachment from context. Actually they are an organic part of the Tale, for they symbolically extend the misfortunes and griefs of the central characters and at the same time provide a background against which these same misfortunes and griefs will seem less extraordinary. (Frost 300)

This jarring shift in narrative voice causes the reader to see the temples through the Knight's eyes, raising the question: are we as readers meant to deduce that the Knight drew on personal observations and experiences in order to give such a detailed and exacting description? In order to answer this question, it is necessary to consider how a medieval audience would read architecture, and how the Knight fits into a medieval audience. I will address this momentarily.

I consider the most unexplored and underdeveloped element of the Knight's Tale to be the role of architecture as it is used to interrupt the narrative as well as comment on the events and characters in the Tale. The most dominant element of architecture in the Knight's Tale is the "noble theater," which Theseus builds and the three temples within it that are described in minute detail. This segment of the Tale serves as an abrupt pause in the progressive action of the plot.

Although Part Two contains a brief architectural description of the prison, it is not as elaborate as the architectural descriptions of the "noble theatre" and temples found in Part Three. It is important to note, however, that by including a brief focus on the prison and the barred window in it, Chaucer sets the stage for the more elaborate architectural picture that appears later on. He also creates a sense of parallel structure within the Tale through this description, in which architectural elements are sandwiched between plot.

Many authors writing on the Knight's Tale come very close to discussing Chaucer's use of architectural description. Their arguments lead up to the questions I wish to ask on the matter, but stop as soon as they approach any of the issues. By this I mean to say that

scholarship on the architecture and visual elements of the Knight's Tale is meager at best and usually focuses not on the temples and the lengthy visual descriptions found in Part Three of the Tale. Thus, the issue of imprisonment and separation in the prison description are commonly the theme of discussion rather than why Chaucer chooses to insert such a descriptive and seemingly out of place intrusion into the narrative progression of his Tale.

Chaucer uses extensive descriptions of architecture and visual arts to comment on the nature of medieval society. Clogan explores the differences between several versions of the Theban tale adapted by both Boccaccio and Chaucer in "Visions of Thebes in Medieval Literature." He claims that "in the Knight's Tale the perception of Theban history becomes the responsibility of the intelligentsia as medieval romance decorum subverts the historical and moral vision of the classical epic" (Clogan 144). The architectural descriptions reveal much more about medieval society than they do of classical Theban culture. Clogan continues with his argument by concluding that "the Knight's Tale is essentially a political poem concerning the relationship of history and chivalric culture, epic history and the realities of courtly life. The text conceals much of Theban history that would expose contradictions in the dominant ideology and the social tensions of Chaucer's world" (Clogan 149). I argue that Chaucer uses the temples of Mars, Venus and Diana in order to comment on the "dominant ideology and the social tensions" of his time.

The comments that Chaucer makes through ekphrasis in the Knight's Tale all point toward the notion of inaccessibility— the inaccessibility of medieval ideals, such as chivalry, knighthood, courtly love and the ordering of chaos—through the Tale and its characters. By using the term "inaccessible," I mean to say that such an element or character that I label "inaccessible" is difficult to identify with and is upheld by constructs that have become so idealized that they hold no ground in the practicality of daily life (either during antiquity,

Chaucer's time or now). Thus, the pilgrims listening to the Knight's Tale and the modern reader are faced with obstacles caused by this inaccessibility in order to fully grasp the Knight's Tale or its larger implications as a comment on medieval society, patronage, and even knighthood in general. This concept is illustrated throughout the Knight's Tale and is demonstrated especially through Chaucer's use of architecture and visual arts in the "noble theatre" and the temples of Mars, Venus and Diana. It is also found in the contrast between ideals and corruptions of ideals associated with Theseus and the Knight.

The significance of ekphrasis in the Knight's Tale is found in three main comments. First, that the Knight's first person narration of the architecture and artistic details in Part Three [a](#)ffect the reading of the Tale and its characters. Second, that the "noble theatre" and temples reveal Theseus's desire to manifest his own power in concrete form. Third, that the comments made by the tension between order and chaos manifested throughout the Knight's Tale combine to create Chaucer's comments on his society through the Tale itself.

Part II: Historical Context

The Importance of Travel and Architecture

Because Chaucer has so thoroughly integrated architecture into the Knight's Tale it is of paramount importance to read the architecture as a text in its own right, and not dismiss it as part of the scenery. As a modern audience, we tend to consider architecture as part of a scene's background. This was not so during the Middle Ages. An exploration of the medieval reading of architecture is integral to the understanding of the Knight's Tale because medieval and modern perceptions of architecture are markedly different. The reading of architecture in the Knight's Tale is also integral to an understanding of the text because of Chaucer's own experience with it, both through travel and occupation.

The Knight's Tale is focused around two activities that demonstrate the importance of reading architecture: pilgrimage and crusade. *The Canterbury Tales* is the frame narrative of a pilgrimage, which demonstrates the importance of architecture as a destination. I will look specifically at Rome as a medieval tourist or pilgrimage destination in order to explore the medieval views of travel. This analysis will help us to understand better the architecture and visual art in the Knight's Tale: the "noble theatre" and the temples of Mars, Venus and Diana that Theseus commissions. The perception of architecture by a medieval audience will be examined through a look at the tour book of medieval Rome, *The Marvels of Rome* (*Mirabilia Urbis Romae*). An analysis of the medieval views of architecture contrasts with modern views in order to provide further insight into the Knight's Tale. Chaucer's experience with architecture, both through his position as Clerk of the King's Works and his travels, also provides insight into why he infused architecture into the Knight's Tale.

Chaucer traveled to Italy (Genoa, Florence and Milan) in 1372-3 and 1378. His own travels influenced the Knight's Tale and its extensive architectural descriptions (Rowland 142). Chaucer's personal experience with the world of architecture made him attuned to the artistry of the buildings that surrounded him both in England and during his trips to Italy. In "Chaucer and the Visual Arts of His Time," John Fleming considers the influence that visual arts had on Chaucer and his writing. Fleming pays particular attention to the Gothic style that was prevalent in the late Middle Ages. Art and architecture were readily available to Chaucer as a citizen of London, a cultural center; he also looked to French and Italian visual and written arts for inspiration (Fleming 125-127).

Chaucer's observations of architecture and decorative art serve to make more vivid visual descriptions, which greatly impact the audience's perception of the Knight's Tale. In the article "Architectural Portraiture in Chaucer's House of Fame," Braswell concentrates specifically on the descriptions found in *House of Fame*, but the conclusions are applicable to all of Chaucer's visually descriptive writing. Braswell states that "a systematic comparison of the architecture in Chaucer's poem with the contemporary art forms with which the poet would have been familiar seems to reveal Chaucer's stubborn adherence to material reality," and "detail for detail, the architecture in this poem could and did exist, not in a single design, but in parts of many structures" (Braswell 101-102).

Medieval Pilgrimages

In order to analyze the role of tourism and architecture in *The Canterbury Tales*, it is necessary to understand the premise of the narrative. *The Canterbury Tales* tells of a pilgrimage from the Tabard Inn in Southwark to the Canterbury Cathedral, a shrine to the martyr

Thomas Becket. Even though the pilgrimage Chaucer narrates is relatively short, it serves the same purposes as other, more extensive, pilgrimages. The main motivating factor for medieval travel was religion. Travelers had in common the goal to earn favor with God. As Bishop explains of the Middle Ages: “When travel became reasonably safe in Europe, the church encouraged pilgrimages for the spiritual benefits they provided and sometimes as an alternative for punishment for misdeeds” (Bishop 158).

Another purpose for travel was the crusade, which shared an equally religious motive with the pilgrimage. Francis Gies explains in *The Knight in History* that the crusades can be included under the larger blanket of pilgrimages as well, sharing in the quest for atonement through travel; “the armed pilgrimage of the Crusade might be seen as a superior form in which a knight could win total remission of his sins through skill and valor” (Gies 34). The driving force for pilgrimages and crusades was the desire to win favor with God through exemplary demonstrations of faith. In essence, “the crusades were conceived of as a service to the Christian God, and the crusaders thought themselves, at least intermittently, the consecrated servants of holy purpose” (Bishop 90).

The preservation of sacred space was of paramount importance to medieval Christians, who did not want their holy places tainted by infidels. It is this element that links pilgrimage and crusade. Gies phrases this idea succinctly by saying: “the custom of pilgrimage itself contributed to the Crusade, as pilgrims were easily convinced that it was intolerable for the Holy Places to be in the hands of the infidels” (Gies 34). Despite the conflict between Moslems and Christians that rises out of Christian protection of holy places, both groups made pilgrimages during the Middle Ages to a shared destination: Jerusalem. “The pilgrim rout to Jerusalem was kept holy and secure, and the Holy City, itself

in Moslem hands, was operated as a sanctified tourist attraction for both Moslems and Christians” (Bishop 90).

The reasons for pilgrimages and crusades are of considerable importance in the analysis of the Knight as a character. He went on crusades and a pilgrimage. Is there something the Knight is trying to atone for? Chaucer’s characterization of the Knight and the critical debate surrounding him is referenced by this question. His desire to atone for something implies that he is either conscious of atoning for every little sin, or he is not quite as pure as critics such as Robinson and Manly consider him to be.

The range of pilgrimage destinations spanned from small European churches to much larger sites. Bishop considers the three main destinations for medieval pilgrimages to be Santiago de Compostela in Spain, Rome and Jerusalem (Bishop 158). In addition to these, there were many other destinations that required less travel time and were less strenuous, such as the pilgrimage to Canterbury in *The Canterbury Tales*. Out of these main pilgrimage sites, I will look more closely at Rome in the eyes of the medieval pilgrim-tourist. It is especially important to look at Rome in consideration of the Knight’s Tale because of the similarities of the architecture described by the Knight and that found in Rome.

How does Rome Apply?

Using Rome as a case study, I intend to explore the approach that a medieval audience took to understanding architecture and built space and how it contrasts with a modern approach to the same destination. A focus on medieval tourism in Rome is applicable in an analysis of the Knight’s Tale due to the similarities between Roman architecture and the architecture found in Thebes, the Tale’s setting. Ancient Roman

structures share the monumental magnitude and physical manifestation of power that is shown in the Knight's Tale. Since Rome has universally recognized monuments, its scope and grandeur will be of great advantage here as I consider the Knight's Tale.

A look at the Colosseum is particularly applicable to the Knight's Tale because of both its structure and size. Here I will address the size, as the structure itself will be discussed in depth later. The "noble theatre" in the Tale mimics and even surpasses the size of the huge scale of the Colosseum. The Knight explains that it is a mile around and sixty paces high, so that another obstructs no person's view (KtT 1885- 1892). The "noble theatre" would have to be big enough to meet Theseus's stipulations that both Palamon and Arcite would bring one hundred knights with them. This theatre would have to be big enough to fit 202 warriors and everyone who came to watch them.

The fact that monumental structures were in ruins by the Middle Ages revealed a great deal to the medieval Christians. Charles Stinger explains how common Roman ruins were in medieval Rome in "The Renaissance in Rome": "the ruins in one sense formed part of the natural landscape, or served as convenient foundations for medieval construction" (Stinger 59). Such monuments and ruins were prevalent in the Middle Ages and would be easily recognizable to a medieval audience, thus an adequate point of reference when dealing with medieval architecture.

The medieval belief that anyone not believing in the Christian God would be punished and destroyed was reinforced because enormous buildings, like the Colosseum, were in ruins by the Middle Ages. The Colosseum's degradation, therefore, reflects the degradation of pagan society. This was an appealing idea to medieval Christians, who believed that Christianity was superior to any other belief system, and therefore assumed that the pagans were punished for their religious practices. They concluded that because the

classical societies were pagan and did not believe in the one true God, their prosperous civilization was destroyed.

Medieval and Modern Guidebooks to Rome

Because medieval society had such a Christian focus, every aspect of their lives revolved around the superiority of Christianity and pointed out the shortcomings of any group of non-Christians. Medieval tourism is no exception to this. I have already mentioned the Christian focus of medieval travel, the pilgrimage and crusades. The pilgrim's guidebook to medieval Rome titled *The Marvels of Rome* (*Mirabilia Urbis Romae*) is centered on the beliefs that a non-Christian civilization is doomed to destruction.

The Marvels of Rome was the "standard guide book of the more learned visitors to Rome from the twelfth to the fifteenth century" (*Marvels* xv). The work is not focused on accurately portraying the history of Rome; most of the listings for popular Roman sites have more basis in legend than fact. In Francis Morgan Nichols's Preface to the First Edition of this guide, he explains the nature of the tour book, saying that it "narrates with charming simplicity the legends with which the principle monuments, and the few works of art which were not buried beneath the surface, were associated in the minds of the more educated people of the time" (*Marvels* xvi). This description emphasizes a few crucial points about the guidebook, medieval Rome and medieval tourists. Much of classical Roman building was buried or in extreme disrepair by the Middle Ages. From a modern viewpoint, what a medieval traveler learned about these sites were legends or stories, not concrete facts. Most of all, *The Marvels of Rome* was a narration of Rome widely accepted by the educated members

of medieval society. These ideas pieced together develop the medieval view of classical Rome.

The Marvels of Rome allowed the medieval audience of Rome to encounter its ancient Roman predecessors. In the “Introduction,” added to the guidebook in 1986, Eileen Gardiner explains the function of this guidebook as “a guide for the devout pilgrim seeking to retrace the footsteps of Peter and Paul and the other Christian martyrs” (*Marvels* xxviii). Due to the popularity of *The Marvels of Rome*, it is no wonder that the medieval citizen would have many misconceptions of popular monuments from classical Rome. Eileen Gardiner observes the revival of interest in ancient culture in the twelfth century, which created a market for Roman guidebooks and tourism, in turn spreading historical inaccuracy and misconceptions such as those found in *The Marvels of Rome* (*Marvels* xxv). The misreading of architecture leads to misconceptions that affect the reading of literature, such as the Knight’s Tale, which extensively describe architecture from a classical time period.

Considering *The Marvels of Rome* in particular, the guidebook is divided into three parts: “The Foundation of Rome,” “Famous Places and Images in Rome” and “A Perambulation of the City.” The first section is the most basic and straightforward, entitled “The Foundation of Rome,” it considers Rome with respect to “her wall, gates, arches, hills, baths, palaces, theaters, bridges, pillars, cemeteries and Holy Places” (*Marvels* 1). This section contains mostly lists of triumphal arches and temples, etc., and is presented very matter-of-factly. It is in the second and third sections, however, that the Christian influence and narrative tone of the guidebook is established.

The second part entitled “Famous Places and Images in Rome” is good, quick reading uncluttered by excessive detail, and claims to tell “the legends behind Rome’s monuments” (*Marvels* 15). Part Two truly is a section of legends. The anecdotes take on the

feeling of a traditionally oral story being passed down in print. For instance, in the section entitled “Constantine’s Horse,” a mixture of entertainment and fact emerges as the author informs the reader: “at the Lateran there is a certain bronze horse called Constantine’s Horse, but it is not so. Whoever will know the truth, let him read it here” (*Marvels* 19). With this statement, *The Marvels of Rome* establishes its position as a source of historical fact for a medieval tourist. Part Three addresses “A Perambulation of the City” and considers “the sites of Rome region by region” (*Marvels* 31). It seems to combine the ideas of the first and second parts, giving a more narrative list of Rome’s regions.

Considering the important role of religion in medieval travel, it is critical to note that the guidebook consistently points out pagan influences and mistakes of the ancient Romans. For instance, the Colosseum was believed to be a temple to the sun god, and a value judgment about its function was made accordingly, as demonstrated by its Christian diction. The following statement included under the discussion of the Colosseum reveals several trademarks of the religious connotations of *The Marvels of Rome*: “after some time the Blessed Silvester ordered that temple destroyed and likewise other places so that the orators who came to Rome would not wander through profane buildings but instead pass with devotion through the churches” (*Marvels* 29). First of all, Silvester is “blessed.” Silvester receives this label due to his influence in the destruction of pagan temples. Also, the text conveys the devotion necessary for a Christian traveler through a mention of churches in contrast with “profane” classical Roman buildings. This is not the only instance of straightforward criticism of ancient Roman beliefs.

The reader is left to ponder the thoughts stated in the “Conclusion” as follows: “These and more temples and palaces of emperors, consuls, senators and prefects were inside this Roman city in the time of the heathen, as we have read in old chronicles, have

seen with our own eyes, and have heard the ancient man tell of” (*Marvels* 46). A separation occurs between classical Rome and medieval Christians through the use of “heathen” as a descriptor of classical Roman citizens. In the case of the Colosseum, “Blessed Silvester” even waged war on the pagan structure by ordering its destruction (*Marvels* 29). The contrast between modern and medieval descriptors highlights the medieval belief that Rome fell for a reason, its heathen nature, and it is for this same reason that pilgrimages are necessary.

Medieval tourism and modern tourism in Rome are two very different things, essentially revealing the contrast between reading architectural surroundings as a text and considering them part of the scenery. The contrasts between a modern guidebook of Rome and *The Marvels of Rome* further enunciate the mindset of a medieval audience’s perception of travel. The medieval guidebook, *The Marvels of Rome*, provides entertaining reading while the modern, *Eyewitness Travel Guide: Italy* is more practical for travelers unacquainted with their surroundings and includes backgrounds of architectural style, maps and restaurants in the area. A modern audience is interested in the facts of what they are seeing more than the story behind it. Also, a modern audience would be perturbed if a religious judgment was projected onto everything they saw.

When comparing the medieval guidebook *The Marvels of Rome* with a modern tourism guide to Rome it becomes obvious that each has a different focus. The medieval audience was much more concerned with the story or legend behind buildings than a modern audience, which seems to have a desire for cold hard facts. A description of “The Ancient Centre” in *Eyewitness Travel Guide: Italy* is an exemplary model of the style of the modern guidebook. The description is as follows:

When Emperor Charles V announced he was to visit Rome in 1536, Pope Paul III Farnese asked Michelangelo to give the Capitoline a facelift. He redesigned the piazza, renovated the facades of its palaces and built a new staircase, the Cordonata.

This gently rising ramp is now crowned with the massive statues of Castor and Pollux. (Eyewitness 385)

This tidbit about the Piazza del Campidoglio is rather antiseptic, contains names and dates. Even though there is a sense of story behind the explanations found in a modern guidebook, something markedly different from *The Marvels of Rome* emerges – a shadow of doubt as to whether the story is true or not. The excerpt on “The Temple of Castor and Pollux” relates supposed events as it describes that the “relic is dedicated to the twin brothers of Helen of Troy, who were supposed to have appeared at the battle of Lake Regillus in 499 BC, aiding the Romans in their defeat of the Etruscans” (Eyewitness 392). The way that the temple is described demonstrates that these stories are just stories, not undoubted facts.

Similarly, where the medieval guidebook presents criticism of a heathen past based on contemporary medieval Christian values, the modern guide does nothing of the sort, but provides a more unbiased approach. This is evident in an evaluation of the Roman Forum in which it is described as “a chaotic place, with food stalls and brothels as well as temples and the Senate House... The Forum remained the ceremonial center of the city under the Empire, with emperors renovating old buildings and erecting new temples and monuments” (Eyewitness 390). Instead of proceeding to lists of every temple in the Forum and how saints destroyed them, a focus is placed on the classical Roman way of life. There is no value judgment made on the Roman way of life as “heathen” (as it is described in *The Marvels of Rome*) even though it lists pagan elements.

Despite the differences between *The Marvels of Rome* and the *Eyewitness Travel Guide: Italy*, their formats are remarkably similar. Both use short, informative paragraphs in easily understandable language to describe and explain popular monuments. Moreover, the way the material is presented, either as story or as fact, reflects the respective societies that read and

accepted the material found in these guidebooks. The different presentations clearly denote the differences in perception between a medieval and a modern audience.

What Changed Medieval Views?

The modern obsession with facts is transferred to a modern reading of the Knight's Tale. This is part of the reason that the extensive architectural descriptions of the Knight's Tale are commonly taken at face value or overlooked by modern scholars. A medieval audience would have seen more parallels to the world around them and comments on their own society through such elaborate descriptions. The highly religious viewpoint expressed by medieval society underwent a great transformation to evolve into the views expressed by a modern audience. The transformation of viewpoints was due to the ideas of the humanists.

An intervention occurred concerning the perception of classical civilizations with the research of the humanists. In the Renaissance, spanning from approximately 1300 to 1550, the humanists helped to change the popular view of the classical civilizations of ancient Rome. Through these revolutionary thinkers, the transition from the medieval to the modern views of architecture and space occurred. Humanists conducted much of the research involved in "recovering the wisdom of ancient Rome," which included extensive research in the identification of ancient buildings (Stinger 62). This research, much of which was conducted in the 1400s, was integral to the destruction of many popular medieval ideas concerning the ancient ruins in Rome and their functions in the ancient society. These popular ideas, due to the humanists' research, have since been deemed misconceptions and legend even though they were considered fact during the Middle Ages.

The major transition of viewpoints between the medieval and modern audiences of architecture and space emphasizes the inaccessibility that time creates in the understanding of other civilizations. First, medieval culture misinterpreted buildings of antiquity and their functions. The truth was inaccessible to them due to the passage of time and change in lifestyle and popular beliefs, particularly with the medieval emphasis on the Christian religion. Through the humanists, a reevaluation occurred in which many medieval perceptions of classical Rome were explored. Our views of the civilization today are based on the work of the humanists. It is worth noting that we, as a modern audience, are inhibited with a similar issue of inaccessibility in our study of the Middle Ages. We view the time period through the lens of our own culture on the past, much as the Medievals viewed ancient Roman civilizations. This filtering creates a notion of inaccessibility and clouds the intended meaning of both medieval architecture and medieval texts.

Chaucer's Experience with Medieval Visual Art and Architecture

Chaucer's experience with medieval architecture and visual arts aided him in the development of the lengthy descriptions of architecture in the Knight's Tale. In the medieval world, Chaucer had a great many encounters with the architecture of the time, which made him uniquely qualified to integrate architecture into his writing, using ekphrasis to treat visual images as text. Beyond his role as a common citizen, Chaucer had extensive exposure to architecture and the visual arts with which buildings were decorated through his work as Clerk of the King's Works from 1389 to 1391. In this position he became familiar with the world of architecture. He personally knew one of the most renowned architects of the time,

Henry Yevele, who worked on such buildings as Westminster Hall and the Canterbury Cathedral.

Chaucer's intimate knowledge of the construction industry is demonstrated through detailed architectural and artistic descriptions found in the Knight's Tale and several of his other writings. Hallissy considers the timeframe in which the Knight's Tale was composed in relation to Chaucer's work in the construction industry in order to emphasize the industry's influence on his works. Her summary places Chaucer's writing and revising of the Knight's Tale between 1386 and 1398. Hallissy's deduction is that Chaucer's job influenced his writing of the Knight's Tale, and "addition of construction material to the source may have resulted from Chaucer's increased familiarity with the industry gained as Clerk of the Works" (Hallissy 245). Hallissy also notes the specificity with which Chaucer uses construction terms in his writing, demonstrating great knowledge in the field. Braswell also notes this in "Architectural Portraiture in Chaucer's *House of Fame*," pointing out that "in his description of Fame's house, Chaucer again uses words in specific architectural senses that do not appear earlier in recorded English" (Braswell 107). Braswell's conclusion is that Chaucer's "technical languages that really spoken by craftsmen, and his structures are things which actually did exist" (Braswell 112).

There is a clear reflection of Chaucer's architectural work in his writing, implying that a connection exists between these two occupations. As Clerk of the King's Works Chaucer had opportunities to exercise creativity through his many duties. Carlson explains in *Chaucer's Jobs* that "Chaucer may have been doing productive work – managerial if not industrial– where his artistic creativity may also have been brought into play" (Carlson 26). The duties Chaucer held as the Clerk, such as financial and managerial work, he also performed at other times in other positions (Carlson 27).

The creative awareness found in Chaucer's writing extends from his architectural knowledge to his portrayal of decorative art. In Joan Evans's "Chaucer and Decorative Art," she makes two applicable claims. First, "Chaucer, like other poets of his day, enjoyed touching in a detail or putting in a background, and usually gave to both some symbolic significance. These backgrounds were less the creation of untrammelled fancy and more closely based on things seen than is always realized" (Evans 408). Consequently, we can infer that Chaucer meant to infuse the Knight's Tale with meaning through his extensive descriptions. Second, "The description of the Temple of Mars begins with a forest scene, such as was common enough on the walls and hangings of medieval castles; but Chaucer ravages it and makes it desolate to give it poetic significance" (Evans 412). Chaucer takes traditional images of Mars, found in his sources for the Knight's Tale, and combines them with art he would have seen around him during his life. Changing the images hints to his audience that some deeper meaning is produced due to the images constructed in his writing. It is this way that Chaucer's comments on his contemporary society are apparent.

Through his duties as the Clerk, Chaucer was responsible for "giving expression to royal power by immediate concrete means" (Carlson 26). As Clerk of Works, Chaucer's function was "to supply the means whereby the royal glory might be made manifest" (Carlson 26). In connection to the Knight's Tale, this opportunity to express royal power through concrete means is exactly what the Knight's Tale is all about. The temples and the "noble theatre" commissioned by Theseus provide a concrete means through which Theseus can reveal his power and authority as a ruler.

Although many of the legends created in *The Marvels of Rome* were more than one hundred years old by the time the Knight's Tale was written, the misconceptions of Rome presented in it survived long after Chaucer's death. Chaucer's audience was well acquainted with the belief system presented in *The Marvels of Rome*, and continued to uphold it, still believing in many of the falsehoods that the guidebook presented as truths. Rome is a prime example of the lasting misconceptions of the Middle Ages in reference to beliefs of classical Rome.

As mentioned previously, research conducted by the humanists contributed many corrections to medieval perceptions of classical Roman monuments. For instance, the Roman baths, the "Septizonium" and the Colosseum were redefined through the work of Flavio Biondo conducted in the mid 1400s. Singer explains that the humanist Biondo had much to do with the redefinition of the purpose of the Colosseum. "The Colosseum, believed by many in the Middle Ages to be a temple of the sun, now was rightly perceived as an amphitheater, and Biondo had provided lengthy discussions of the gladiatorial games held there" (Singer 67). In contrast, *The Marvels of Rome* provides a medieval point of view to the function of the Colosseum. According to *The Marvels of Rome*:

The Colosseum was the temple of the sun. It was of marvelous beauty and greatness, disposed with many different vaulted chambers and all covered with a heaven of gilded brass, where thunder and lightning and glittering fire were made, and where rain was shed through slender tubes. Besides this there were the supercelestial signs and the planets *Sol* and *Luna*, which were drawn along in their proper chariots. And in the middle dwelled Phoebus, who is the god of the Sun. With his feet on the earth he reached to heaven with his head and held in his hand an orb that signified that Rome ruled over the whole world. (*Marvels* 28)

Beginning with Bondio then, our understanding of the function of the Colosseum has changed considerably from those commonly accepted by medieval visitors to the city of Rome.

When Chaucer wrote the Knight's Tale, the Colosseum was widely believed to be a temple to the sun god. This clearly defined religious purpose contrasts with the current belief that the Colosseum was a place of combat and gladiatorial games. Combining these contrasting ideas of the Colosseum presents a new way to consider the architectural structures (the "noble theatre" and the temples of Mars, Venus and Diana) built by Theseus in the Knight's Tale. Although the Colosseum was not perceived as a battleground in the Middle Ages, the combination of religious and combative function provides an interpretive slant on an analysis of Theseus's building projects. A building that combines an amphitheater and temples is reflective of the Knight as a character who embodies a combination of warfare and religion. With this combination, Chaucer almost predicts the shift in perception of Roman buildings like the Colosseum that is made with the humanists.

The author Margaret Hallissy presents a unique observation of the prevalent medieval misinterpretation of the Colosseum in "Writing a Building: Chaucer's Knowledge of the Construction Industry and the Language of the Knight's Tale." Hallissy cites Kolve in reference to the "noble theatre" being compared to the Colosseum, noting that the shape as well as the skill required to build such monuments are comparable (Hallissy 249). The buildings are similar in design, and in function to a degree, but the contrasting functions of the Colosseum as a place for religion and battle makes the connection between the "noble theatre" and the Colosseum even more developed than the mere shape, ornamentation and monumental size of both edifices would imply.

The “noble theatre,” depicted in the Knight’s Tale, has other connections with monumental architecture from classical Rome. In addition to its connections with the Colosseum, explored by Hallissy, some aspects of the “noble theatre” might relate to the description of the Circus Maximus in *The Marvels of Rome*. For instance, the Circus Maximus “was built in such a way by degrees that no Roman hindered another from seeing the games” (*Marvels* 43). Theseus builds the “noble theatre” in a similar fashion. The Knight describes it as, “Round was the shap, in manere of compas,/ Ful of degrees, the heighte of sixty pas,/ That whan a man was set on o degree,/ He letted nat his felawe for to see” (KnT 1889-1892). There are clear parallels between these two structures in the way they were built to house large numbers of people.

In addition to the monumental scale of the “noble theatre,” Chaucer took great pains in describing the artistic details in the temples of Mars, Venus and Diana. There is a direct link between the representation of visual arts and architecture, not only through their occupation of the same space, but through their connection with religion. For example, Reddy refers to the universal connection between art and religion in “Temple as a Repository of Fine Arts and the Centre for Education: In Medieval Period with Reverence to Simhachalam Temple.” The role of the temple, according to Reddy, has always been as “a great centre for social, economic, religious and cultural activities...the temple also promoted education and the fine arts like music, dance, architecture, sculpture etc.” (Reddy 53). This directly relates to the role of the temples in the Knight’s Tale, with a specific relationship to the art, architecture and sculpture descriptions.

Chaucer creates a convincing arrangement of temples, which subtly emphasizes the role of art in the perception of deities. Hallissy again provides insight by saying that, through his writing, “Chaucer has designed with an eye to structural symbolism” (Hallissy 251).

Specifically reflective of Chaucer's structural symbolism is the arrangement of the temples of Mars, Venus and Diana with regard to the Eastern and Western gates of the "noble theatre."

The location of Diana's temple emphasizes the importance of chastity because her temple is not located at one of the gates so no one may enter – symbolic of the respect of her chastity and purity (Hallissy 251). Furthermore, "Chaucer makes Theseus take a position on one of the great theological and artistic debates of the day: the moral value of adornment of churches" through his allegorical treatment of the images depicted on the walls of the three temples (Hallissy 251). The comments made about the deities that are celebrated in the temples influence the perception of both the deities and Theseus as patron of the building project by the Knight's audience.

Knowing that the medieval society perceived the Colosseum as a temple to the sun god, and that the civilization that built it fell to ruins, the negative images in the temples in the "noble theatre" are not surprising. The negative images in the temples serve as a historical reference to the corruption and fall of ancient pagan society. Even though Chaucer infuses the Knight's Tale with medieval religious images and symbolism, it is still based on a story of a pagan culture. The Colosseum, and the medieval perceptions thereof, is an excellent real life model of the "noble theatre" that implies the decline of a great society and its fall into chaos.

Part III: Reading the Architecture

Overview

Chaucer's extensive visual descriptions in the Knight's Tale are placed there for a purpose: to reveal a commentary on medieval society. There are two integral elements in this analysis. First, a consideration of the way that Theseus is reflected by the architecture, the "noble theatre," and visual art, found in the temples of Mars, Venus and Diana, in the Knight's Tale. Second, the narrative shift to the first person point of view separates the reader from the reaction of the characters as they see the architecture and visual art.

In order to see how Theseus is reflected through the "noble theatre" and three temples, we must first look at the art in the temples and know, historically and within the context of the story, why the art reflects Theseus and what it is saying about him. Interestingly, the first person narration of this section obscures how the characters perceive and analyze, or "read," the architecture. Simply stated, the reader is manipulated by the narrative shift. These two ideas hinge together and provide an understanding of Chaucer's comment on medieval society through the Knight, Theseus and Palamon, Arcite and Emelye. Because of the way the descriptions are presented to the reader, any observations of implied meaning are obscured, giving way instead to a feeling that this section of detailed description is out of place in the Tale.

At the time of Theseus, there is nothing in the world so grand and unique like the "noble theatre." As the Knight explains, "That swich a noble theatre as it was/ I dar wel seyen in this world ther nas" (KnT 1885-1886). The grandeur of the structure is immediately presented in the opening of Part Three. A closer look at this quote reveals two central ideas

to the reader. First, as I have just said, the “noble theatre” is a grand structure indeed, and second, that the narrative voice has suddenly been shifted. The awe of the “theatre” is reflected though the sudden shift of narrative voice. But both of these elements are equally jarring to the audience. The descriptive section of the Tale is told by the Knight in the first person point of view, raising several questions. Why did Chaucer choose to place a narrative shift here, and what is achieved through it? What can an analysis of the narrative shift conclude in regards to Chaucer’s comments on the characters of the Knight’s Tale, and medieval society through them? These are the questions I intend to answer through a close look at the text.

The Temples

In the Knight’s Tale, the temples in the “noble theatre” function as monuments, paying homage to and commemorating Mars, Venus, and Diana as deities. This idea has concrete manifestation in the medieval view of the Colosseum as a temple that holds “supercelestial signs and the planets *Sol* and *Luna* in their proper chariots. And in the middle dwelled Phoebus, who is the god of the Sun” (*Marvels* 28). The images that a medieval audience assumed were held in the Colosseum are representative of the deity worshiped there. Margaret Hallissy connects this idea the Knight’s Tale in that “the visual images in the three oratories place the worshipper of each deity in mind of his or her characteristic powers” (Hallissy 252). Thus, the gods represent the areas in which Arcite, Palamon and Emelye desire assistance. Arcite visits the temple of Mars, who will help him win his battle with Palamon. Palamon asks Venus to help him win Emelye, with whom he is desperately in love. Emelye entreats Diana to help her remain chaste, because she really does not want to

marry either Arcite or Palamon. However, gruesome, negative images are presented to the characters. They go to these gods with their most heartfelt requests, surrounded by images of various degrees of cruelty and suffering.

Palamon's visit to Venus's temple signals the first description. Venus's temple presents the audience with all the different circumstances of love (KnT 1932-1934). Included in these are: laments, tears, desire, pleasure, hope, desire, foolhardiness, beauty, youth, mirth, riches, falsehood and deceit, charm, force, flattery, expenditures, attentiveness, jealousy and lust (KnT 1920-1932). These are undeniably all qualities that love assumes from time to time, and it is not unreasonable to have them all represented in Venus's temple. The disjoint in the portrayal of love comes, however, with the mention of specific scenes that are depicted in the temple. Although the Knight admits, there are more paintings "than I kan make of mencioun," and "I koude rekene a thousand mo," he chooses the images he describes, and each scene emphasizes the futility of love (KnT 1935, 1954). We see, for instance, Hercules, who was killed by his lover; Medea and Circes who held their loves against their will; and Narcissus, who died for his lover Echo (KnT 1937- 1966). I would assume, now, that Palamon did not desire such poor outcomes of his love for Emelye. Nonetheless, these are the outcomes that the Knight deems necessary to describe.

Mars's temple, visited by Arcite, is immediately defined as a "grisly place" (KnT 1971). The temple's walls, filled with images of fire and blood, present the audience with images of anger, fear and murder. The Knight tells what he saw:

Ther saugh I first the derke ymaginyng
Of Felonye, and al the compassyng;
The crueel Ire, reed as any gleed;
The pykepurs, and eek the pale Drede;
The smylere with the knyf under the cloke;
... Al ful of chirkyng was that sory place. (KnT 1995-2004)

The glories of victory in war are overlooked for an emphasis on death and vengeance, cruelty, murder and pain. These images are more acceptable within the context of war, but they are still disturbing in a place of worship.

When Emelye visits the temple of Diana, she sees images “Of huntynge and of shamefast chastitee,” but it is not these images that the Knight concentrates on in his description (KnT 2055). Instead, he tells of Callisto, Acteon and Atalanta, who were all punished by Diana. The most disturbing and prominent image found in the temple, the image that Diana’s statue is looking upon is of a woman in the pains of a breech childbirth. “A womman travaillynge was hire biforn;/ But for hir child so longe was unborn,/ Ful pitously Lucyna gan she calle/ And seyde, ‘Help, for thou mayst best of alle!’” (KnT 2083-2086). This heart-wrenching image of a woman crying out for help is the image most representative of Diana in her temple, as the Knight sees it.

In Boccaccio’s *Teseida*, Chaucer’s source for the story of the Knight’s Tale, Boccaccio presents these descriptive scenes differently. First of all, the prayers of Arcite, Palamon and Emelye are placed before the descriptions of the temples of Mars, Venus and Diana. The Knight’s Tale formats this section the opposite way. This rearrangement done by Chaucer takes the emphasis that Boccaccio places on the religious prayers to the gods and instead places the visual details in higher prominence. This change in focus presents the reader with a situation in which architecture and visual detail are privileged over the religious devotion and emotions of the characters.

A look at Boccaccio’s *Teseida*, provides insight to the temples found in Theseus’s “noble theatre.” Boccaccio’s text describes the temples as the female personification of prayer sees them, and the prayers of Palamon, Arcite and Emelye react to the images accordingly. The temple of Mars is equally frightening in the *Teseida* as in the Knight’s Tale.

Boccaccio writes of Arcite's prayer: "as soon as she saw the house of Mars, she became mute from fright" (Boccaccio 172). As the supplicant looks around the temple she is confronted with "Death with his bloody looks, and Bewilderment. Every altar there was covered with blood that had been shed by human bodies only in battles. Every altar was luminous with the fire taken from flame-ravaged lands destroyed by wretched war" (Boccaccio 173- 174). Chaucer uses the same frightening images of fire and blood in the Knight's Tale.

Venus, however, is described more favorably by Boccaccio. As Palamon's prayer travels to "merciful Venus," she encounters a more whimsical temple. "As she passed along with a quick step, somewhat rapt out of herself and gazing about, she saw that every corner of the lofty and beautifully adorned place was filled with spirits who flew about here and there and returned to their places" (Boccaccio 177). The imagery creates a sprightly, positive surrounding for the worship of Venus.

The most striking difference in Boccaccio and Chaucer's works is the temple of Diana. Where Chaucer puts the most gruesome image of a woman in the pains of a breech birth, Boccaccio makes no real mention of the images in Diana's temple, and instead, he focuses on the religious rites that Emelye performs there, and how she adorned the temple. It is notable that Diana's temple is not viewed through the eyes of the prayer as the other two temples were. Boccaccio writes:

The temple to which she came was clean and adorned with beautiful hangings. She found there at once all that she had ordered... Then she uncovered the sacred image of the goddess whom she loved best and she purified it with her white hand lest perhaps some blemish should be on it... She garlanded the entire temple and her own head as well. (Boccaccio 180-181)

Chaucer made the most changes to the temple of Diana as he infused the desire for chastity with images of hunting and pain.

Although there are descriptions of the three temples in the *Teseida*, they are not as extensive and carry a different tone than the Knight's Tale. Chaucer's changes to his source imply that he means to make specific comments based on these changes. One prominent change Chaucer makes is in the narrative voice of the descriptions. Boccaccio's descriptions are narrated in the third person voice; it is the prayers that Palamon, Arcite and Emelye send to the gods that react to their surroundings. Chaucer chooses the Knight to describe the temples to his audience.

How the Knight Effects the Tale

Although the shift in narrative voice appears abruptly at the opening of Part Three, it is emphasized not only in the beginning of the section, but repeated at the beginning of each temple description as well. Part Three opens:

I trowe men wolde deme it negligence
 If I foryete to tellen the dispence
 Of Theseus, that gooth so bisily
 To maken up the lystes royally,
 That swich a noble theatre as it was
 I dar wel seyen in this world there nas. (KnT 1881-1886)

When the Knight begins his description of the temple of Venus, the audience is again

reminded that the Knight relays these details: "First in the temple of Venus maystow se/
 Wroght on the wal, ful pitous to biholde" (KnT 1918-1919). And again, Chaucer presents the reader with the idea that the Knight sees these things himself when the temple of Mars is introduced: "Why sholde I noght as wel eek telle yow al/ The portreiture that was upon the wal/ Whithinne the temple of myghty Mars the rede?" (KnT 1967-1969). And finally, Diana's Temple presents the same viewpoint: "Now the the temple of Dyane the chaste,/ As shortly as I kan, I wol me haste,/ To telle yow al the descripsioun" (KnT 2051-2053).

The Knight sees the temples of Mars, Venus and Diana with his own eyes, reiterating this with each individual observation. With the change in narrative voice, the Knight and reader see the temples together without intervention of the characters. Instead of entering the equivalent of a crowded room, the Knight gives the reader an individualized tour.

The narrative shift in Part Three of the Knight's Tale separates the characters, who are part of the narrative action, from directly reacting to the visual arts found in the temples of Mars, Venus and Diana. Instead, the Knight presents the reader with his own reaction to the art in the temples through first person narration. Because the Knight provides the temple descriptions, it is possible for the audience to overlook the fact that the characters do not even see the images attributed to the deities to whom they appeal— gods who they believe will favorably assist them. There is a disjuncture, however, between the idea of helpful, benevolent gods and the images found in their temples. Negative depictions of Mars, Venus and Diana bring into question the deities themselves. The result of the narrative shift is a conflict in the perception of the temples of Mars, Venus and Diana, and the creation of a blind spot in the Knight's Tale. It is through this blind spot that Chaucer has the opportunity to comment on his society through the society of Palamon, Arcite, Emelye and Theseus.

Theseus and Patronage

The Knight makes it obvious to his audience that Theseus spares no expense when he builds and adorns the “noble theatre” and temples. Of the building project, the Knight concludes that

swich a place
Was noon in erthe, as in so litel space;

For in the lond ther was no crafty man
That geometrie or ars-metrike kan,
Ne portreyour, ne kervere of ymages,
That Theseus ne yaf him mete and wages
The theatre for to maken and devyse. (KnT 1895-1901)

The quality of workmanship of the craftsmen Theseus hires is clearly astounding. Hallissy infers that “so intricate and detailed are the paintings that Theseus surely needed every craftsmen, painter, and carver if images in his kingdom” (Hallissy 252). Theseus’s building project is of utmost importance to him; this is shown by his attention to detail and willingness to hire the best workers for his project.

Through his attention to details and focus on craftsmanship it is fitting to conclude, as Hallissy does, that Theseus “assumes some of the responsibilities of the Clerk of the Works and of the master builder...Theseus is portrayed as the man at the top of the pyramid of authority” (Hallissy 241). Hallissy chooses to equate roles that Theseus fills with those that Chaucer held and was connected to himself. This immediately poses the question: since Theseus is all-powerful over the building project, how do Chaucer’s views of the industry fit in comparatively? He must appreciate the field of architecture and construction very much in order to incorporate it so thoroughly into his writing. But there is something more that he is saying through this depiction of Theseus as master in charge of the building of the “noble theatre” and the temples. I assert that Chaucer frowns upon the patronage system inasmuch as the edifice constructed gives more glory to the patron or commissioner than it does to the deities that the structure is erected to honor. Chaucer’s negative view of this practice is reflected in Theseus’s concrete demonstration of power through the “noble theatre” and the temples, and the negative depiction of the gods that are to be honored in the temples: Mars, Venus and Diana, in which he becomes a patron of misconceptions, misinterpretations and chaos through the events that the building project causes.

There is no doubt that Theseus is an integral force in the construction and adornment of the three temples. In the opening of Part Three of the Knight's Tale, Theseus's role in the artistic furnishing of the temples is established.

And for to doon his ryte and sacrifice,
He estward hath, upon the gate above,
In worship of Venus, goddess of love,
Doon make an auter and an oratorie;
And on the gate westward, in memorie
Of Mars, he maked hath right swich another,
That coste largely of gold a fother,
And northward, in a touret on the wal,
Of alabaster whit and reed coral,
An oratorie, rich for to see,
In worship of Dyane of chastitee,
Hath Theseus doon wrought in noble wyse. (KnT 1901- 1913)

The temples are located at the gates of the "theatre," unmistakably built under Theseus's order and, as he is the patron, reflect directly on him.

During the Middle Ages and Renaissance, patrons commonly commissioned works of art. Often these works of art reflected the patrons' opinions of themselves, or manifested an element of their rule or personality into the art. For instance, the Medici family commissioned many statues that were meant to reflect favorably on their rule. Sarah Blake McHam synthesizes the idea behind the sculptures of David and Judith commissioned by the Medici family in "Donatello's Bronze *David* and *Judith* as Metaphors of Medici Rule in Florence." She says, "together the sculptures conveyed the controversial, self-serving message that the family's role in Florence was akin to that of venerable Old Testament tyrant slayers and saviors of their people" (McHam 32). Regardless of the true character of the Medici nobles that commissioned the sculptures, they desired to portray themselves as Davids and Judiths to those around them.

Notably, the Medici and other patrons wanted to depict themselves more favorably than those they had power over saw them. This contrasts with the graphic and awe-inspiring

images and statues that the Knight presents his audience with in Theseus's temples. There are three statues located within the "noble theatre," one each, dedicated to Mars, Venus and Diana. Since Theseus commissioned the artwork and the temples within the "noble theatre," it is conceivable that they reflect Theseus, just as much if not more than Mars, Venus and Diana. Another factor affects the relationship between the depictions of the deities and Theseus; he serves two of the gods that are given temples in the "noble theatre." The Knight expressly says of Theseus, "For after Mars he serveth now Dyane" (KnT 1682). Further investigation reveals that Mars and Diana's temples contain the most blatantly horrific images.

The images of Mars, Venus and Diana effectively inspire terror and awe. They do not provide positive figures for Palamon, Arcite and Emelye to identify with. Furthermore, the images provide a window into the corruption demonstrated by Theseus in his quest for power. In Part Three, the first statement pertaining to absolute power is found in the description of Venus's temple. "Thus may ye seen that wysdom ne riches, / Beautee ne slighthe, strengthe ne hardynesse, / Ne may with Venus hold champartie, / For as hir list the world than may she gye. / Lo, alle thise folk so caught were in her las" (KnT 1947- 1951). Venus, the goddess of love seems to be all-powerful based on this description.

The temple of Mars exhibits a plethora of Mars's evil and negative influences, some of which include pick-pockets, madness, "Armed Compleint, Outhees, and fiers Outrage" (KnT 2012). Mars's statue is especially revealing as "With soutil pencil was depeynted this storie / In redoutynge of Mars and of his glorie" (Knt 2049- 2050). Apparently, the glory of Mars includes malicious felony, anger and fear, as well as gruesome scenes such as a wolf eating a man observed by an insane-looking statue of Mars (KnT 1996- 1998, 2042- 2048). It is understandable that Theseus wants to be associated with the glory of a god, but he seems

to have missed the mark regarding the favorable depiction of glory.

The images in Diana's temple are more evocative of a powerful ruler than a goddess of chastity and the hunt. The paintings in her temple that the Knight sees fit to describe mostly focus on the punishments Diana gives to those who have wronged her. Theseus would reasonably want to be associated with such authority, but the most disturbing image found in Diana's Temple is a woman crying out in the pains of childbirth for Diana's aid (KnT 2083- 2086). Instead of showing images relating to a successful childbirth, its more negative side is shown, which emphasizes the possibility of pain involved with supplicating to Diana. With these images around it is amazing that Emelye, Arcite and Palamon decide to call on the gods for assistance at all.

These readings of the visual art in the temples in the "noble theatre" reflect on Theseus in two different ways. First, Theseus could be continually misinterpreting the gods. Since he is completely satisfied with the "noble theatre" and temples, ("Whan it was doon, hym lyked wonder weel" KnT 2092) he might just be too oblivious to realize what they actually portray. This interpretation makes Theseus seem like he does not quite know what he is doing. The second interpretation reads more into the comments Chaucer makes on his society through the Knight and his Tale. The same idea of satisfaction with the temples applies to this argument, but with a different interpretation. Since, "Whan it was doon, hym lyked wonder weel," Theseus approves of the disturbing images in the temples and understands that they portray elements he deems necessary for powerful leadership (KnT 2092). Due to the narrative shift to the first person point of view, by which we are given the Knight's perception of the visual arts in the temples, the reader does not see the characters react to the images in the temples they visit. Since the audience is presented with the Knight's view, Chaucer is able to make judgments on Theseus's manifestation of power

through the mouth of the Knight and present a negative view of Theseus through the art he commissioned without having a profound effect on the characters.

The text presents two opposing views of Theseus. One view is that Theseus is a worthy knight, embodying many characteristics that the Tale's orator does. The contrasting view is found in a close examination of Theseus's actions and the visual art found in the temples he commissions. Addressing the first view, the Knight's Tale lauds Theseus as a "trew knight" (KnT 959), and refers to him as "the noble conquerour" (998), "this duc, this worthy knight" (2190), "the grete Theseus" (2523) and "noble Theseus" (2975). These are undisputedly favorable attributes. Theseus's actions, however, contrast with these descriptions. For instance, even though Theseus takes pity on the widows that want to bury their dead husbands in Part One of the Knight's Tale, Theseus benefits greatly through his show of mercy. He gains territory for his kingdom through conquest in battle. This is more advantageous to him than burying a few dead men. Even more so, regarding the main action of the Tale, instead of letting Palamon and Arcite resolve their dispute themselves, Theseus decides "Everich of you shal brynge an hundred knyghtes/ Armed for lystes up at alle rightes,/ Al redy to darreyne hire by bataille" (KnT 1851- 1853). He expands a rivalry between cousins to include two-hundred additional men, and also considers the argument a fine occasion for a pageant displaying the fighting prowess of the equally matched cousins and their men. The Knight describes the pageant:

It nas nat of the day yet fully pryde
Whan set was Theseus ful riche and hye,
Ypolita the queene, and Emelye,
And othere ladys in degrees aboute.
Unto the seetes preeseth al the route.
And westward, thurgh the gates under Marte,
Arcite, and eek the hondred of his parte,
With baner reed is entred right anon;
And in that selve moment Palamon
Is under Venus, estward in the place,

With baner whyt and hardy chiere and face. (KnT 2574- 2586)

The Knight continues to explain how the contestants are equally matched, that neither has the advantage over the other. Theseus and his court will be provided with great entertainment from this match.

The “noble theatre” is an architectural text that comments on Theseus. It is reflective of his power and ideals, represented by Mars, Venus and Diana, who are given their own temples. Unfortunately, the ideals that Theseus wants to portray are embodied by negative images. The negative images reflect the power that Theseus actually has. He has no interest in helping Palamon, Arcite, and Emelye. Instead, he acts as a dictator of fate. He shows no interest in whether Palamon or Arcite win the battle or the girl, and he has no interest in what happens to Emelye. Instead, he finds amusement in the solution of the problem. Theseus’s amusement is demonstrated through his eagerness to build a grand “noble theatre,” and the pageant that surrounds the event of Palamon and Arcite’s battle. He seizes the opportunity to make himself more popular through the events surrounding Palamon and Arcite. Public opinion of Theseus increases when he announces that there is to be no loss of life during the battle. “The voys of peple touchede the hevene,/ So loude cride they with murie stevene,/ ‘God save swich a lord, that is so good/ He wilneth no destruccion of blood!” (KnT 2561- 2564) Theseus plans the event beautifully in order to make himself look good.

The Grove, Temples and Prison

A monstrous building that imposes upon the natural world, the “noble theatre” is obviously a force to be reckoned with. According to Casey in *Getting Back into Place*, a

monument resists, ignores and flouts the natural world, treating nature as a force to be reckoned with (Casey 150). Due to the sheer size of the “noble theatre,” “The circuit a myle was about, / ... Ful of degrees, the heighte of sixty pas,” and its connection with actual monuments such as the Colosseum, Theseus’s structure is easily classified as a monument. Considering the taming of nature, the visual artistry within the temples contains representations of nature and thus holds power over them. The most dominant example of this is in the temple of Mars:

on the wal was peynted a forest,
in which ther dwelleth neither man ne best,
With knotty, knarry, bareyne trees olde,
Of stubbes sharpe and hidouse to biholde,
In which ther ran a rumbel in a swough,
As though a storm sholde bresten every bough. (KnT 1975-1980)

Notice, within the forest “ther dwelleth neither man ne best” (KnT 1975). This relates directly to another example of nature as a “force to be reckoned with:” the grove where Arcite’s funeral pyre is built. During the section of the Knight’s Tale in which Arcite’s funeral is narrated, the Knight shows special attention to the idea of the habitation of natural space. After a long list of all the different kinds of trees cut down in the grove, the Knight makes a point of it to say:

How they weren feld shal nat be toold for me;
Ne hou the goddes ronnen up and down,
Disherited of hire habitacioun,
In which they woneden in reste and pees,
Nymphes, fawnes and amadrides;
Ne hou the beestes and the briddes alle
Fledden for fere, whan the wode was falle;
Ne how the ground agast was of the light,
That was nat wont to seen the sonne bright; (KnT 2924- 2932)

This description connects directly with that found in Mars's temple, causing a parallel between Theseus and Mars. Both beings are agents of destruction through their relation to nature.

Casey considers that "buildings stave off the chaos, 'the void above the abyss,' found in a disaggregated natural order" (Casey 112). Since Theseus directly influences the destruction of nature and the expulsion of the gods that consider it a dwelling place, Theseus does not "stave off" chaos through his construction, but causes it. The discussion of order and chaos relates to Hallissy's exploration of Theseus as a force that brings order out of chaos. "Theseus's role on the construction project parallels his role in the political order. He builds the "theatre" as a way of imposing rational order on Palamon and Arcite's disorderly emotions" (Hallissy 252). I agree with Hallissy, that Theseus, to a degree, attempts to find order out of the chaos that Palamon and Arcite have made for themselves and Emelye, but I think that she neglected a very important connection: the implication of the political power demonstrated by Theseus through the building itself, through its monumental scale and multiple purposes including both religion and combat. The "noble theatre" and the temples demonstrate Theseus's power as a patron and a ruler, and the building of the "noble theatre" and the temples is a physical demonstration of the dictatorial power Theseus has over his subjects.

In the process of demonstrating his power, Theseus creates more chaos than order through his amplification of Palamon and Arcite's argument. He also causes a sense of disorder through the unsettling depiction of the gods in his temples. Furthermore, Theseus takes on god-like power himself when he expels gods, nymphs, fawns and wood nymphs from the grove when he orders the building of Arcite's funeral pyre. The events in the Knight's Tale characterize Theseus as the dictator of events from when he first brings

Ypolita and Emelye back to his kingdom, to the imprisonment of Palamon and Arcite, determination of the conditions of their battle, building of the “noble theatre” the battle is to take place in, building and supply of the visual images in the temples Palamon, Arcite and Emelye worship in, and ultimately the decision that Palamon can wed Emelye after Arcite’s death. Theseus is placed in an elevated role in charge of the lives of those under him. His position is so prominent that it detracts from the role of the gods and undermines their authority.

While the “noble theatre,” temples and grove point to the corruption of Theseus’s authority, the symbolism of the Prison in which Palamon and Arcite are held unseats the ideals of knighthood. The prison description is unobtrusive in the course of the narrative. It does not stand out like the detailed description of the “noble theatre” and temples do. The Knight describes some architectural elements of the prison in which Palamon and Arcite are held:

The grete tour, that was so thikke and stroong
Which of the castel was the chief dongeoun
(Ther as the knyghtes weren in prisoun
Of which I tolde yow and tellen shal),
Was evene joynant to the gardyn wal
Ther as this Emelye hadde hir pleyynge. (KnT 1056- 1061)

In particular, the Knight draws attention to a window that overlooks the garden Emelye is in: “And so bifel, by aventure or cas,/ That thurgh a wyndow, thikke of many a barr/ Of iren greet and square as any sparre,/ He cast his eye upon Emelya,” (KnT 1074- 1077). John Zhang explores the prison window in relation to the symbolism of medieval visual arts in “Medieval Visual Arts and the Barred Window in Chaucer’s *The Knight’s Tale*.” Zhang deduces that “The barred window may signify, in the medieval mind, the carnal senses through which deadly sins enter the soul” (Zhang 10). Zhang concludes, “the barred window

may also symbolize a contrast between the ideals and the imperfect reality of chivalry” (Zhang 10). Ultimately, a window can symbolically lead to heaven or hell. “The prison in the *KT*, the ‘thikke and stroong’ castle, is symbolic of holiness... because medieval buildings ‘associate holiness with towering vertical structures and thick stone walls’ (Zhang 11). Zhang implies that the bars on the window in the prison mean that the love Palamon and Arcite have for Emelye is distorted, impure and focused on lust.

Instead of emphasizing the dichotomy between order and chaos, the prison scene, with specific focus on the barred window, focuses on the struggle between the imperfect and the ideal, a theme explored throughout the characterization and *Tale of the Knight* (Zhang14). Again, the contrast between the ideals of knighthood and the corruption of the same institution are pointed out, this time not through the Knight, but Palamon and Arcite.

The Knight describes the actions of Emelye when she is in the garden. “She walketh up and down, and as hire liste/ She gadereth floures, party white and rede,/ To make a subtil gerland for hire hede” (KnT 1052- 1054) Zhang analyzes this use of color: “In relation to knighthood, white and red also have positive significations. The use of the two colors, as a medieval iconographic convention, is a symbolic staple in the literature of the chivalric knight” (Zhang 14). In the prison scene, Chaucer separates Palamon and Arcite from these colors by placing them with Emelye outside the prison, and separating them from the colors with a barred window (Zhang 14). The character of the knights in the *Tale* is further complicated when the colors are placed in the narrative again when Palamon and Arcite are meeting each other in the decisive battle. “Arcite, and eek the hondred of his parte,/ With baner reed is entred right anon;/ And in that selve moment Palamon/ Is under Venus, estward in the place” (KnT 2582- 2585). Chaucer’s complication of knightly character

exhibited by the symbolic use of colors is mimicked through the epithetic descriptions of the Knight and Theseus.

Chaucer creates an unsettling balance between the ideals and corruptions of the institution of knighthood through all of his knightly characters. The prison points out negative aspects of Palamon and Arcite with regards to their knightly characterization and corruption of courtly love. The temples and architecture act similarly for Theseus, as they point out his failure to bring order out of chaos and his corruption as a patron, and the description of the Knight in the General Prologue questions the idealized character of the Knight. The connection of ideas associated with each of the knights (worthiness, chivalry etc.) infers a connection of the faults as well.

Chaos out of Order

Chaucer molded Boccaccio's *Teseida* to his own purposes: "he transformed from epic to romance, and medievalized by merging the mythological gods with the astrological planets, introducing the motif of violated sworn brotherhood... investing all with a Boethian philosophy which changed Boccaccio's fate into Christian Providence" (Rowland 230). The most important change Chaucer makes to Boccaccio's text relates directly to the analysis of order versus chaos. "He makes the structure more patterned and symmetrical, with closely parallel episodes and characters" (Gray 272). Chaucer patterns the Knight's Tale symmetrically with the division into four Parts. Within these Parts, action and architectural description are alternated, with the focus on the prison foreshadowing and providing a mirror image for the "noble theatre" and the temples and their implications.

The use of such an obvious structure in the Knight's Tale points more dramatically to the constant tension between order and chaos. Theseus is especially caught up in the idea of constructing order, but he is blind to the chaos he creates. Part of his blindness is exhibited in his attribution of creation to Jupiter. Present in the idea of creation is the idea that a creator takes chaos and produces order from it. Jupiter is not able to stop the chaos that develops through an argument between Mars and Venus, so it is more logical to connect Jupiter to chaos, even though Theseus misinterprets him as invoking order.

That Juppiter was bisy it to stente,
 Til that the pale Saturnus the colde,
 That knew so manye of adventures olde,
 Foond in his olde experience an art
 That he ful soone hath plesed every part.
 As sooth is seyde, elde hath greet advantage;
 In elde is bothe wysdom and usage;
 Men may the olde atrenne and noght atrede.
 Saturne anon, to stynten strif and drede,
 Al be it that it is agayn his kynde,
 Of al this strif he gan remedie fynde. (KnT 2442- 2452)

In this situation, Saturn is the deity Theseus should aspire to emulate, because he actually does create order out of a chaotic situation.

Saturn is also defined as a creative force earlier in the Tale, during the scene in which Palamon and Arcite first see Emelye. "Som wikke aspect or disposicioun/ Of Saturne, by som constellacioun,/ Hath yeven us this, although we hadde it sworn/ So stood the hevne whan that we were born" (KnT 1087- 1090). The characterization of Saturn is problematic, however. The Knight describes him as "Saturnus the colde,/ That knew so manye of adventures olde" (KnT 2443- 2444). Through this description it is implicit that Saturn is typically hostile, and more acquainted with an older, almost primal era. This is reinforced a few lines later when the Knight point out how out of character it is for Saturn to establish order. Saturn is usually a proponent of chaos. "Saturne anon, to stynten strif and drede,/ Al

be it that it is agayn his kynd,/ Of al this strif he gan remedie fynde” (KnT 2450- 2452).

Enforcing that Saturn is primal and chaotic, he also asks Pluto to send the earthquake that causes Arcite to fall off of his horse and eventually die (KnT 2684- 2691). Saturn’s restoration of order to the Tale is a random, primal act for Saturn’s character, which further emphasizes the tension between order and chaos within the Tale. Due to Saturn’s primal and chaotic character, it is impossible for Theseus to emulate him.

Saturn is a barrier between the characters and the gods in the Knight’s Tale because of his manipulation of the events in the Tale. Because of his primal power, he is outside the borders of a role model for Theseus. Saturn’s power makes him inaccessible both through his position as a primal force and his extreme exercise of authoritative power. A paradox emerges from Theseus’s need to emulate Saturn. Saturn is ultimately described as a negative force of chaos, but he is the only one to effectively resolve the conflict in the Knight’s Tale. The power of resolution by Saturn is exactly what Theseus aspires to have, but can never attain.

Chaucer implies that Theseus, a proponent of order, is unable to bring order out of chaos, no matter how hard he tries. This is a direct comment, reinforcing the enigma of Chaucer’s Knight through Theseus’s problematic characterization. Both characters are enigmatic. Theseus attempts to bring order out of chaos through building the temples and “noble theatre,” but he ultimately creates a more chaotic situation through his solution to Palamon and Arcite’s problem. Within the context of the Knight’s Tale, and *The Canterbury Tales*, the Knight does not directly inflict chaos, but he is connected with chaos by his characterization in the General Prologue. With the Knight’s characterization, a conflict arises between the ideal knight (order) and the mercenary (chaos). The crusades the Knight took part in echo the contrast as well, because they were “conceived of as a service to the

Christian God,” (Bishop 90) when in reality they resulted in “horrifying massacres” and a schism in the church (Jones 39).

The Knight and Theseus also show startling similarities in the way they are described by Chaucer. His word choices are the same for Theseus, “This Theseus, this duc, this worthy knyght” (KnT 2190), and the Knight, “This ilke worthy knyght” (GP 64). The connecting epithet of “worthy” establishes grounds by which to compare the characters and relate them to each other. Such a clear parallel in description connects the two men.

Part IV: Conclusion

Both Theseus and the Knight are “worthy knyghts,” which makes it is possible to infer that comments made about Theseus apply to the Knight as well. Thus, the negative images in the temples Theseus builds and his tendency toward chaos can be projected onto the Knight. Through this connection, Chaucer infers that even though the Knight is a “verray, parfit gentil knyght,” there is more to him than meets the eye.

The Knight’s connection with Theseus permeates the text. It does not matter whether the Knight realizes that he skews the perception of the Tale through his shift to first person narration. The Knight’s choice, however, creates a stronger connection between himself and Theseus than with Palamon and Arcite. This comment on the Knight’s character presents the Knight as corruption of knightly ideals, and reflects the failed ideals around him through his Tale.

The Knight considers the architecture and visual images he describes to be so important that he pauses at them for a long time and makes sure they stand out from the natural progression of the narrative. By doing this, he invites the audience to read the architecture as a text and draw conclusions about it. However, the descriptions are inaccessible because of how they are presented. The detachment his first person narration causes makes it difficult to identify or sympathize at all with Palamon, Arcite or Emelye, because they have been ripped out of the scene.

The Knight fails to give his audience the reaction of Palamon, Arcite and Emelye to the temples. His choice to provide descriptions of the temples from his own point of view causes a blind spot in the interpretation of the text, where it is easy for the reader and the characters to overlook the comments made about the patronage of Theseus by the art. The

ideas of patronage and reflection of power that Theseus stands for are inaccessible to the characters because of this, so they are removed from the comments that Chaucer makes about the society the characters are in, as well as Chaucer's own society.

The implications made by the Knight's Tale regarding the tension between order and chaos are directly applicable to the structure and progression of *The Canterbury Tales*. The Knight's Tale, placed prominently as the first told on the pilgrimage, is an orderly, symmetrical tale told by an assumedly orderly figure, once his shabby appearance is overlooked. The pilgrims attest to the perfection of his Tale once it is finished: "Whan that the Knyght had thus his tale ytoold,/ In al the route nas ther yong ne oold/ That he ne seyde it was a noble storie/ And worthy for to drawen to memorie" (MilP 3109- 3112).

Harry Bailley, the host, entreats the Monk to begin his Tale once the Knight has finished, but the Miller's chaotic personality and Tale immediately interrupt the orderly flow of *The Canterbury Tales*. Through the interruption the Miller makes on the socially ordered progression of the Tales established by Harry Bailley from the start, Chaos ensues. The Miller should not tell his Tale next, but he rudely intervenes. "I kan a noble tale for the nones,/ With which I wol now quite the Knyghtes tale," to which Harry Bailley replies: "Som better man shal telle us first another./ Abyde, and lat us werken thriftily" (MilP 3126- 3127, 3130- 3131). Harry is intent on preserving the order of the Tales, but after the first Tale, order is upset.

Chaucer's choice to immediately interrupt the proposed order of the Tales proposes the importance of contrasting order with chaos. As *The Oxford Companion to Chaucer Studies* indicates, Chaucer comments on the human condition through the Knight's Tale and its characters. (Gray 272). In the Knight, he creates an enigmatic character whose Tale addresses human flaws. The Knight serves as a portrait of these flaws, of the conflict

between orderly ideals and chaotic corruption through his impeccable record as a knight and his shabby appearance, as does Theseus through the conflicting messages sent through the concrete manifestation of his power. The divide created by Chaucer's Knight's Tale reflects the overall tension of order and chaos vying for the same space and the human inability to overcome inaccessibility.

Essentially, the Knight's Tale and its gestures to inaccessibility apply to our reading of the text as well as to the implications of the text itself. As intellectual tourists in medieval literature, we face the challenge of interpreting texts based on a civilization very distant to us. Instances of ekphrasis, such as the concentration on architectural detail in the Knight's Tale can assist in our accessing of interpretations. The passage of time is an unbreakable barrier that can only be worked around through exploration of the ideas, conventions and beliefs of those from the past as they are left for us in literature and artwork.

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