CHAPTER IV

Making Virtue of Necessity: *The Noble Pagans of* The Knight's Tale

In *Troilus and Criseyde*, we are given a firm impression of both the achievements and the limitations of the pagans. By contrast, in *The Knight's Tale* the pagans' achievements in ethics, politics and metaphysics are very much to the fore. This difference between the poems is related to a major difference of narrative technique. Whereas in *Troilus* the narrator provided an explicit Christian standard against which the pagan standard was measured and ultimately found wanting, in *The Knight's Tale* the narrator empathizes with his characters and allows them to define their pagan standard without direct interference. There is no thoroughgoing condemnation of paganism, no attempt to assert openly the superiority of Christian belief.

In the General Prologue to *The Canterbury Tales*, we are told that the Knight fought 'for oure feith' against the 'hethen' (I, 47–66), which may be taken as an explanation of his interest in pagan chivalry and belief[1] Only at one point in the tale does the Knight feel the need to justify this interest. When he comes to Emelye's pagan 'ryte' in honour of Diana, he coyly assures us that a man who means well should be granted the freedom to describe such things at length:

> But hou she dide hir ryte I dar nat telle,
> But it be any thing in general;
> And yet it were a game to heeren al.
> To hym that meneth wel it were no charge;
> But it is good a man been at his large.
> (I, 2284–8)

An appeal is then made to the *auctoritas* of 'ancient' books, including the *Thebiad* of Statius:

> Two fyres on the auter gan she beete,
> And dide hir thynges, as men may biholde
> In Stace of Thebes and thise bookes olde.
> (I, 2292–4)

Naturally, no mention is made of Boccaccio's *Teseida*, the 'modern' work which was Chaucer's main source both for this episode and for *The Knight's Tale* as a whole. Chaucer wished to establish the historical credentials of the tale, so that his 'ancient' pagans could be allowed to speak for themselves (cf. pp. 63–4 above). The Knight's most explicit criticism of paganism is so slight that it could be missed, consisting as it does of a casual witty remark to the effect that, when the trees are being felled for Arcite's funeral,

> the goddes ronnen up and doun,
> Disherited of hire habitacioun,
> In which they woneden in reste and pees,
> Nymphes, fawnes and amadrides . . .
> (I, 2925–8)

For the rest, the Knight's Christian standard is implicit; it emerges in the way he tells the story.

This narrative technique will now be considered in some detail, beginning with an examination of the reciprocal relationship between gods and men which the Knight seems to postulate. The personality of each pagan is defined in relation to the personality of his special god; the strengths and weaknesses of each god are mirrored by his worshipper. Yet, in the final analysis, the pagan deities fare very badly from this comparison, and the characters of the men transcend the characters of the gods they serve. This being done, we shall examine the degree of enlightenment which the Knight allows to Theseus, Emelye, Arcite and Palamon respectively. All the pagans in *The Knight's Tale* appear to be virtuous and good, but clearly some are better than others. In particular, the mature Duke Theseus is far more enlightened than are the young people.[2] Any limitations which any human character may have, however, pale into insignificance when we are confronted with the caprice and cruelty of the pagan gods. The two major revelations of this divine malevolence will be described in turn: how an ambiguous oracle gives Arcite false hope, and how the planet-god Saturn indulges his ancient malice against Thebans by condemning this worthy man to death. In *The Knight's Tale* the 'payens corsed olde rites' are open to much criticism, but the good pagans can only be commended for the way in which they make virtue of necessity.

I THE SOURCES OF CHARACTER-TYPES

From the *Teseida*, Chaucer took the characters of Teseo, Arcita, Palemone and Emilia, and created them afresh.[3] Whereas Boccaccio's main interest was in Arcita while Palemone was portrayed less fully, Chaucer provided the cousins with equally important though very different personalities. Emelye was made into a fatalistic and acquiescent person; Theseus became even more noble than he was in *Il Teseida*. I wish to suggest that these changes were carried out with a large measure of consistency, and that to some extent this was due to the operation of a single basic principle: the main sources of Chaucer's character-types were traditional descriptions of the *natura deorum gentilium*.

Most of the evidence marshalled in support of this interpretation comes from two acknowledged Chaucer sources, the *Ovidius Moralizatus* which constitutes book XV of Bersuire's *Reductorium Morale*, and Alain de Lille's *Anticlaudianus* (1182–3)[4]; popular repositories of astrological commonplaces have been consulted also. Indeed, one can find a precedent for the process of character-creation itself in one of these works, the *Reductorium Morale*. As has been show

in Chapter I, Bersuire provided an historical explanation and a series of anthropocentric moralizations for each of the gentile gods (Saturn as a Cretan king, as a depraved old man, and so on), a method of exposition which probably has its *raison d'etre* in the medieval belief that the gods were mere humans who had superstitiously been deified. By interpreting the gods as historical individuals and moral types, Bersuire, as it were, reversed this process. So, in a different manner, did Chaucer, by modelling the characters of his pagans on the characters of the gods they worship.[5] Euhemerism has become a principle of characterization. Moreover, Chaucer's gods, like Bersuire's, are astrologized deities, and therefore another factor influencing characterization in *The Knight's Tale* would have been the notion that a man's character was affected (but not determined, of course) by the planet-god or planet-gods in the ascendant at his birth. Some knowledge of these sources of Chaucer's character-types will help us to understand what he really did to *Il Teseida*.

In Boccaccio, Arcita's character has primacy. He sees Emilia first and may therefore be said to have the prior claim on her, yet he acts reasonably and with superhuman patience towards the cousin who cannot control his passion for the same woman. A pugnacious Palemone continually insists on fighting a reluctant Arcita—it seems somewhat ironic that Arcita should pray to Mars while Palemone prays to Venus, for clearly Palemone is the aggressor.[6] Chaucer was more precise in relating human nature to the *natura deorum*. The cousins' prayers on the eve of the tournament (2209–70; 2367–437) confirm the general impression one gains of each character in the poem as a whole: their personalities are such that one cannot imagine Arcite praying to Venus or Palamon praying to Mars.[7] Equal in prowess, virtue and worth, in nature they are quite different.[8] Arcite may be described as a Mars-type, and Palamon a Venus-type.

This suggestion may be substantiated by reference to the stock 'pictures' of astrologized deities provided by medieval scholars. The source of Chaucer's description of armed Mars, standing 'upon a carte' with a rapacious wolf at his feet (2041–50) was probably Bersuire's *Ovidius Moralizatus*, as has already been mentioned above (p. 20).

> Erat ergo figura Martis ymago furibundi hominis in curru sedentis, galeam habentis in capite et flagellum in manu portantis. Ante eum vero lupis pingebatur quia scilicet illud animal sibi ab antiquis gentilibus specialiter consecrabatur. Iste enim Mavors id est mares vorans, et deus bellorum dicebatur a gentibus . . .[9]

> [The figure of Mars, therefore, was in the likeness of a man surrounded by fire and sitting in a chariot, having a helmet on his head and carrying a whip in his hand. In front of him, indeed, a wolf was painted because that animal was specially consecrated to him by the ancient gentiles. This certainly is from *mavors* 'devouring males', and he was said to be the god of battles by the gentiles . . .]

Allegorically, Bersuire explains, by this god and image can be understood worldly princes and tyrants and most of all bellicose men. They are said to be seated in a cart because of their lack of stability; the wolf which accompanies them signifies the cruel officials who always accompany tyrants to prey on their subjects. Earlier in the *Reductorium Morale*, in the fifth book, Bersuire had described Mars as a hot and dry planet, which gives men born under it a choleric complexion.[10] These astrological details were derived from the *De Proprietatibus Rerum* of Bartholomaeus Anglicus, here quotes in John Trevisa's translation:

> Mars god of bataile and of werre was iholde amongis naciouns. For he is an hoot planete and drye, male, and a nyȝt planete, and so haþ maistrie ouer colera and fire and colerik complexioun, and disposith to boldnesse and hardinesse, and to desire of wreche. þerfore he is iclepid god of bataille and of werre. . . . he disposiþ þe soule to vnstedefast witte and liȝtnes, to wraþþe, and to boldnesse, and to oþir colerik passiouns.[11]

Much of the same information is provided in Alain de Lille's *Anticlaudianus*. Alain recounts how Prudence is stunned by the heat of the palace of Mars: here the fiery planet-god holds sway, abundant in wrath, eager for disputes, the destroyer of peace and treaties.

> Imperat hic Mars igne calens, fecundus in ira,
> Bella serens siciensque lites nostrique sititor
> Sanguinis, excuciens pacem fedusque recidens . . .
> Tabe sua uiciat comitem, sociumque planetam
> Vel seuum seuire docet, uel forte benignum
> Nequicia docet esse truncem leditque ueneno.

> [Mars, glowing with fire, here holds sway, prolific in wrath, sowing the seeds of war, thirsty for disputes, thirstier still for our blood, banishing peace, wiping out treaties. . . . By his corruptive influence he affects his companion and neighbouring planet and in his malice teaches the violent to show more violence or the mild to turn savage and he wounds with his venom.][12]

Fuller accounts of the actions and influence of the planet are provided in works of a rather different kind, the technical treatises on astrology such as Ashenden's *Summa Iudicialis* and the *Exafrenon* of Richard of Wallingford (died 1336).[13] We may assume that Chaucer, a proficient astrologer-astronomer, knew the standard description of Mars as an unfortunate planet which, when it governs alone, generally causes such mischiefs and destruction as are consonant with dryness. According to Ashenden, these include wars both foreign and civil, divisions, captivity, slaughter, untimely death, violations of treaties and all kinds of violence.[14]

This medieval lore throws considerable light on Arcite's character. Chaucer has Palamon see and love Emelye first, and to some extent Arcite's decision to pursue his suit appears as an act of aggression. It is Arcite who rejects the family tie and breaks the blood-brother code, as Palamon is quick to point out:

> 'It nere', quod he, 'to thee no greet honour
> For to be fals, ne for to be traitour
> To me, that am thy cosyn and thy brother

Ysworn ful depe, and ech of us til oother,
That nevere, for to dyen in the peyne,
Til that the deeth departe shal us tweyne,
Neither of us in love to hyndre oother,
Ne in noon oother cas, my leeve brother;
But that thou sholdest trewely forthren me
In every cas, as I shall forthren thee,—
This was thyn ooth, and myn also, certeyn;
I woot right wel, thou darst it nat withseyn'.
(I, 1129–40)

One is reminded of Mars's traditional role as the destroyer of peace and treaties, the bringer of strife. Arcite finds it impossible rationally to refute Palamon's prior claim (1152–1186). He labours under the disadvantage of, as it were, having come in second—in *Il Teseida* it was Palemone who laboured under this disadvantage. Mars's destructive capability is stressed heavily in Chaucer's description of the temple of Mars (1967–2035). Arcite's destructive capability is stressed also: it is he who exclaims,

'Wostow nat wel the olde clerkes sawe,
That "who shal yeve a lovere any lawe?"
Love is a gretter lawe, by my pan,
Than may be yeve to any erthelý man;
And therfore positif lawe and swich decree
Is broken al day for love in ech degree'.
(I, 1163–8)

The logical conclusion of Arcite's proposition is anarchy and the destruction of positive law, those legal institutions established by generations of wise men. 'Positif lawe and swich decree' is constantly broken in war, Mars having no regard for such things.

Of course, Arcite and Palamon are equally brave as knights and equally ardent as lovers. Both feel 'wraþþe' because of the other's love of Emelye, and both are worthy to wed her, as Theseus says (1831–2). Yet the essential difference between them emerges quite clearly during Palamon's prayer to Venus. Palamon makes his plea through a series of negatives which, by implication, define Arcite's character:

'I kepe noght of armes for to yelpe,
Ne I ne axe nat tomorwe to have victorie,
Ne renoun in this cas, ne veyne glorie
Of pris of armes blowen up and doun;
But I wolde have fully possessioun
Of Emelye . . .
For though so be that Mars is god of armes,
Youre vertu is so greet in hevene above
That if yow list, I shal wel have my love'.
(I, 2238–50)

Arcite seems to see everything—including his love for Emelye—in black-and-white terms of 'victorie' or death; the 'renoun' or 'glorie' he gladly will give to Mars. Convinced that Emelye must be won by force of arms, Arcite asks Mars for his 'helpe or grace':

'For she that dooth me al this wo endure
Ne reccheth nevere wher I synke or fleete.
And wel I woot, er she me mercy heete,
I moot with strengthe wynne hire in the place,
And, wel I woot, withouten help or grace
Of thee, ne may my strengthe noght availle.
Thanne help me, lord, tomorwe in my bataille . . .
And do that I tomorwe have victorie.
Myn be the travaille, and thyn be the glorie! . . .
Yif me victorie, I aske thee namoore'.
(I, 2396–420)

There is something sadly bitter about his belief that Emelye does not care what happens to him and that she must be forced to respond. One gains the impression of a man who, faced with an inhospitable world and cruel gods, has come to place his trust in martial 'strengthe'.

It is, therefore, typical of Arcite that he should almost die of his 'loveris maladye' (1355–79) and that, unlike Palamon, he should first describe his love for Emelye in terms of killing, dominance and death:

'The fresshe beautee sleeth me sodeynly
Of hire that rometh in the yonder place,
And but I have hir mercy and hir grace,
That I may seen hire atte leeste weye,
I nam but deed; ther nis namoore to seye'.
(I, 1118–22)

The abruptness of this protestation also befits a Mars-type: unlike the Venus-type, he cannot be loquacious about love. Arcite is a man of action rather than of words, and it seems perfectly appropriate that he should bluntly ask Mars for victory in battle: 'Yif me victorie, I aske thee namoore' (2420). When all due allowance is made for the influence of traditional complaint about the *femme fatale* (which, of course, influenced Palamon's professions of love also), Arcite's rather morbid preoccupation with love and death seems to go far beyond the stock idioms of *fin' amors*. And the reasons for this are rooted in his 'martian' character.

The basis of Palamon's character may be sought in late-medieval descriptions of the planet-god Venus. As Twycross has pointed out, Chaucer's description of naked Venus, 'fletynge in the large see', wearing a 'rose gerland' and holding a 'citole' (1955–65), is derived from mythographic tradition.[15] Close literal parallels are found in Bersuire:

Fingebatur igitur Venus puella pulcherrima nuda et in mari natans et in manu sua dextera concham marinam continens atque gestans, que rosis erat ornata, a columbis circumvolantibus comitata . . . Ante quam tres

astabant nude iuvencule que tres Gracie vocabantur . . . Cui scilicet Cupido filius suus alatus et cecus assistebat . . .[16]

[Therefore, Venus was feigned as a most beautiful naked girl, swimming in the sea and holding and bearing in her right hand a sea-shell; who was adorned with roses, accompanied by doves flying all around . . . In front of whom stood three naked young girls who were called the Three Graces . . . Cupid, her son, winged and blind, stood beside her . . .]

The mythographers stressed the voluptuous and foolish nature of Venus, a view which Chaucer fully recognized in his description of the temple of Venus (1918–54).[17] Bersuire, following Fulgentius, interpreted Venus as the voluptuous life or a certain luxurious person, depicted as a woman because of woman's inconstancy. She is said to be naked because of her inevitable indecency, to float in the sea because she wants always to wallow in sensual pleasures.[18] 'Mythographus tertius' says of the roses of Venus that, just as roses blush and prick with their thorns, so sensual desire indices blushing because of the disgrace of shame, and pricks with the goad of sin.[19] The Venus worshipped by Boccaccio's Palemone is basically of this type; she functions as the patroness of his violent and destructive passion.

However, Venus fared much better in the accounts of the astrologers, and this is significant because Chaucer's Venus, unlike Boccaccio's, is an astrologized deity. Bartholomaeus Anglicus explains that

Uenus . . . is an goodliche planete, female, and a nyȝt planete, in his qualities, in hete and moisture, temporat. . . . This planete . . . hatte Venus for, as me seiþ, by his qualite, hoot and moist, a excitiþ to loue of Venus, as Isidir seiþ. . . . He haþ colour whiȝt and schinynge as *electrum*, þat is metalle þat is most whit and briȝt . . . For among alle sterres Venus schiniþ most comfortabilly and whitly, and þerfore he is iclepid 'cleernesse' . . . In mannes body he disposiþ to fairnesse, volupte, and lykynge in touche and gropinge, in smyl, in taast and in songe; and þerfore he makeþ singers, louyers of musik . . . Vndir him is conteyned wey, loue, frendschipe, and pilgrimes, and tokeneþ wynnynge and ioye and blisse; and he is trewe.[20]

Richard of Wallingford compares the planet's benevolent influence with that exercised by Jupiter:

in wynter principaly, and in ver, she temperis the yere, in moysture, and the drowght of somer and harveste she schiwes, fore she manote use hir ladyshipe but in gudenesse namore than Jupiter.[21]

John Ashenden says that when Venus is alone in domination, honour and joy will attend mankind.[22] Happy marriages will be contracted and the fortunate couples will have many children. Every undertaking will prosper. Wealth will increase, and the conduct of human life will altogether be pure, simple and pious, due reverence being paid to all holy and sacred institutions, and harmony existing between princes and their subjects. In such descriptions Chaucer could have found valuable hints for the rather mystical personality of Palamon.

It is perfectly appropriate that Palamon the Venus-type should see Emelye first and fall in love with her first, and that his love should be consummated in a happy marriage:

now is Palamon in alle wele,
Lyvynge in blisse, in richesse, and in heele;
And Emelye hym loveth so tendrely,
And he hire serveth al so gentilly,
That nevere was ther no word hem bitwene
Of jalousie or any oother teene.
(3101–6)

At first, Palamon does not know whether Emelye is a woman or the goddess Venus herself:

'I noot wher she be womman or goddesse,
But Venus is it soothly, as I gesse'.
And therwithal on knees doun he fil,
And seyde: 'Venus, if it be thy wil
Yow in this gardyn thus to transfigure
Bifore me, sorweful, wrecched creature,
Out of this prisoun help that we may scapen'.
(1101–7)

Arcite tells him that

'Thyn is affeccioun of hoolynesse,
And myn is love, as to a creature'.
(1158–9)

—which seems perfectly accurate. Palamon is the type who will see something of Venus in every beautiful woman. Viewed in the context of the pagan religion in the poem, Palamon seems to have the makings of a visionary: he can see the invisible in the visible, the uncreate in the created. If he were a Christian, one would expect him to go on pilgrimages and to have a strong 'affective' devotion to the Virgin Mary.[23]

In this regard, it is interesting to note that Bersuire managed to allegorize certain planetary properties of Venus as qualities of the Virgin Mary. Bartholomaeus had said that she is a benevolent, feminine, and nocturnal planet that always accompanies the sun. Such is the blessed Virgin, Bersuire exclaims, because she is feminine on account of her piety, benevolent on account of her generosity, and nocturnal and occult with regard to her humility, and she always accompanies the sun who is the incarnate Christ.[24] Bersuire also moralizes the planetary motions of Venus in terms of the mental activity of the perfect man, who elevates his intellect in meditation of heavenly things and extends his disposition (*affectus*) in loving the invisible. But such a high degree of perfection is not possible for a pagan who, because of his unfortunate historical position, lacks the revealed truth of Christianity. As things stand in the ancient world of *The Knight's Tale*, Palamon's total devotion

to Venus hints at his eventual 'wynnynge and ioye and blisse' in a matter of human love.

Such was Chaucer's concern for symmetry in *The Knight's Tale* that his parallelism of pagan gods and men extended to the minor characters Lygurge and Emetreus. Boccaccio allocated only four lines to Lygurge, in contrast with Chaucer's twenty-seven; Emetreus was Chaucer's invention. These alterations to the *Teseida* were dictated by Chaucer's wish to provide Arcite the Mars-type and Palamon the Venus-type with champions of appropriate personalities. Arcite's martian character is emphasized by Emetrius's choleric complexion, golden apparel and distinctive appendages (2155–78).[25] Lest we should miss the point, Emetrius is said to have come 'ridynge lyk the god of armes, Mars'. By contrast, Lygurge's black hair and beard, and yellow and red eye-circles, clearly mark him as a saturnian man (2128–52). It is fitting that the Saturn-type should champion the Venus-type, because in the pagan heaven Saturn champions his daughter Venus at least to the extent that he puts her claim on a par with that of Mars (who, after all, had granted his knight's request first in the narrative), and at best to the extent that his way out of the gods' dilemma, while perfectly satisfactory to Mars, leaves the Venus-type alive and in possession of Emelye at the end of the tale.[26]

Emelye's personality is modelled on the personality of the goddess she serves; she may be called a Diana-type. In her case Chaucer drew on the mythographic tradition which described Diana as the chaste huntress of the woods. Bartholomaeus Anglicus explains that

> in fablis he is clepid Prosperina, for naciouns clepiþ þe mone goddes of sedis þat ben iþrowe in þe erþe. Also he is iclepid Diana, goddesse of woodis and of groves, for he ȝeueþ liȝt to wilde bestis þat gadren her mete by nyȝe in woodis and grovis. And þerfore nacyouns clepiþ þe mone goddes of hunters, for huntinge is ofte in woodis and in groves. And þerfore þey peyntid a goddes wiþ a bowe in hire honde, for hunters vsen bowes.[27]

Similarly, Bersuire states that Diana is depicted 'in the form of a lady carrying an arrow and bow, hunting the horned deer', and stresses her virginity by allegorizing her as the Virgin Mary.[28] In his description of the temple of Diana—which has no equivalent in *Il Teseida*—Chaucer refers to Diana's chastity and love of hunting (2051–88). These are Emelye's defining characteristics also, which emerge on the one occasion on which Chaucer allows her to speak, namely when she prays to Diana:

> 'Chaste goddesse, wel wostow that I
> Desire to ben a mayden al my lif,
> Ne nevere wol I be no love ne wyf.
> I am, thow woost, yet of thy compaignye,
> A mayde, and love huntynge and venerye,
> And for to walken in the wodes wilde,
> And noght to ben a wyf and be with childe.
> Noght wol I knowe compaignye of man'.
> (I, 2304–11)

When Emelye prepared herself for this prayer, she engaged in another activity traditionally associated with her goddess, namely bathing:

> This Emelye, with herte debonaire,
> Hir body wessh with water of a welle.
> (I, 2282–3)

Perhaps Chaucer had in mind the story of Acteon, who was transformed into a deer and killed by his own dogs because he had seen Diana bathing 'al naked': significantly, this story is mentioned twice in *The Knight's Tale*, in Chaucer's description of the temple of Diana (2065–8) and during Emelye's prayer itself (2302–3). It would seem, then, that Emelye is a sort of earthly counterpart of Diana. Is Chaucer implying that she is equally deadly to men who unwittingly come into contact with her, as Palamon and Arcite did when they looked upon her in the garden?

Duke Theseus, the benevolent 'Firste Moevere' of the world of the poem, is the perfect human counterpart of his special god, Jupiter. In *De Proprietatibus Rerum* Jupiter is described as follows:

> Errour of nacioun and feynynges of poetis menen þat Iubiter was hiȝest fadir of goddis. . . . Þis Iubiter coniunct with goode planetis makeþ goode and profitable impressiouns in þise neþir elementis, and þerfore astronomers tellen þat in mannes body he helpiþ to fairnesse and honeste. . . Vndir Iubiter is conteyned honour, richesse, best cloþynge. In iugement and dome of astronomers he tokeneþ witte and wisdome and resoun, and is tristy and trewe. And þerfore, as astronomers tellen, whanne he is iseye in his cercle þat hatte *assendens*, he tokeniþ reuerence and honeste and fey and lore; and he schal be ende to saluacioun.[29]

These details are repeated in the fifth book of Bersuire's *Reductorium*.[30] According to Ashenden, when Jupiter is alone in domination, he promotes honour, happiness, content and peace.[31] The planet induces favours, benefits, and gifts emanating from royalty, and adds greater lustre to kings themselves, increasing their dignity and magnanimity. For Chaucer it would have been a short step from a kingly planet to an ideal king whose character was an amalgam of the qualities invariably associated with that planet. After all, the good rule of the planet-god Jupiter was praised often, and contrasted with the bad rule of Saturn.

At one point in the poem, Chaucer actually compares Theseus to a god:

> Duc Theseus was at a wyndow set,
> Arrayed right as he were a god in trone.
> (I, 2528–9)

We need not wonder which god Chaucer had in mind. Jupiter was traditionally depicted as sitting majestically on a burnished throne, holding the symbols of his supreme power:

Iupiter Saturni filius cui celum et celi regimen in sorte cessit, pingebatur homo in throno eburneo in sua mayestate sedens sceptrumque regni manu tenens, fulmina eciam altera manu inferius mittens et Gigantes repressos fulmine tenens sub pedibus et conculcans.[32]

[Jupiter the son of Saturn who in turn succeeded to heaven and the government of heaven, was painted as a man sitting in his majesty on a burnished throne, holding the sceptre of royalty in one hand and with the other despatching thunderbolts downwards, and holding the giants, restrained by lightning, under his feet and treading them down.]

Bersuire provides an historical interpretation of this 'picture' in terms of the King of Crete who repressed his enemies (the Titans) and deposed his father Saturn.[33] This interpretative process, which is found in all the major medieval compilations of pagan history and myth, could have provided Chaucer with the precedent for his 'humanizing' of Jupiter (or at least Jupiter's more admirable traits) in the person of Theseus.

Theseus possesses the jovian qualities of 'witte and wisdome and resoun' in abundance; he wields absolute power and exercises considerable control over the pagan world of the poem. His excellence in rule and judgment is obvious; he wants to judge others as fairly as he would wish to be judged himself (1863–4). When, in the woods, Theseus judges Arcite and Palamon for their transgressions against him, his 'resoun' has supremacy over his 'ire'; he tempers justice with mercy (1762–86). In the monotheistic vision which serves as the climax to the poem, Theseus's 'lore' finds its consummate expression (2987–3040).

Certain mythographers spoke also of the supreme power of Jupiter,[34] and this attribute is reflected by his devotee in *The Knight's Tale*. Theseus proceeds from one war to another without respite (864–993); the city of Thebes is destroyed 'bothe wall and sparre and rafter' (an incident which has no parallel in Boccaccio).[35] Moreover, he sentences Arcite and Palamon to life-imprisonment without hope of ransom (1020–32), releases one cousin but not the other (1189–1208), initiates the tournament for the possession of Emelye (1845–69), and eventually decides that Emelye should marry the survivor (3067–98). None of these decisions is questioned, either by the other characters or by Chaucer's Knight. Theseus's *fiat* is supreme; his expressed 'wyl' rarely brooks any 'repplicacioun' (1845–69; cf. 2533–60). If some of the man's actions seem rather arbitrary and even harsh, they may be related to the dark side of the character of his god.

However, Theseus is 'jovial' in the modern sense of the term also. John Ridevall, following 'Mythographus tertius' (whom he identifies erroneously as Alexander Neckam), comments on the good humour of Jupiter as follows:

Sexta pars picture est de dei Iovis hilaritate. Pingitur enim Iupiter a poetis cum vultu hilari et ameno, sicud et de hoc tractat Virgilius, ut recitat Alexander Nequam in sua mithologia. Astrologi eciam dicunt Iovem preesse sanguini; unde sanguinei sunt Iovis filii.[36]

[The sixth part of the picture is of the hilarity of the god Jove. For Jove is painted by the poets with a cheerful and amenable expression, just like Virgil also treats of this, as Alexander Nequam reports in his mythology. The astrologers say that Jove is the leader of the sanguine, whence sanguine men are sons of Jove.]

Theseus certainly shares his god's sense of humour. He soon sees the funny side of the situation in the woods: their love for the same woman has brought the cousins into a ridiculous situation.

'Now looketh, is nat that an heigh folye?
Who may been a fool, but if he love?
Bihoold, for Goddes sake that sit above,
Se how they blede! be they noght wel arrayed?
Thus hath hir lord, the god of love, ypayed
Hir wages and hir fees for hir servyse!'
(1798–803)

But the best joke of all is that Emelye knows nothing of their plight:

'But this is yet the beste game of alle,
That she for whom they han this jolitee
Kan hem therfore as muche thank as me.
She woot namoore of al this hoote fare,
By God, than woot a cokkow or an hare!'
(1806–10)

There is nothing malicious nor even condescending about Theseus's humour here, because he proceeds to admit that during his own youth he suffered similar distress on account of love.

The planet Jupiter was regarded as the bringer of peace. In his *Anticlaudianus*, Alain de Lille recounts how Prudence makes her way into the undamaging fires of Jupiter, the joy of his calm peace and the smiling regions of the celestial pole. Here the star of Jupiter shines, bringing tidings of safety to the world, and tempering the fury of Mars. Jupiter will befriend any evil star that is joined with him, thus turning gloom to laughter, lament to applause, and tears to joy.

Hic sydus Iouiale micat mundoque salutem
Nunciat et Martis iram Martisque furorem
Sistit et occurit tranquilla pace furenti.
Cui si stella mali prenuncia, preuia casus
Iungitur, ille tamen inimicum sidus amicat,
Alternansque uices, in risus tristia, planctum
In plausus, fletusque graues in gaudia mutat . . .

[Here the star of Jupiter glows, brings tidings of safety to the world, checks Mars' rage and fury and opposes his madness with serene peace. Even if a star that is a herald of evil and a precursor of misfortune is joined to him, Jupiter makes friends with the unfriendly star and brings about a change in him, turning gloom to laughter, lament to applause, bitter tears to joy.][37]

Bartholomaeus Anglicus explains how Jupiter can temper the malice of the other unfortunate planet, Saturn; similar statements are found in Vincent's *Speculum Naturale*, Ashenden's *Summa Iudicialis*, and Bersuire's *Reductorium Morale*.[38] Chaucer's Theseus is a peace-maker also, a quality not marked in Boccaccio's Teseo. When he discovers Arcite and Palamon fighting in the woods, Theseus's first reaction is that they lack a 'juge or oother officere' (1710–3). Later, Theseus organises a proper tournament and proclaims strict rules; his order that no blood should be shed is obeyed. Thus, the fury of Mars is tempered; violence is restrained and minimized. When death has removed Arcite from the contest, Theseus takes delight in bringing peace and joy by organising the marriage of Palamon and Emelye. This he interprets as the will of Jupiter:

> 'What may I conclude of this longe serye,
> But after wo I rede us to be merye,
> And thanken Juppiter of al his grace?
> And er that we departen from this place
> I rede that we make of sorwes two
> O parfit joye, lastynge everemo.
> And looketh now, wher moost sorwe is herinne,
> Ther wol we first amenden and bigynne'.
> (3067–74)

Gloom has been turned to laughter, lament to applause, and tears to joy. Moreover, this marriage has resolved the long conflict between Thebes and Athens. Theseus's final speech is made in the Athenian parliament; before Palamon and Emelye were summoned the lords had discussed the issue of an alliance with Thebes:

> ther was a parlement
> At Atthenes, upon certein pointz and caas;
> Among the whiche pointz yspoken was,
> To have with certein contrees alliaunce,
> And have fully of Thebans obeisaunce.
> (2970–4)

This passage, unparalleled in Boccaccio, has given rise to the charge that Theseus was a crass political opportunist, and that his speech in praise of 'the faire cheyne of love' had a very practical objective, namely a marriage of convenience.[39] But Chaucer would doubtless have seen Theseus's political acumen as an essential virtue in a prince. Surely the significance of the episode turns rather on the realization that one marriage can produce so much peace and harmony, both personal and political.

In would seem, then, that in *The Knight's Tale* very considerable comparisons can be drawn between the humans and their respective deities. Yet the contrasts one can make between men and gods are equally significant and ultimately more important. Arcite moves far beyond the limitations of Mars when, on his deathbed, he makes a supreme gesture of reconciliation by commending Palamon to Emelye (2792–6). Here he invokes 'Juppiter so wys', the bringer of peace. Moreover, the dishonourable and murderous activities described in the temple of Mars (1995–2038) are unparalleled in Arcite's life. Similarly, the unpleasant qualities of Venus listed in the description of her temple (1918–50) find no echo in Palamon's character. If Emelye is a *femme fatale* she is an innocent and unwilling one: she has no desire to emulate her goddess by causing the deaths of men. In his descriptions of the gods' temples, Chaucer provided both a focus for Christian suspicion of pagan religion, and an indication that his pagans deserve better gods than the ones they worship.

Most interesting of all is the contrast between Theseus and Jupiter. One of the man's most attractive qualities is the positive way in which he responds to the importunities of women. This cannot be criticized as vacillation because on each occasion feminine influence brings out some good quality in his character. The Theban widows move him to right their grievous wrong (893–1000); the company of courtly ladies move him to temper justice with mercy by pardoning Arcite and Palamon (1748–81). Theseus responds in a noble manner to male friends also. At the request of Perotheus he frees Arcite (1189–1218); he turns to his father Egeus for wise and consoling counsel (2837–52). By contrast, Jupiter is vacillating and indecisive. Feminine influence (the shrewish demands of Venus) hardly brings out the best in him, and when he turns to his father, Saturn, it is for an easy way out of a dilemma. Egeus and Saturn, the two fathers, are similar only in age and quantity of experience; in quality of experience and type of character they are quite different.

Consideration of the major role played by Saturn in *The Knight's Tale* will be reserved until the end of this chapter, since it can best be appreciated after the goodness of the good pagans in the poem has been described more fully. We shall, therefore, proceed to discuss the ways in which late-medieval notions about pagan achievements and limitations (as summarized in previous chapters) influenced Chaucer in his transformation of Boccaccio's poem. The varying degrees of perfection attained by Theseus, Emelye, Arcite and Palamon will be considered in turn.

II THE SHADOWY PERFECTION OF DUKE THESEUS

Duke Theseus is the most perfect of all Chaucer's good pagans: indeed, he is the closest Chaucer ever got to portraying a hero.[40] His perfection may be said to have two facets, ethical-political and metaphysical.[41] The former is manifest throughout the tale; the latter receives full articulation in Theseus's fine monotheistic vision of the first and unmoved mover who made the fair chain of love which forms the bond of the universe (2987–3074).

Theseus is credited with the virtues of wisdom, true nobility, chivalry, pity, 'gentillesse', truth, worthiness and might; he is a paragon of ethical and political virtue. Chaucer avoided referring to his faithlessness to Ariadne, which he did describe in *The Legend of Ariadne*.[42] As portrayed by the Knight, Theseus is wholly honourable in his treatment of women, and susceptible to their entreaties (see 952–64, 1760–81).

Particular emphasis is placed on his role as a 'rightful lord and juge' (1719).

Those who would appear to have some cause to complain about his judgments fail to do so. Although Theseus has sentenced Arcite and Palamon to life-imprisonment, they tend to blame their plight on fortune and the stars and not on their captor. Besides, Theseus's subsequent generosity to the cousins dispels any doubts that the reader may have concerning his treatment of them. Particularly illuminating is the episode in which he interrupts their fight to the death in the woods. Among the reasons for his anger is the fact that they are fighting 'withouten juge or oother officere' (1712), improperly conducting a trial by combat. Palamon instantly sees the situation from Theseus's point of view (yet another indication that the Duke's standards are supreme in the poem) and accepts that, judged by the canons of absolute justice, he and Arcite should be condemned to death. But of course, Theseus's 'resoun' soon gains control over his 'ire', and he recognises that in this case justice should be tempered with mercy.

> And softe unto hymself he seyde, 'Fy
> Upon a lord that wol have no mercy,
> But been a leon, bothe in word and dede,
> To hem that been in repentaunce and drede' . . .
> (I, 1773–5)

The man who can rule himself is fit to rule others, as we are assured in many a late-medieval 'Regiment of Princes'.

The basic principle on which Theseus operates is that he will judge others as he would wish to be judged himself:

> 'God so wisly on my soule rewe,
> As I shal evene juge been and trewe'.
> (I, 1863–4)

This seems to be the pagan equivalent of Matthew 7.2: 'With what judgment you judge, you shall be judged: and with what measure you mete, it shall be measured to you again'. These sentiments, the emphasis on the Duke's abilities as a judge, and his anger at the improper conduct of a trial by combat, are all without precedent in *Il Teseida*.

Ample precedent may be found, however, in a different kind of writing, namely, in stories of virtuous pagan kings and/or judges. A wealth of such *exempla* is provided in the first part of the *Communiloquium*. There John of Wales, following John of Salisbury, claims that the prince is 'the public power, and as it were an image on earth of the divine majesty' (cf. our discussion on p. 117 above).[43] Moreover, according to Plutarch's *Instructio Traiani*, the prince, being the 'chief judge' and head of the body politic, has to instruct and inform those persons who are its members. His justice should be dispensed without prejudice or favour.[44] Mercy is essential in a prince, as the Emperor Trajan recognized when he said that a man is insane who, having inflamed eyes, prefers to dig them out rather than cure them.[45] Likewise, nails which are too sharp should be trimmed and not plucked out. Just as a cithar player can correct the fault of a string which is out of tune by tuning it and not breaking it, so should the prince moderate his acts—now with the rigour of justice, now with the leniency of mercy—so that he may make his subjects all of one mind.

Therefore, the ethical writer (Ovid) says, 'The true prince is slow to punish, swift to reward, and grieves whenever he is compelled to be severe'. Trajan was inclined by nature to be merciful towards all, though he was stern towards the few who deserved his wrath. All these noble qualities are present in Duke Theseus, the ideal ruler and chief judge of *The Knight's Tale*.

In *St Erkenwald*, the unnamed good pagan whose body is miraculously preserved in order that it might be baptised and his soul saved thereby, was a judge of 'the gentile law'.[46] Indeed, he was the 'king of keen judges' because of the superlative excellence of his decisions, and hence when he died his body was buried with the trappings of kingship.

> 'I was committid & made a mayster mon here,
> To sit upon sayd causes þis cite I ȝemyd
> Vnder a prince of parage of paynymes laghe
> (& vche segge þat him sewid þe same fayth trowid). . . .
> Quen I deghed for dul denyed all Troye,
> Alle menyd my dethe, þe more & the lasse,
> & þus to bounty my body þai buriet in golde,
> Cladden me for þe curtest þat courte couthe þen holde,
> In mantel for þe mekest & monlokest on benche,
> Gurden me for þe gouernour & graythist of Troie,
> ffurrid me for þe fynest of faith me wytinne;
> ffor þe honour of myn honeste of heghest enprise
> þai coronyd me þe kidde kynge of kene iustises,
> þer euer wos tronyd in Troye oþir, trowid euer shulde
> And for I rewardid euer riȝt þai raght me the septre'.
> (201–56)

The heathen people who lived in 'New Troy' (=London) were unruly, but he administered justice according to his conscience, without showing undue favour to anyone, no matter how rich or powerful. Even if his own father had been a murderer, he would not have been swayed from his duty, but if necessary would have seen him hanged. This is reminiscent of the action of the just Emperor Trajan, in refusing to show favour to his own son. When Trajan's son accidentally killed a widow's son, the Emperor gave the widow his son in place of hers (cf. p. 54 above). Of course, in *The Knight's Tale* Theseus is not called upon to make a personal sacrifice of that kind, but it is quite clear that he has the superlative virtue necessary for such a feat of justice.

In order to establish this superlative virtue at the outset, Chaucer drastically abbreviated the first two books of the *Teseida*, where Boccaccio dealt with Teseo's great wars against the Amazons and the Thebans respectively. As a result of this drastic abbreviation the episode of Theseus and the widows becomes all-important. Boccaccio had employed this as a link-passage between Teseo's two wars, but in Chaucer the episode is more important than the wars. Chaucer's selection of material might have been influenced by popular tales about that other pagan champion of widows, Trajan. Trajan's decision to give a widow his son in place of her dead son, has just been mentioned. Even more significant in this context is the occasion on which the Emperor was hindered from going to war by a widow who, seizing his stirrup and miserably lamenting, besought him that she should have justice (cf. pp. 53–4 above).

Trajan promised to give her satisfaction on his return. The widow then asked what would happen if he did not return. Higden takes up the story thus:

> Traian themperour seide, 'My successor schalle iugge and do to the satisfaccioun'. The wedowe seide, 'What schalle that profite the and if thy successour do satisfaccion for me or eny other; þow arte dettor to me to receyve after thy meryte, and hit is a frawde not to restore that is dewe; hit is sufficiaunte for þy successor if he do satisfaccion for hym selfe'. Traian themperour, hauenge compassion of that wedowe, lepede downe of his hors, and did satisfaccion to the wedowe, wherfore he hadde an ymage sette in the cite of Rome made to his similitude.[47]

By contrast, Theseus, returning from one war, sets off on another war on behalf of a group of wretched widows who were once married to high-ranking aristocrats. Yet in each case a widow appeals to a pagan lord renowned for his nobility and justice, and in each case the lord puts the widow's grievance before self-interest. Chaucer may have regarded his Theseus as a Greek Trajan.

Particularly impressive is the way in which Theseus manages to avoid mass slaughter at the tournament: by the standards of Chaucer's age, he was positively squeamish.[48] Boccaccio's Teseo merely imposed limits on the numbers of fighting men and on the arms they could carry, expressing the pious hope that unnecessary bloodshed should be avoided.[49] During the battle, some knights are captured but a great many are killed, so that Emilia fears the curses of the bereaved 'mothers, fathers, friends, brothers, sons and others'.[50] At the beginning of the tenth book of *Il Teseida* a series of cremations is described briefly: each king lights 'a fire for his dead on the pyres built in sorrow'.[51] The instructions of Chaucer's Theseus are precise and strict: there is to be no bloodshed at all.

> 'The lord hath of his heigh discrecioun
> Considered that it were destruccioun
> To gentil blood to fighten in the gyse
> Of mortal bataille now in this emprise.
> Wherfore, to shapen that they shal nat dye,
> He wol his firste purpos modifye'. . . .
> (2537ff.)

Knights who are overcome in battle are not to be killed, but 'brought unto the stake' where they must await the outcome of the contest without further participation. Consequently, 'of hem alle was ther noon yslayn' (2708), although they all can display honourable wounds. Only one cremation is described towards the end of *The Knight's Tale*—that of Arcite, who is the victim of Saturn and not of Palamon or any of his company of knights.

Theseus's decree against bloodshed is universally commended by the people:

> 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!'
> (I, 2561–4)

Similarly, the company assembled in the woods praise Theseus's judgment of Arcite and Palamon (1870–80). The exceptional virtue of this good pagan, therefore, is acknowledged by all, and there is no reason to suspect any of the famous (or infamous) Chaucerian irony in his portrayal.[52] In his final speech, a shrewd political move—the marriage of Palamon and Emelye, which will ensure peace between Thebes and Athens—is shown to have not only ethical but also metaphysical sanction. The philosophy of Duke Theseus is internally consistent, comprehensive, and enlightened.

But precisely how enlightened is Theseus; what degree of perfection has he attained? The answer lies in his final speech, which will now be considered at some length. It shall be argued that the Boethian ideas found therein are quoted out of context from *De Consolatione Philosophiae* every bit as much as was the argument in favour of strict necessity which Chaucer put in the mouth of Troilus. Once again, Chaucer is using material drawn from Boethius not to investigate the nature of truth but to characterize a pagan philosopher of a type envisaged in the sources of his classicism.

Theseus's monotheistic vision provides the climax of *The Knight's Tale*, in marked contrast with the *Teseida* wherein Arcita's death and funeral serve this function. Chaucer transformed the episode in which Teseo, acting imperiously and somewhat overbearingly, decrees that Palemone and Emilia should marry. Every man must die, declares Teseo, and when it shall please the god 'who sets the limits of the world, we who are living now shall also die. Therefore, we ought to bear up cheerfully under the pleasure of the gods, since we cannot resist it'.[53] Here is the key to what Teseo means by making 'a virtue of necessity'. Since we all have to die, it is best to die well, 'when life is a joy'. The valiant man ought not to care how or whence death will come, because fame will preserve the honour he deserves. Consequently, if we thought deeply about this, we would emulate Arcita instead of grieving for him, turning 'our efforts towards a valiant life that would win us glorious fame'. This is the opening speech in a debate with Palemone, who has to be persuaded that to marry Emilia would not negate his love for Arcita. Emphasizing that he is following the pleasure of great Teseo rather than his own volition, Palemone seeks the approval of 'merciful Jove' who governs 'the earth and heavens with prudence and who gives each and all equally their ever-lasting place'.[54] He prays also to Diana, Venus, and any other goddess who has power in matrimony, and finally asks pardon, if pardon is necessary, of the 'piteous shade' of Arcita.

By contrast, in *The Knight's Tale* it is Theseus alone who speaks. His reasoning is altogether more substantial and comprehensive than Teseo's, and Palamon does not reply to him but accepts Emelye with joy and without even a token protest. Only one god is mentioned,

> 'Juppiter, the kyng,
> That is prince and cause of alle thyng'
> (I, 3035–6)

This monotheistic precision contrasts with the references to a plurality of gods made in the speeches of Boccaccio's Teseo and Palemone, although it should be noted that both these pagans make vague allusions to an omnipotent god. The main change, however, that Chaucer wrought was the introduction of ideas

from *De Consolatione Philosophiae*. For example, from II met. 8 and IV met. 6 is derived the notion that the divine love which produces and governs creatures binds 'the series of things' so that the world moves through its changes in regular concord, all things being 'held by mutual love' (cf. pp. 99–100 above).

> 'The Firste Moevere of the cause above,
> When he first made the faire cheyne of love,
> Greet was th'effect, and heigh was his entente.
> Wel wiste he why, and what thereof he mente;
> For with that faire cheyne of love he bond
> The fyr, the eyr, the water, and the lond
> In certeyn boundes, that they may nat flee.
> That same Prince and that Moevere', quod he,
> 'Hath stablissed in this wrecched world adoun
> Certeyne dayes and duracioun
> To al that is engendred in this place,
> Over the whiche day they may nat pace,
> Al mowe they yet tho dayes wel abregge'.
> (I, 2987–999)

Here the Creator who 'sits on high, and ruling the universe guides its reins' (IV met. 6, 34–5) is identified with the Aristotelian first mover and primary cause, perhaps under the influence of the Aristotelian theory of causality which, as we have seen, permeates Trevet's commentary on Boethius (cf. pp. 102–3 above).[55] But the Boethian philosophy in lines 2987–3016 is much more than a mere preliminary to the free adaptation of Teseo's speech provided in the lines which follow—it is the main guiding principle behind that adaptation, and provides the perameters within which interpretation thereof should operate. Theseus's views on necessity and fame must be considered in Boethian terms, as I now hope to demonstrate.

The world, Theseus claims, is subject to those general fortunes which are dispensed by secondary causes. From on high the eternal and stable Mover has decreed that

> 'speces of thynges and progressiouns
> Shullen enduren by successiouns,
> And nat eterne, withouten any lye'.
> (I, 3013–5)

Natural things go through the phases of their existence and eventually cease to be; towns 'wane and wende'; human beings die. No living creature can resist these things:

> 'heer-agayns no creature on lyve,
> Of no degree, availleth for to stryve'.
> (3039–40)

This might appear to be similar to Troilus's postulation of strict necessity, which Chaucer derived from *De Consolatione Philosophiae* V pr. 3,

> 'al that comth, comth by necessitee:
> Thus to be lorn, it is my destinee'.
> (IV, 958–9)

—but in fact it is quite different in origin and import. The relevant Boethian analogue is to be found in IV pr. 6, where Dame Philosophy explains the way in which 'the generation of all things, and the whole development of changeable natures, and whatever moves in any manner, are given their causes, order and forms from the stability of the divine mind' (22–25). Trevet explains that the necessity involved here is not absolute but conditional (cf. pp. 41–2 above). God ensures that certain things (such as the balance of elements, the seasonal cycle, and the normal successions of creatures) result necessarily only to the extent that these things have proximate causes which are contingently necessary. Causes which, in so far as they are contingent, are changeable, can yet be disposed in a fixed order by divine providence. This stability is not absolute but conditional, dependent on a higher authority. As Theseus puts it, the fixed pattern of the ever-changing series of events is made by

> 'Juppiter, the kyng,
> That is prince and cause of alle thyng,
> Convertynge al unto his propre welle
> From which it is dirryved, sooth to telle . . .'
> (I, 3035–8)

Conditional necessity means that neither God nor man is a mere cog in a mechanistic universe. Men are free to meet the common fortunes of life with dignity and courage.[56] We have the power to

> 'maken vertu of necessitee,
> And take it weel that we may nat eschue,
> And namely that to us alle is due.
> And whoso gruccheth ought, he dooth folye,
> And rebel is to hym that al may gye'.
> (I, 3042–6)

This may be compared with the attitude to future contingents recommended by 'Aristotle' in the *Secreta Secretorum* (cf. pp. 98–9 above). Some say that, since things must come 'of force', there is nothing we can do about it, even in those cases in which we are warned of future evils by astrological prediction. 'Aristotle' rejects this view and espouses a positive approach which has much in common with that of Theseus: things which we expect to happen may be 'moor lightly suffred, moor wysly passand, and so in manere eschewed; ffor yn als mekyl als þey ar forsey yn oure knowynge, we take hem mor discretly to passe withoutyn heuynesse and most harme'. This argument is substantiated by reference to the seasonal cycle:

> Als by ensample, whanne men trowyn wynter þat it is cold, men ordeyns herbergage and cloþing, and warmstores of cole and woode, and of many oþer þynges; And þerfore whanne þe wynter comes, þay er noght harmyd of þe cold. And yn somer of þe same maner þurgh cold metys and dyuers

> spyses þay kepe hem fro þe hete of somer; and yn þe same maner, when men knowyn byfore ȝeres of nede and hunger, þurgh kepynge and holdynge of whete and of oþer þynges, men suffren þe tyme mor lightly.[57]

This entire discussion, and Theseus's final speech, presuppose a belief in the freedom of the will, a belief which Troilus, in his most fatalistic mood, could not accept (IV, 1058–9). The logical conclusion of Troilus's thought is quietism and gloomy acceptance of fate: by contrast, Theseus insists on the importance of action. Thanks to conditional necessity, real virtue is possible, and it may be rewarded, according to Theseus, with 'a worthy fame'.

To be fair to Troilus, at the end of book III of *Troilus and Criseyde* he attained a vision of love as the 'holy bond of thynges' similar to that ascribed to Theseus, which also entailed belief in conditional necessity (cf. p. 100 above). But Troilus was unable to maintain this enlightened position for long. When the stimulus of earthly beauty was removed he reverted to his previous fatalism and polytheism. Theseus's wisdom, however, is mature and secure: he does not vacillate between variant forms of paganism; his vision is not dependent on the stimulus of earthly beauty. In death, Troilus realized that one cannot trust earthly things because of their ephemeral nature, that human joy and grief are vain. By contrast, in *The Knight's Tale* this type of insight into the transitoriness of the sublunary world and the vanity of human wishes is presented as the height of pagan wisdom, which Theseus is able to attain in life. Coming as it does at the end of the poem, his wisdom is presented as the distillation of the experience and thought of a lifetime.

Yet Theseus's wisdom is limited. He fails to move from the notion of Jupiter, prince and primary cause, to the notion of a loving god who can intervene in the determined course of events and suspend the normal operation of secondary causes.[58] Similarly, he does not push his understanding of earthly mutability to what a Christian (like the narrator of *Troilus*) would regard as a logical conclusion, namely, the rejection of the earthly and mutable in favour of the divine and permanent. Instead Theseus opts for the spurious eternity of human fame:

> 'And certeinly a man hath moost honour
> To dyen in his excellence and flour,
> Whan he is siker of his goode name . . .
> Thanne is it best, as for a worthy fame,
> To dyen whan that he is best of name'.
> (I, 3047–56)

Chaucer's personal skepticism about human fame may be inferred from *The House of Fame*, in which Fame's dwelling is said to be made of glass and built on ice.[59]

> Thoughte I, 'By seynt Thomas of Kent!
> This were a feble fundament
> To bilden on a place hye.
> He ought him lytel glorifye
> That hereon bilt, God so me save!'
> (1131–5)

Some of the virtuous people who approach the 'gentil lady Fame' are granted 'good fame' but others are not; some will have neither 'good ne harm' spoken of them while others will actually be slandered (1549–1635). A company of people who have been idle all their lives are granted as much renown as those who 'han doon noble gestes, / And acheved alle her lestes' (1727–1770). It would seem, therefore, that the confidence which Theseus has in Arcite's 'goode name' is utterly misplaced: the fame of this worthy man may endure, but then again it may not. Only time will tell; it is all a matter of fortune and luck, and posterity may afford some 'ydel' fellow as much respect as he.

To be more precise, what is in question at the end of *The Knight's Tale* is the status of fame as a good, the extent to which it is a fitting object of human endeavour. Since this issue is not discussed in *The House of Fame* we must turn once again to the sources of Chaucer's classicism, paying special attention to the late-medieval understanding of Boethius's statements on *gloria* and *fama*.

Robert Holcot's views on the subject emerge in his treatment of the *dubitacio*, is it virtuous for a man to neglect his fame?[60] It would seem that fame should be neglected, since it is a matter of good fortune or luck and, as Boethius proves in the first two books of *De Consolatione Philosophiae*, such matters are to be abandoned by the virtuous man. This is what those saints did, who gave up everything for Christ. Indeed, it seems to be the case that fame is to be contemned, because this kind of positive contempt is conducive to true happiness. As Christ told his followers, 'Blessed are ye when they shall revile you, . . . and speak all that is evil against your name' (Matthew 5.11). Furthermore, II Corinthians 6.4 teaches us to exhibit ourselves to God in such a way that we shall not take pride in good estimation nor be concerned about bad estimation. However, against the proposition that fame should be neglected one can cite Ecclesiasticus 41.15, 'Take care of a good name: for this shall continue with thee, more than a thousand treasures precious and great', and also Proverbs 22.1, 'A good name is better than great riches'. Holcot then 'responds' with his own opinion, which turns out to be a reiteration of what Augustine says in *De Communi Vita Clericorum* about the distinction between conscience and fame. These are two distinct things: conscience is necessary to us in respect of ourselves; fame, in respect of our neighbours. To contemn proper fame would be a mortal sin, while to neglect it would be sin either venial or mortal, depending on the degree of negligence. The reason for this is, that to neglect fame would be directly contrary to charity, which involves the instruction of one's neighbour by good edification or conversation. Holcot proceeds to refute the arguments in favour of the proposition as follows. Matters of good fortune are to be abandoned only if they impede virtue, yet *bona fama* does not hinder virtue but greatly promotes it. However, the love or desire for good fame can be excessive, as can the love of food, drink or clothes, each of which is necessary for life. Against the second argument, it may be pointed out that what was being praised was the patience with which the saints in question endured infamy inflicted unjustly, not the neglect of good fame. All this seems to point to the conclusion that fame can be a good thing if sought in the right manner and to the right extent.

Attacking those who are wholly preoccupied with the glory of fame, Holcot paraphrases five arguments from *De Consolatione Philosophiae* II pr. 7.[61] First is the spatial argument: the whole earth is but a mere point in comparison with the heavens, as Ptolemy and Alphorabius prove. Only a quarter of the earth is

habitable, which further indicates the narrowness of the limits within which fame can spread. Secondly, it is impossible to spread one's name widely because of defective communications and the difficulty of travel. Thirdly, there is a wide variety of customs in the world: what one race approves of and commends, another may deride and contemn. Fourthly, men die, and the memory of their name fades away. As Boethius asks in the following metrum, who now remembers the good Fabricius or Cato or Brutus? Names written in a few letters are all the fame that is left to them, and by reading these letters we cannot gain knowledge of the people themselves. Fifthly and finally, he who hopes to live in the memories of men suffers two deaths—one of his body, the other of his name.

Here Holcot appears to be adapting the *divisio textus* or breakdown of arguments offered in Trevet's commentary on *De Consolatione Philosophiae* II pr. 7. Of special interest to us is Trevet's gloss on Boethius's deliberations on the question, 'what has fame to offer men of the best sort, whose means to glory has been their virtue—what indeed, . . . after death has finally destroyed the body?' (77–80). He expands the author's statement that virtuous men either die totally or, if the soul lives after the death of the body (which we must believe) it travels to heaven.[62] If such men die totally, glory will be no concern of theirs; if their souls continue to live, being in heaven they will scorn all earthly things and consequently care nothing for human glory. One thinks of the souls of Boccaccio's Arcita and Chaucer's Troilus, rejecting mundane values as they travel towards their eternal home. Later in *De Consolatione Philosophiae*, in III pr. 6, glory or fame is firmly placed as one of the five inferior goods which are no substitute for the *summum bonum* of true happiness. As a type of false felicity, fame is not to be sought inordinately.

By placing Teseo's praise of fame in a Boethian context which encouraged the reader to identify it as one of Boethius's types of false felicity, Chaucer was bringing closer to the surface the principle of historical and cultural relativity which, I suspect, underlies Boccaccio's treatment of his pagan warlord in the final book of *Il Teseida*. Teseo's special interest in renown as a reward is absolutely typical of virtuous heathen as envisaged in the later Middle Ages.[63] Robert Holcot was expressing a commonplace of late-medieval classicism when he remarked that in 'ancient' writings we read that those men who did great and wonderful things, or things which were of great benefit to the state, were not only commemorated by their successors but also were placed in eternal memory to be worshipped as gods.[64] For example, Dionysius, the first to demonstrate the way in which grapes are cultivated, was called the father of wine by the Greeks, and deified. In a similar manner, Hercules and Ulysses, Ajax and Hector, perpetuated their fame by bellicose deeds. Another commonplace of late-medieval classicism was that the desire for fame had actually motivated many pagans to perform virtuous actions. According to Augustine in the fifth book of *De Civitate Dei*, 'love of country and thirst of praise' were 'the two things that set all the Romans upon admirable action'.[65] Boccaccio, aiming at historical accuracy in this matter, has Teseo recommend that all men should turn their efforts towards a valiant life that would win them glorious fame.[66]

In the extensive discussion of earthly glory provided in book V of *De Civitate Dei*, Augustine invoked the principle of the ethical expertise of the pagans. Christians should be shamed from boasting of their deeds for the eternal country by the superlative feats of virtue achieved by the Romans for their temporal city and for merely human glory.[67] For example, why is it so much to despise all this world's vanities for eternity, when Brutus could kill his own sons (supporters of the power-seeking Tarquin) for fear his country should lose bare liberty, a deed which the heavenly country compels no one to do?[68] Virgil erects Brutus 'a monument of unhappiness' for killing his sons, though otherwise he praises him. So then, if a pagan father could kill his sons for mortal freedom and thirst of praise, both transitory desires, what great matter is it, if we do not kill our sons, but count the poor of Christ our sons, and for eternal liberty free men, not from Tarquin but from the devils and their king? The obvious implication is that what Christians are obliged to do is altogether more reasonable and appropriate, and certainly more pleasing to God. The virtue that serves human glory, Augustine declares, 'is not comparable even with the imperfect beginnings of the saints' virtues, whose assured hope stands fixed in the grace and mercy of the true God'.[69] These views were reiterated frequently by late-medieval classicizing scholars, including the compiler of the *Speculum Morale*, John of Wales, and Pierre Bersuire.[70] Bersuire summed up the prevailing opinion succinctly: 'Fame, indeed, is the thing that the noble heart seeks most eagerly; and for that reason the ancients performed all their lofty deeds for the sake of acquiring fame, and they longed for glory and fame as the final reward of their deeds; and this they did because they were ignorant of the true glory of heaven and the true, everlasting reward'.[71]

This throws considerable light on the attitude of Boccaccio's Teseo and Chaucer's Theseus to 'worthy fame' and 'goode name'.[72] It was perfectly proper, and indeed commendable, for pagans to conceive of human fame as the final reward of their deeds, especially since, by dint of their unfavourable historical position, they were ignorant of the true glory of heaven and the true, everlasting reward. Therefore, in so far as the pagan desire for fame which Theseus articulates is conducive to virtue, it may be accepted and even approved of by the Christian reader of *The Knight's Tale*. However, such a reader cannot accept either Theseus's trust in fame or his inclination to establish it as the fit objective of human endeavour. The truth of the matter is that the virtuous man should not care greatly about the perpetuity of human fame and glory after death, although charity dictates that, in the interests of his neighbours, he should not neglect fame during his lifetime. 'Fame is the spur that the clear spirit doth raise' to superlative feats of virtue and valour, but it is also (as Augustine and Boethius recognized) the 'last infirmity of noble mind'.[73] Thus, the strengths and weaknesses of Theseus's philosophy of life are evident.

III THE YOUNG FATALISTS: EMELYE, ARCITE AND PALAMON

Chaucer's Emelye is a puzzling character, and quite unlike her counterpart in Boccaccio. Boccaccio's Emilia has a positive and quite forceful personality.[74] For example, during the tournament she complains of the evil that love has

wrought, and of the effect of her beauty, 'the price of which had to be a horrible, wicked, and ruthless conflict waged here only because of my face! How heartily I wish that it might have been kept veiled always, rather than that so much blood should be spilled for it, as I now see here in the place below'.[75] The sorrowful spirits of those who have been killed because of her face, she fears, will glare at her forever and gloat over everything that does her harm. Moreover, the relatives of the dead will beg their gods to afflict her with misfortunes, 'and the gods will become so hostile that I shall be condemned to a cruel death'.[76] When Arcita wins the tournament, Emilia ceases to care about Palemone and genuinely falls in love with Arcita: 'she already told herself that she was espoused to Arcita, and already she secretly felt unaccustomed love for him, and already she prayed often to the gods for her lord. Now she looked at him with new desire as she praised everything that he did'.[77] After his accident, she cries out against the gods who have bereft her of her happiness, which was all too brief.[78]

By contrast, Chaucer's Emelye appears as negative and shadowy: always in the background, she seems to accept meekly her role as prize in a trial of strength. However, far from destroying his heroine's character, Chaucer created it afresh: Emelye's paganism is stressed, and this seems to be the key to her character. Chaucer invented a description of the temple of Diana to parallel the descriptions of the shrines of Venus and Mars. This is part of the process by which Emilia's heathen piety was made as substantial as that of any of the male characters in *The Knight's Tale*.

The story of Nectanabus as told by Vincent of Beauvais and Ralph Higden (paraphrased above on pp. 63–4) reveals the extent to which, according to late-medieval scholars of antiquity, pagan peoples had believed in the inevitability of fate. In his very attempt to reject the notion of a fixed fate, Alexander sealed the fate of the man who was his real father. 'No man may flee his destinee', exclaims the dying astrologer, 'for y knewe by myn arte þat myne awne sonne scholde by cause of my dethe'. Similarly, Emelye believes that no-one can escape his or her destiny. Faced with the equal loves of her two suitors, she is concerned to discover if

> 'my destynee be shapen so
> That I shal nedes have oon of hem two . . .'
> (I, 2323–4)

—and Diana leaves her in no doubt that the gods have made an irrevocable decision:

> 'Among the goddes hye it is affermed,
> And by eterne word writen and confermed,
> Thou shalt ben wedded unto oon of tho
> That han for thee so muchel care and wo . . .'
> (I, 2349–52)

Unlike Boccaccio's Emilia, Emelye never cries out against her gods: as a virtuous pagan, she accepts their will. The fact that (to a Christian) Diana is an unworthy object of worship is not her fault: historically speaking, Emelye was quite justified.

> 'I putte me in thy proteccioun,
> Dyane, and in thy disposicioun'.
> (I, 2363–4)

Such perfect faith must impress even those who cannot share it; such trust in the divine will is of the superlative kind that (in the view of the classicizers) should put many a Christian to shame.

Attempts to analyse Emelye simply in terms of *fin' amors* are therefore misguided: she could hardly be more different from, for example, the heroine of *Le Roman de la Rose* who exercises supreme power over her lover, and has the sole responsibility for deciding the outcome of his suit. Chaucer was concerned to portray not a fourteenth-century courtly lady but an 'ancient' pagan, and, as we are reminded in *Troilus*, 'ancient' and 'modern' methods of pursuing a love-suit can be dissimilar:

> for to wynnen love in sondry ages,
> In sondry londes, sondry ben usages. . . .
>
> For every wight which that to Rome went
> Halt nat o path, or alwey o manere . . .
> (II, 27–37)

Emelye's passivity becomes comprehensible only if it is placed in its historical perspective and related to her fatalism.

This passivity is rendered more acceptable to us because of Chaucer's narrative technique in *The Knight's Tale*: the pagans are allowed to think and speak for themselves, to define their pagan standards without explicit criticism. The double standard of *Troilus and Criseyde* encourages us to judge Criseyde more critically, and of course we have more to criticize her for, every possible excuse having been made for her behaviour. In that poem, people are shown to be responsible for their actions, irrespective of what they themselves might believe to the contrary. Therefore, Criseyde's faithlessness cannot be blamed on fate; her 'To Diomede algate I wol be trewe' is pathetic rather than noble. By contrast, we are not made aware that Emelye has any freedom of action, other than the freedom to ennoble what must be by accepting it bravely.

Indeed, fatalism is the norm in the 'closed' pagan world of *The Knight's Tale*, and the monotheistic vision attained by Theseus at the end of the poem is the exception that proves the rule. In general, Theseus seems to be polytheistic—the 'rede statue of Mars' adorns his banner (975–6) and he can swear by 'myghty Mars' (1747)—and therefore his final speech should perhaps, technically speaking, be regarded as a statement concerning Jupiter as the greatest of the pagan gods rather than as a single omnipotent god, although its indubitable monotheism is, quite clearly, meant to be understood as an enlightened pagan anticipation of Christian belief. Theseus, although not in the same intellectual league as Socrates and Plato (who were supposed to have rejected polytheism utterly), resembles those Stoic philosophers who, according to Bradwardine, identified fate with the dictates of Jove, their greatest god, and regarded fate as 'the effecting of the divine will' (cf. pp. 43–4 above). The young pagans in Chaucer's poem, however, do not get so far, since they believe

that men are predetermined by the power of the stars and conceive of fate in terms of a fixed order of events. The necessity of which Emelye, Arcite and Palamon make virtue is the absolute necessity of which Troilus spoke in book IV of *Troilus and Criseyde*:

> 'al that comth, comth by necessitee:
> Thus to ben lorn, it is my destinee'.
> (IV, 958–9)

Perhaps Theseus's implicit belief in conditional necessity, judged by the standards of his day, is somewhat optimistic, although of course it is the hope for the future, the theory of divine control which one day history will prove to be the right one.

As in *Troilus*, in *The Knight's Tale* the pagan deities are assimilated to the planets which bear their names, and belief in planetary influences and astral determinism is inextricably linked with polytheism. The god Saturn causes Arcite's death yet, earlier in the poem, Arcite blames the misfortunes which Palamon and he have to suffer on fortune and the wicked aspect of the planet Saturn:

> 'Fortune hath yeven us this adversitee.
> Som wikke aspect or disposicioun
> Of Saturne, by som constellacioun,
> Hath yeven us this . . .'
> (I, 1086–9)

Arcite performs 'his sacrifice, / With alle the rytes of his payen wyse', in the temple of the planet-god Mars (2368–70); Palamon does likewise in the temple of the planet-god Venus. Yet the fact that they are deeply embrangled in 'observaunces of judicial matere and rytes of payens' does not imply that they lack virtue in some way; there is no suggestion that their worship of false gods is a reflection of moral falsity, as was the case with the dubious piety of Calkas in *Troilus*. Indeed, Arcite and Palamon are presented with considerable sympathy. Chaucer avoided all mention of Arcite's faithlessness to Anelida (which forms the subject of his short poem *Anelida and Arcite*): obviously he did not wish the character in *The Knight's Tale* to be accused of moral turpitude, or the honesty of his love for Emelye to be questioned.

Because the cousins are presented as essentially virtuous, their reservations about the standard religious and philosophical beliefs of their time carry considerable weight. For all their trust in Mars and Venus respectively, Arcite and Palamon incline towards the belief that the gods kill men for their sport. Palamon, left alone in prison when Arcite is freed, cries out against the cruel gods who lead mankind like sheep to the slaughter:

> Thanne seyde he, 'O crueel goddes that governe
> This world with byndyng of youre word eterne, . . .
> What is mankynde moore unto you holde
> Than is the sheep that rouketh in the folde?
> For slayn is man right as another beest . . .'
> (I, 1303–9)

Men without guilt are often tormented:

> 'What governance is in this prescience,
> That giltelees tormenteth innocence?'
> (1313–4)

Here one is reminded of the commonplace medieval theory that the pagan gods were actually demons, who purposed no good to mankind. Palamon proceeds to claim that the gods Saturn and Juno, 'jalous and eek wood', have destroyed Thebes and now seek to destroy him (1328–31). Similarly, Arcite complains about Juno and 'felle Mars' (1540–62). Forced to leave Athens and Emelye, he laments that fortune has turned the dice in favour of Palamon, then muses that the 'purveiaunce of God' or fortune often gives men good or ill in disguise (1234–65), concluding that

> 'We seken faste after felicitee,
> But we goon wrong ful often, trewely'.
> (1266–7)

The Boethian allusion is obvious: in pursuing earthly beauty in the form of Emelye, the lovers are seeking a kind of false felicity which falls far short of the ultimate end of true happiness.

In this way, Chaucer characterises his benighted pagans, walking by the best light they have, striving for felicity but not finding it, wasting their devotions on false gods. The implicit Christian standard in *The Knight's Tale* is thereby indicated, and a focus provided for Christian distrust of the 'rytes of payens'. Particularly striking is the cousins' impression that the gods act arbitrarily and without a fixed standard of justice. This suspicion proves to have been well-founded, as an examination of their callous treatment of Arcite will indicate.

IV 'GODDES SPEKEN IN AMPHIBOLOGIES': THE AMBIGUOUS ORACLE

Boccaccio was more interested in Arcita than in Palemone—a fitting sub-title for *Il Teseida* would be, 'The Death of Arcita'. Arcita sees Emilia first, and Boccaccio seems to think that he deserved her most. Moreover, Arcita's appeal to Mars comes first in Boccaccio's sequence of prayers to the pagan gods. By contrast, Chaucer's Palamon sees Emelye first, his prayer to Venus comes first, and the story is referred to as 'Palamon and Emelye' (I, 3107). However, these should be taken as hints of Palamon's ultimate victory, and not mistaken for an attempt to establish the primacy of Palamon's character. Palamon and Arcite may have different personalities (as has been argued above) but they are equally honourable and brave as knights, equally ardent as lovers, and equally

limited as pagans. Even the most wise Theseus cannot judge which is the more worthy of Emelye:

> 'Ech of you bothe is worthy, doutelees,
> To wedden whan tyme is . . .'
> (I, 1831–2)

There is no suggestion that Palamon was the most deserving, or indeed that Emelye got the man who loved her most. The cousins are equally worthy men—and that, I suggest, is precisely Chaucer's point. Had Palamon deserved Emelye more than Arcite, one could have argued that the pagan gods had acted properly and justly in judging that he should have her. But there is no divine justice in *The Knight's Tale*: the pagan gods act arbitrarily and capriciously, and they have their favourites.[79] Arcite loses his life and his lady simply because he prayed to the wrong god, and because Saturn had a grudge against his race. Palamon wins Emelye because he had the good luck—one can hardly call it good judgment—and the personality to pray to Venus.

It might be objected that, technically speaking, Mars and Saturn are within their rights: after all, Arcite asked for victory, not for Emelye. But it is obvious that Arcite is interested in victory not for its own sake, but as a means to an end, namely, the winning of Emelye. This is made very clear in his address to Mars:

> 'wel I woot, er she me mercy heete,
> I moot with strengthe wynne hire in the place,
> And, wel I woot, withouten help or grace
> Of thee, ne may my strengthe noght availle.
> Thanne help me, lord, tomorwe in my bataille . . .'
> (I, 2398–402)

Thus the gods' legalism is both mean and misleading. They fail to provide Arcite with full information concerning his future; they are guilty, at least, of what a Christian would call a sin of omission. We already have noted the common late-medieval conviction (as held by Vincent of Beauvais, Holcot and others) that the gentile gods, who were really demons, warned the 'ancient' pagans about certain future events in order to lead them to wreck and ruin (cf. pp. 33–7 and 81 above). The intimation of victory given to Arcite in the temple of Mars (2427–33) should perhaps be regarded in this light. From the image of Mars comes the mumbled word, 'Victorie!', which Arcite naturally interprets as meaning total victory, including the possession of Emelye. It transpires that he had been granted mere victory in battle.

Our understanding of this episode, which largely is Chaucer's invention, is crucial for our understanding of *The Knight's Tale* as a whole. In *Il Teseida*, Boccaccio recounts how Arcite's prayer arrives at the heavenly house of Mars, whereupon the god makes his way to the earthly temple in which his devotee is praying.[80] As soon as the temple hears its sovereign god, it begins to tremble and its gates begin to roar, so that Arcita is very much afraid. The votive fires which he has kindled burn with a brighter glow, the earth emits a marvellous aroma and the smoke of the incense draws near the image erected in honour of Mars. The armour on this statue moves of its own accord and resounds with sweet music, and 'signs' are given to 'wondering Arcita' that his prayer has been heard. And so, Boccaccio continues, the young man rests content with the thought of achieving victory. He remains in the temple that night and receives other reassuring signs. Chaucer, it would seem, has made the response of Mars more definite and ultimately more damning as far as the character of the god is concerned. He seems to have been influenced by the commonplace of medieval classicism that demon-gods often deceived men through the agency of oracles and speaking images.[81]

In Trevet's commentary on *De Consolatione Philosophiae* Chaucer would have read the tale of how King Croesus had consulted the Delphic oracle concerning his projected war with Persia.[82] Apollo's answer was ambiguous: 'If Croesus crosses the Alys, a great kingdom will fall'. Croesus, reassured by this prediction, crossed the river Alys, and a great kingdom did fall—his own. The answer which Arcite receives from Mars is ambiguous in the same way. We are reminded of Criseyde's greatest theological insight:

> 'goddes speken in amphibologies,
> And, for a sooth, they tellen twenty lyes'.
> (IV, 1406–7)

As was suggested in our previous chapter, here she has in mind Apollo, who was notorious for his ambiguous answers. Apollo is the special god of her father, Calkas, and it is significant that he too has a reputation for dissimulation—like god, like prophet. Diomede, skeptical of Calkas's prediction concerning the fall of Troy, complains that this dubious prophet may be leading the Greeks

> 'with ambages,
> That is to seyn, with double wordes slye,
> Swiche as men clepen a word with two visages . . .'
> (V, 897–9)

Arcite is misled by what might be regarded as a 'double worde slye': Mars's word 'Victorie!' certainly has 'two visages'; the god of war is as deceitful as the demon of Delphi.[83]

In Chapter II it was explained that stories of deceptive pagan oracles occur in a wide variety of medieval works: in standard reference books like Vincent of Beauvais' *Speculum Historiale*, Jacob of Voragine's *Legenda Aurea* and Higden's *Polychronicon*, in Latin versions of the Troy legend such as Guido delle Colonne's *Historia Destructionis Troiae* and Joseph of Exeter's *De Bello Trojano*, and in Old French romances with an antique setting like the anonymous *Roman de Thebes* and Benoît de Sainte-Maure's *Roman de Troie*. I shall take as representative two episodes from John Lydgate's *Troy Book* and *Siege of Thebes*, these being free translations of Guido's *Historia* and the *Roman de Thebes* respectively.

In *The Troy Book*, IV, 6930–7035 Lydgate curses the false gods for not punishing the Greeks for their murder of Hecuba and Polyxena.[84] Those statues of wood and stone to which the pious Trojans prayed were inhabited by Satan, the old snake himself, who sought to lead them astray.

þat an evele chaunce
Come to þeis false goddes euerychoon!
And her statues of stokkes & of stoon,
In whiche þe serpent & þe olde snake,
Sathan hym silf, gan his dwellinge make;
And fraudently folkes to illude,
Ful sotilly kan hym silfe include
In ymagis, for to make his hold,
þat forged bene of siluer & of gold,—
þat by errour of false illusioun,
He hath y-brouȝt to confusioun,
þoruȝ myscreaunce, þe worþi kynde of man,
Siþen tyme þat aldirfirst be-gan
þe false honour of ydolatrie
And þe worship vn-to mawmetrie. . .
(IV, 6930–44)

All the pagan deities, Lydgate continues, sprang from the devil, as David bears witness in the Psalter where he writes expressly that 'þe goddes of paganysme rytes' are all fiends. Those who trust in them shall endure great mischief in this life and be damned in the next. In *The Siege of Thebes* our attention is focused on one idol in particular, the statue of Apollo which, although it stands in a splendid chariot of bright gold, is inhabited by an unclean spirit which

Be fraude only / and fals collusioun,
Answere gaf / to euery questioun,
Bryngyng the puple in ful gret errour,
Such as to hym dyden fals honour
Be Rytys vsed in the olde dawes
Aftere custome / of paganysmes lawes.
(I, 539–44)[85]

In both these episodes Lydgate emphasizes the contrast between the pagans' piety and the wickedness of the gods to whom it is directed. Edippus (=Oedipus) prays devoutly 'with full humble chere' and 'gret deuocioun' to Apollo, beseeching him on his knees for any sign whereby he might learn his lineage. The invisible fiend promptly orders him 'with a vois dredful and horrible' to go to Thebes, thereby setting him on the road to parricide, incest, madness and death (*Siege of Thebes*, I, 545–57). Similarly, Troy expected to prosper by the help of its gods,

Whom þei wer wont to honour & to serue
With Cerymonyes & with sacrifise
(IV, 7024–5)

Instead the town was destroyed, thus manifesting the result of pagan faith:

Here may ȝ sen how þe venym bites,
At þe ende, of swiche olde rytes,
By evidence of þis noble toun.
(IV, 7029–31)

The great piety of Chaucer's pagans is striking also: each of the young people fervently worships his or her special god. Yet all this ardent devotion would seem to be misplaced, in view of the suffering which ensues. Like Edippus and the Trojans, they are deceived and deluded. Lydgate's rhetorical question—which may well reflect his understanding of the *Troilus* epilogue—is as relevant to them as it is to the hapless and helpless Trojans:

What may now helpe her frauded fantasie
Of al her olde false ydolatrie?
Allas, allas! þei bouȝt it al to sore.
(*The Troy Book*, IV, 7033–5)

This suggestion concerning the malevolence of the pagan deities seems to be substantiated by the way in which Chaucer handled the 'assembly of the gods' episode. Boccaccio had said simply that a new strife arose in the heavens between Venus and Mars, but the gods found a way to content both prayers:

e si ne nacque in ciel novella lite
intra Venere e Marte, ma trovata
da lor fu via con maestrevol arte
di far contenti i prieghi d'ogni parte.
(VII, 67)[86]

Chaucer substitutes an argument among the gods, briefly alluding to Jupiter in his traditional role of peacemaker:

And right anon swich strif ther is bigonne,
For thilke grauntyng, in the hevene above,
Bitwixe Venus, the goddesse of love,
And Mars, the stierne god armypotente,
That Juppiter was bisy it to stente . . .
(I, 2438–42)

Significantly, it is 'pale Saturnus the colde', and not the benevolent Jupiter, who finds 'in his olde experience an art' which enables him to please the haggling gods (2443–6). We are left in no doubt concerning what kind of 'experience' Saturn has:

'Myn is the drenchyng in the see so wan;
Myn is the prison in the derke cote;
Myn is the stranglyng and hangyng by the throte,
The murmure and the cherles rebellyng,
The groynynge, and the pryvee empoysonyng . . .'
(I, 2456–60)

Chaucer seems to have been indebted to the traditional description of Saturn as a malicious planet and hence a thoroughly unpleasant planet-god. For example, in Trevisa's translation of *De Proprietatibus Rerum* we read that

> Saturnus is an yuel-willid planete, colde and drye, a nyȝt planete, and heuy; and þerfore by fablis he is ipeyntid as an olde man. . . . And is pale in colour oþir wan as leed, and hath tweye dedliche qualitees, cooldnes and drynes. And þerfore a childe and oþir brood þat is conceyued and comeþ forþ vndir his lordschipe dyeþ oþir haþ wel yuel qualitees, for . . . he makþ a man brown and foule, mysdoynge, slowh and heuy, elynge and sory, seldome glade and merye oþir lauȝhynge. . . . And he loueþ stinkinge beestis and vnclene, and soure þingis and scharpe, for in here complexioun melancolik humour haþ maistrie. . . . Vndir him is conteyned lyf, buldinge, lore, and coolde place and drye. In dome and iugement he tokeneþ sorowe and wo and elyngenes.[87].

Bersuire repeats this account in the fifth book of his *Reductorium Morale*; in the fifteenth book (the *Ovidius Moralizatus*) he provides a moral allegory of Saturn as an old and depraved man.[88] Alain de Lille says that in the abode of Saturn, grief, groans, tears, discord, terror, sadness, wanness, mourning and injustice hold sway.[89] It would seem, then, that any course of action proposed by this unfortunate figure can be expected to be nasty and unjust.[90]

However, there was another (and less common) medieval tradition relating to Saturn which saw him in a very good light. Following Macrobius, Alexander Neckham credited him with wisdom: 'Saturn is rightly described as an old man by the philosophers for old men are of mature judgment'.[91] In his *Fulgentius Metaforalis*, John Ridevall interpreted Saturn as prudence and his four children as the virtues which attend prudence.[92] Jupiter represents the harmony of all the moral goods; Juno, the memory of past things; Neptune, the understanding and ordering of present things; and Pluto, the providence of future things. Bersuire incorporated this account into the second recension of his *Ovidius Moralizatus*, the version that Chaucer knew.[93].

Some critics, seeking to demonstrate that this 'good' tradition is dominant in Chaucer's depiction of Saturn, have focused their attention on lines 2443–52, where the age and wisdom of the planet-god are apparently praised:

> the pale Saturnus the colde,
> That knew so manye of aventures olde,
> Foond in his olde experience an art
> That he ful soone hath plesed every part.
> As sooth is seyd, elde hath greet avantage;
> In elde is bothe wysdom and usage;
> Men may the olde atrenne, and noght atrede.

But in context these words are heavily ironic, almost to the point of sarcasm. The long catalogue of horrid 'aventures olde' produced by the malevolent agency of the planet-god (2453–69) condemns him out of his own mouth—such is the 'wysdom and usage' of Saturn! In the following lines the knight remarks that

> Saturne anon, to stynten strif and drede,
> Al be it that it is agayn his kynde,
> Of al this strif he gan remedie fynde.
> (2450–2)

This has been interpreted as a declaration that Saturn is putting aside his normally nasty nature to produce something positive and constructive for once, a solution which will satisfy all parties (except the human testees, of course).[94] In my opinion, it continues the irony established in lines 2443–52, thereby warning the reader that Saturn's 'remedie' will be a medicine of the type that cures the ailment by killing the patient. After all, it is Jupiter's 'kynde' to 'stynten strif and drede'; yet the Jupiter of *The Knight's Tale* is a moral coward who, after a feeble attempt at peacemaking, relinquishes his proper role to his mischief-making father. It is possible, I suppose, to argue that the 'good tradition' relating to Saturn may have influenced the portrayal of the other aged father figure in the poem, namely Egeus,[95] whose speech in lines 2836–51 exemplifies all the virtues which (according to Ridevall and Bersuire) attend prudence: the harmony of all moral goods, the memory of past things, the understanding and ordering of present things, and the providence of future things. But the essence of Chaucer's Saturn is the common astrological 'picture' of the wicked old man.

In *The Knight's Tale* Saturn acts true to this type. He passes a death-sentence on Arcite, which he carries out himself: it is he (and not Venus, as in the *Teseida*) who asks Pluto to send the infernal fury which startles Arcite's horse (2684–91).[96] Saturn has no interest in justice or human merit; his concern is to reconcile the gods at whatever expense to human beings, and to indulge his ancient malice against Thebans (clearly intimated in lines 1328–31; cf. 1087–90). According to the astrologers, Jupiter constantly abates the malice of Saturn; in *The Knight's Tale*, Saturn seems to be abating the 'honeste' of Jupiter. 'Juppiter, the kyng' is not in such benevolent control of the pantheon as Theseus's depiction of him would suggest. Perhaps the reader is expected to have the reaction which Chaucer made explicit at the end of *Troilus and Criseyde*:

> Lo here, of payens corsed olde rites,
> Lo here, what alle hire goddes may availle;
> Lo here, thise wrecched worldes appetites;
> Lo here, the fyn and guerdoun for travaille
> Of Jove, Appollo, of Mars, of swich rascaille!
> (V, 1849–53)

It would seem then, that while Chaucer's Knight dislikes and distrusts the pagan gods, he has considerable respect and sympathy for the noble paganism of his characters, especially that of Theseus. We see into the heathen heaven—a privilege denied us in *Troilus*—and receive first-hand information about the disorganized haggling, the petty spites and the self interest, of its denizens. The difference between what the pagans think their gods are like and what they are really like is quite startling, and the gods fare very badly from the comparison. Quite clearly, the pagans deserve better gods than the ones they worship, as is most evident in the case of Theseus's reverence for Jupiter. It is as if he has created his god in his own image. Theseus possesses the qualities of 'witte and wisdome and resoun' in abundance, and naturally ascribes them to Jupiter; he wields power and exercises control over the pagan world of the poem, and believes that his god has such power and control. This noble view of Jupiter is very flattering to the god, but it does Theseus considerable credit: only an extremely noble pagan could attain such an enlightened view of deity.

For the regal 'Juppiter' of Theseus's speech does exist: he may be identified not with the ether or with a demon, but with the one true God who is known more fully to Christians. Bersuire interpreted the traditional 'picture' of Jupiter as an allegory of the Almighty;[97] Christians may regard Theseus's depiction of the 'prince and cause of alle thyng' as an incomplete but substantially correct description of their God. If ever a good pagan merited salvation, it is Theseus. Perhaps Chaucer wished us to make the inference.

However, although we may suspect that Chaucer regarded Theseus as a 'friend of God', there is no firm confirmation of this provided in the poem. The Knight also avoids discussing the issue of the fate of Arcite's soul, claiming that he has neither the knowledge nor the will to do so. Besides, in the register (i.e., the table of contents) of the authoritative book he is following, there is nothing mentioned about souls—an oblique way of saying that his source does not treat of the subject.[98]

> His spirit chaunged hous and wente ther,
> As I cam nevere, I kan nat tellen wher.
> Therfore I stynte, I nam no divinistre;
> Of soules fynde I nat in this registre,
> Ne me ne list thilke opinions to telle
> Of hem, though that they writen wher they dwelle.
> Arcite is coold, ther Mars his soule gye!
>
> (I, 2809–15)

As in *Troilus and Criseyde*, in *The Knight's Tale* Chaucer is preoccupied with what his pagan characters achieved during their lives, and it is quite clear that Theseus has achieved the most.

It has been said that Boccaccio's Teseo is 'closer to the ideal governor of a republic than to the traditional ruler of a medieval kingdom'.[99] In fact, this description fits Chaucer's hero much more exactly. Teseo is first and foremost a conqueror whose greatest delight is in fighting. Theseus, on the other hand, is as accomplished in philosophy (metaphysical, ethical and political) as he is in military matters, a suggestion which may be substantiated from the second prologue to Holcot's commentary on that Biblical 'Mirror for Princes', the Book of Wisdom. According to Holcot, the objective of wisdom is to dispose men in order and harmony.[100] Cicero speaks of a time before law and order were invented, when men lived like beasts, doing nothing by the guidance of reason but relying chiefly on physical strength. Then a great and wise man appeared, who assembled and gathered these rude men in accordance with a plan. When, through reason and eloquence, he made them listen to him, 'he transformed them from wild savages into a kind and gentle folk'. The same point was made, Holcot continues, by those poets who created the fable of Orpheus. As Boethius says in *De Consolatione Philosophiae* III pr. 12, he was so skilled a harpist that he could make the rivers stand still and the woods move, the hind to come together with the lion, and the hare with the hound. Orpheus really designates wise men (*sapientes*) whose task it is to reconcile in civilization men who are vicious and divided among themselves.[101] Holcot concludes this argument with Boethius's summary of the doctrine of Plato that 'those states would be happy where philosophers were kings or their governors were philosophers'. Philosophers 'must involve themselves in political affairs, lest the rule of nations be left to the base and wicked, bringing ruin and destruction on the good' (I pr. 4, 18–25).[102] Without wishing to imply that life in the ancient world depicted in *The Knight's Tale* is brutish (although it can be nasty and short), it may be pointed out that Chaucer's Theseus possesses in large measure all the essential qualities here commended by Holcot: he imposes law and order on anarchy and potential chaos, brings reason to bear on destructive passions, reconciles warring factions, and in general makes virtue of necessity. The state of Athens can be happy because its king is a philosopher, a *sapiens* in the subject-areas of ethics, politics and even metaphysics.

Chaucer's 'medievalization' of Boccaccio was carried out with a large measure of consistency, and I have sought to demonstrate that at least some of the principles at work may be illuminated through investigation of the attitudes to pagan antiquity which were current in fourteenth-century England. In such theological, encyclopaedic and historical works as Chaucer and his contemporaries read, one may find the basis for an approach to *Troilus and Criseyde* and *The Knight's Tale* which takes stock both of Chaucer's celebration of the achievements of good pagans and his fundamental detachment from such pagan limitations as the 'observaunces of judicial matere' and 'corsed olde rytes'. As a result of this inquiry, it should be recognized that the paganism in these poems is not mere background and setting, but an essential aspect of their overall meaning.

129 *Teseida*, xi, st. 1 (ed. Roncaglia, p. 316; trans. Havely, *Chaucer's Boccaccio*, p. 144); cf. Steadman, *Disembodied Laughter*, pp. 16–20.
130 *Teseida*, x, sts 95, 99 (ed. Roncaglia, pp. 310, 311; trans. B. M. McCoy, *The Book of Theseus by Giovanni Boccaccio* (New York, 1974), p. 279).
131 Chiose al libro x (ed. Roncaglia, p. 449; trans. McCoy, p. 286). On Chaucer's possible knowledge of Boccaccio's commentary on his own work see especially Boitani, *Chaucer and Boccaccio*, pp. 113–6, 190–7.
132 *Teseida*, xi, st. 3 (ed. Roncaglia, p. 316; trans. McCoy, p. 289; cf. Havely, p. 144).
133 Cf. Steadman, *Disembodied Laughter*, pp. 40–1.
134 See especially Arcita's catalogue of the virtues which, in his view, make him worthy of Elysium: *Teseida*, x, sts 96–9 (ed. Roncaglia, pp. 310–11; trans. McCoy, p. 279).
135 Cf. Tatlock, 'The Epilog of Chaucer's *Troilus*', pp. 640–7.

CHAPTER 4

1 On the other hand, the Knight has been seen as a crude mercenary and a cold-blooded killer, a product of the growing commercialization of warfare: see Terry Jones, *Chaucer's Knight: The Portrait of a Medieval Mercenary* (London, 1980). An utterly convincing refutation of these views has been provided by Maurice Keen, 'Chaucer's Knight, the English Aristocracy, and the Crusade', in *English Court Culture in the Later Middle Ages: Proceedings of the Colston Symposium, University of Bristol, 5–8 April* (forthcoming).
2 The significance of the age of each of the characters is brought out well by D. Brooks and A. Fowler, 'The Meaning of Chaucer's *Knight's Tale*', *Medium Ævum*, xxxix (1970), 123–46, and J. A. Burrow, 'Chaucer's *Knight's Tale* and the Ages of Man' (unpublished).
3 On style and characterization in *Il Teseida* see especially Boitani, *Chaucer and Boccaccio*, pp. 1–60.
4 On Chaucer's knowledge of the *Anticlaudianus* see especially E. P. Hammond, *Chaucer: A Bibliographical Manual* (repr. New York, 1933), p. 84; T. R. Lonsbury, *Studies in Chaucer* (New York, 1892), ii, 344–52; M. J. Donivan, 'The *Anticlaudianus* and Three Passages in the *Franklin's Tale*', *JEGP*, lvi (1957), 52–9.
5 This notion has been expressed in various ways by a few critics, but never (to the best of my knowledge) in the form offered here. I have found particularly stimulating Brooks/Fowler and Burrow (cit. note 2 above), and also P. M. Kean, *Chaucer and the Making of English Poetry* (London and Boston, 1972), ii, 3–52; Alan Gaylord, 'The Role of Saturn in the *Knight's Tale*', *The Chaucer Review*, viii (1974), 171–90 (esp. pp. 175, 182–3).
6 Cf. Boitani, *Chaucer and Boccaccio*, p. 47.
7 I cannot accept R. M. Jordan's view that 'There is no clear reason why Palamon should be the Knight of Venus and Arcite the Knight of Mars rather than vice versa': *Chaucer and the Shape of Creation* (Cambridge, Mass., 1967), pp. 172–3.
8 Some of the arguments offered here concerning the differences in the cousins' characters were to some extent anticipated by H. N. Fairchild, 'Active Arcite, Contemplative Palamon', *JEGP*, xxvi (1927), 285–93. Unfortunately, he imposes a Christian ideology on pagan characters, failing to take account of their historical position. Most critics agree that Arcite and Palamon are similar in many respects; there is, however, considerable disagreement concerning the quality of differentiation between them. See the helpful summary of the various positions provided at the beginning of L. Y. Roney's thesis, *Scholastic Philosophies in Chaucer's Knight's Tale* (Ph.d. thesis, University of Wisconsin, Madison, 1970).
9 *Ovidius Moralizatus*, ed. Engels, p. 15; cf. the anonymous *De Deorum Imaginibus Libellus*, iii (ed. as an appendix by Liebeschütz, Ridevall's *Fulgentius Metaforalis*, pp. 117–8). See further the account of medieval descriptions of Mars in Twycross, *The Representation of the Major Classical Divinities*, pp. 208–59.
10 *Reductorium Morale*, v.25 (in the Venice edition of 1583, p. 122).
11 *On the Properties of Things*, viii.13 (ed. Seymour et al., i, 481).
12 Alain de Lille, *Anticlaudianus*, IV, 420–6 (ed. R. Bossuat, Textes philosophiques du moyen âge, i (Paris, 1955), p. 119; trans. J. J. Sheridan, *Anticlaudianus, or The Good and Perfect Man*, Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies (Toronto, 1973), p. 133).
13 North, *Richard of Wallingford*, i, 200–1, 214–5, 232–3.
14 *Summa Iudicialis*, i, dist. iv, cap. 3 (MS Bodley 369, fols 44v–6v). Cf. the brief account in Vincent of Beauvais, *Speculum Naturale*, xv.27 (*Speculum Maius*, i, fol. 188v); also Curry, *Chaucer and the Medieval Sciences*, pp. 123–4.
15 See Twycross, *The Medieval Anadyomene*.
16 *Ovidius Moralizatus*, ed. Engels, p. 22. Cf. the *Libellus*, v (ed. Liebeschütz, p. 118). No Venus 'picture' appears in the partial text of Ridevall's *Fulgentius Metaforalis* edited by Liebeschütz, but one is included in the 'longer version', on which see Allen, 'The "Fulgentius Metaphored" of John Ridewall', pp. 25–8. An edition of Ridevall's picture of Venus is being prepared by Dr Nigel Palmer of Oriel College, Oxford.
17 On Chaucer's descriptions of the temples of Venus and Mars see especially Boitani, *Chaucer and Boccaccio*; also his article 'Chaucer's Temples of Venus', *Studi Inglesi*, ii (1975), 9–31.
18 *Mythologiae*, ii.i (ed. Helm, pp. 66–7).
19 Mythographus Tertius, ii.1 (in *Scriptores rerum mythicarum*, ed. Bode, pp. 228–9. For the identification of this writer as Alberic of London see E. Rathbone, 'Master Alberic of London, "Mythographus Tertius Vaticanus"', *Mediaeval and Renaissance Studies*, i (1941–3), 35–8. Cf. the essentially similar view of Venus held by Mythographus Secundus, iii.30–3 (ed. Bode, pp. 84–5).
20 *On the Properties of Things*, viii.14 (ed. Seymour, i, 481–2); cf. *Reductorium Morale*, v.26 (pp. 122–3); Vincent of Beauvais, *Speculum Naturale*, xv.29 (*Speculum Maius*, i, fol. 188v).
21 From the anonymous Middle English translation of the *Exafrenon prognosticacionum temporis* (ed. North, *Richard of Wallingford*, i, 233).
22 *Summa Iudicialis*, i, dist. iv, cap. 5 (MS Bodley 369, fols 47r–8v).
23 On late-medieval 'affective piety' see especially D. Gray, *Themes and Images in the Medieval English Religious Lyric* (London and Boston, 1972), pp. 18–30.
24 *Reductorium Morale*, v.26 (pp. 122–3).
25 Cf. Curry, *Chaucer and the Mediaeval Sciences*, pp. 131–4.
26 Ibid., pp. 134–7. However, Curry is quite wrong in thinking that Saturn champions the cause of Venus by granting her knight ultimate success, since Chaucer makes it perfectly clear that both Venus and Mars are satisfied with Saturn's solution (see I, 2446; 2471–76). Cf. Gaylord, 'The Role of Saturn', p. 190, note 47.
27 *On the Properties of Things*, viii.17 (ed. Seymour et al., i, 493). For medieval attitudes to Diana see Twycross, *The Representation of the Major Classical Divinities*, pp. 499–564.
28 *Ovidius Moralizatus*, ed. Engels, pp. 28–9.
29 *On the Properties of Things*, viii.12 (ed. Seymour et al., i, 480). For medieval attitudes to Jupiter see Twycross, *The Representation of the Major Classical Divinities*, pp. 167–207.
30 *Reductorium Morale*, v.24 (pp. 121–2). Cf. Richard of Wallingford's *Exafrenon*, ed. North, i, 200–1, 231–3, 214–5.
31 *Summa Iudicialis*, i, dist. iv, cap. 2 (MS Bodley 369, fols 42v–44v); cf. Vincent of

Beauvais, *Speculum Naturale*, xv.27; *Speculum Doctrinale*, xv.47 (*Speculum Maius*, i, fol. 188v; ii, fol. 263v).

32 *Ovidius Moralizatus*, ed. Engels, pp. 10–11. Cf. the *Libellus*, ii (ed. Liebeschütz, p. 117). See further Bernard Silvester's interesting etymology of the name 'Theseus': 'Theseus is called *deus bonus*: 'the good god'—*theos* is *deus*, 'god', and *eu* is *bonum*, 'good'. He is called a god because of the theoretical knowledge of the divine, and is called good because of the practical knowledge which teaches the human good, that is, the honest life'. *Commentary on the First Six Books of Virgil's Aeneid by Bernardus Silvestris*, trans. E. G. Schreiber and T. E. Maresca (Lincoln and London, 1979), p. 83. Cf. Robertson, *Preface to Chaucer*, pp. 260–2, who unfortunately finds in this interpretation support for his allegorical approach to *The Knight's Tale*. In my opinion, Silvester's details constitute an interesting abstract and ideological parallel to the way in which Chaucer conceived of the character of Theseus in terms which were historical, literal and concrete.

33 *Ovidius Moralizatus*, ed, Engels, pp. 6, 11; cf. Mythographus Tertius, iii.4 (ed. Bode, p. 162); Mythographus Secundus, proemium (p. 74); also (more generally) Vincent of Beauvais, *Speculum Doctrinale*, xv.47 (*Speculum Maius*, iii, fol. 263v).

34 See for example Ridevall, *Fulgentius Metaforalis*, iii (ed. Liebeschütz, pp. 81–2); Mythographus Tertius, iii.2 (ed. Bode, p. 160).

35 However, this action cannot be taken as an instance of special cruelty, *pace* Jones, *Chaucer's Knight*, pp. 175–6, and H. J. Webb, 'A Reinterpretation of Chaucer's Theseus', *RES*, xxiii (1947), 289–96. According to the medieval laws of war relating to a town taken by assault, Theseus was perfectly justified: see Maurice Keen's chapter 'Sieges' in his *The Laws of War in the Later Middle Ages* (London, 1965), pp. 119–33.

36 *Fulgentius Metaforalis*, iii (ed. Liebeschütz, pp. 82–3). Cf. Mythographus Tertius, iii.3 (ed. Bode, p. 161).

37 *Anticlaudianus*, IV, 445–51 (ed. Bossuat, p. 120; trans. Sheridan, p. 134).

38 'Þis Iubiter by his goodnes abatiþ þe malice of Saturnus'; 'by his presence he abatiþ þe kynde malice of Saturnus': *On the Properties of Things*, viii.12 (ed. Seymour, i, 480); cf. Vincent of Beauvais, *Speculum Naturale*, xv.27 (*Speculum Maius*, i, fol. 188v); Ashenden, *Summa Iudicialis*, i, dist. iv, cap. 2 (MS Bodley 369, fols 42v–4v); Bersuire, *Reductorium Morale*, v.24 (pp. 121–2).

39 Cf. Jones, *Chaucer's Knight*, p. 195; R. Neuse, 'The Knight: The First Mover in Chaucer's Human Comedy', *University of Toronto Quarterly*, xxxi (1961/2), 299–315 (p. 306).

40 Critical opinion on Theseus has been sharply divided. For the view, which I share, that he is an admirable and noble ruler, see for example R. K. Root, *The Poetry of Chaucer* (rpt. New York, 1950), p. 171; C. Muscatine, *Chaucer and the French Tradition* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1957), p. 183; E. T. Donaldson, *Chaucer's Poetry: An Anthology for the Modern Reader* (New York, 1958), p. 104; Robertson, *Preface to Chaucer*, pp. 260–66; R. L. Hoffman, *Ovid and the Canterbury Tales* (Pennsylvania, 1966), p. 46; Elbow, *Oppositions in Chaucer*, p. 79; Boitani, *Chaucer and Boccaccio*, pp. 144–7; Burlin, *Chaucerian Fiction*, pp. 101–2, 104–5, 110–11; Burnley, *Chaucer and the Philosophers' Tradition*, pp. 25–7, 30–1, 44, 80, 116. Unfavourable interpretations include: Webb, 'A Reinterpretation of Chaucer's Theseus'; Dale Underwood, 'The First of the *Canterbury Tales*', *ELH*, xxvi (1959), 455–69; Neuse, 'The Knight: The First Mover'; T. K. Meier, 'Chaucer's Knight as "Persona": Narration as Control', *English Miscellany*, xx (1969), 11–21; Kathleen A. Blake, 'Order and the Noble Life in Chaucer's *Knight's Tale*', *MLQ*, xxxiv (1973), 3–19; Jones, *Chaucer's Knight*, pp. 192–211.

41 On late-medieval conceptions of the link between ethics and politics, and of the importance of such doctrine for a ruler, see Minnis, 'John Gower, *sapiens* in Ethics and Politics'.

42 *Chaucer: Works*, ed. Robinson, pp. 510–5. This ignoble incident is mentioned also in the *House of Fame*, 405–26 (pp. 285–6), where the narrator says of 'fals' Theseus, 'The devel be hys soules bane!' But no trace of this attitude can be found in *The Knight's Tale*. Cf. W. Frost, 'An Interpretation of Chaucer's *Knight's Tale*', *RES*, xxv (1949), 289–304.

43 *Communiloquium*, pars i, dist. 2, cap. 1 (fols 11v–12r); cf. John of Salisbury, *Policraticus*, iv.1 (ed. Webb, i, 235–6; trans. Dickinson, p. 4). For praise of Plurarch as Trajan's teacher see for example Walter Burley, *De Vita et Moribus Philosophorum*, cap. cxix (ed. Knust, pp. 364–8).

44 John of Wales illustrates this with the *exemplum* of Trajan and the wronged widow, which is quoted on p. 53 above. The impartiality of Theseus is unquestionable. Chaucer omitted the episode in *Il Teseida* where Mars, disguised as Teseo, appears before Arcita to exhort him to fight harder in the tournament: he did not wish his character Theseus to seem to take sides in the feud, even in this indirect way, or indeed to condone the cousins' strife.

45 See *Communiloquium*, pars i, dist. 3, cap. 5 (fols 19v–21r); cf. John of Salisbury, *Policraticus*, iv.8 (ed. Webb, i, 263–4; trans. Dickinson, pp. 38–9).

46 *St Erkenwald*, ed. Morse, pp. 60–2.

47 *Polychronicon Ranulphi*, v, 4–7.

48 On these standards see Keen, *The Laws of War*, passim.

49 *Teseida*, vii, sts 8–14 (ed. Roncaglia, pp. 182–3; trans. McCoy, pp. 168–9).

50 *Teseida*, viii, st. 100 (ed. Roncaglia, p. 246; trans. McCoy, p. 230).

51 *Teseida*, x, st. 6 (ed. Roncaglia, p. 285; trans. McCoy, p. 262).

52 Such irony was detected by Webb, 'A Reinterpretation of Chaucer's Theseus'. Frost rejected Webb's arguments as 'partial, misleading and incomplete': 'An Interpretation of Chaucer's *Knight's Tale*', pp. 289–304. For Keen's rejection of the more elaborate argument in Jones's book *Chaucer's Knight*, see note 1 above.

53 *Teseida*, xii, sts 5–19 (ed. Roncaglia, pp. 343–6; trans. McCoy, pp. 314–6).

54 *Teseida*, xii, sts 34–7 (ed. Roncaglia, pp. 350–1; trans. McCoy, pp. 319–20).

55 On the importance of causality as a fourteenth-century topic see W. J. Courtenay, 'The Critique on Natural Causality in the Mutakallimun and Nominalism', *Harvard Theological Review*, lxvi (1973), 77–94; also his 'Covenant and Causality in Pierre d'Ailly', *Speculum*, xlvi (1971), 94–119. On some thirteenth-century precedents see Chapter 3 of my book *Medieval Theory of Authorship*.

56 *Secreta Secretorum*, ed. Steele, pp. 64–5.

57 Ibid., p. 65.

58 Bradwardine stresses this aspect of God's power in *De Causa Dei*, i.1, cor. 32; ii.3 (ed. Savile, pp. 42–4, 449–72). Perhaps Chaucer regarded this as too Christian a belief, and hence too historically improbable, to ascribe to his noble pagan. But note that, in the *Secreta Secretorum*, 'Aristotle' expresses such a belief: if the stars tell of evil, we can pray to the 'heghe destynour' to put aside the evils that are to come (ed. Steele, p. 65).

59 For discussion of Chaucer's point of view see B. C. Koonce, *Chaucer and the Tradition of Fame: Symbolism in The House of Fame* (Princeton, 1966), and J. A. W. Bennett, *Chaucer's Book of Fame: An Exposition of The House of Fame* (Oxford, 1968).

60 *Sap. Sal. praelectiones*, lectio 18 (on Wisdom 2.4), pp. 68–9.

61 Ibid., p. 66; cf. his discussion of two additional points from *De Consolatione Philosophiae* III pr. 6, on pp. 66–7.

62 Cf. the discussion in Steadman, *Disembodied Laughter*, pp. 130–1.

63 *Teseida*, xii, sts 14–15 (ed. Roncaglia, p. 345; trans. McCoy, p. 315).

64 *Sap. Sal. praelectiones*, lectio 18 (p. 65).

65 *De Civitate Dei*, v.18 (ed. B. Dombart and A. Kalb, Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina, xlvii–iii (Turnholt, 1955), i, 151; trans. John Healey (London and New York, 1945), i, 166).

66 *Teseida*, xii, st. 15 (ed. Roncaglia, p. 345; trans. McCoy, p. 315).

67 *De Civitate Dei*, v.18; cf. cap. 17 (ed. Dombart and Kalb, i, 149–54; trans. Healey, i, 164–8).

68 The exemplum of Brutus is narrated at considerable length in Trevet's commentary on *De Consolatione Philosophiae* II pr. 7, wherein the general influence of Augustine's approach to the material is obvious.

69 *De Civitate Dei*, v.19 (ed. Dombart and Kalb, i, 156; trans. Healey, i, 170).

70 *Speculum Morale*, lib. iii, pars iii, dist. 8: *De peccato inanis gloriae* (*Speculum Maius*, iii, fol. 185ᵛ); *Communiloquium*, pars i, dist. 1, cap. 11: *Quanta sustinuerunt et fecerunt antiqui pro salute reipublice* (fol. 9ᵛ; cf. fols 10ʳ–10ᵛ); *Compendiloquium*, prohemium; also ii.2 (ed. Wadding, pp. 21, 78–9). In his *Manipulus Florum*, s.v. *gloria eterna*, Thomas of Ireland cites *De Civitate Dei*, v.22 (pp. 438–9, 442–3); see further his authorities on *gloria bona* and *gloria mala sive vana* (pp. 430–2, 432–8).

71 Bersuire, *Dictionarius seu Repertorium Morale*, s.v. *fama* (Venice, 1583), p. 100; cf. Koonce, *Chaucer and the Tradition of Fame*, pp. 20–2, note 17. See further Bersuire's entry under *gloria* (pp. 170–3), wherein a distinction is made between eternal glory, which is the same as beatitude, and worldly glory, which is greatly deceptive, short in duration, never satisfied (as is illustrated by the insatiable ambition of Alexander and Nabuchodonosor), utterly distracting, and ends sadly. Cf. Vincent of Beauvais, *Speculum Doctrinale*, iv.128: *De inani gloria*, and v.67–8, on glory and fame according to the philosophers and poets (*Speculum Maius*, ii, fols 68ʳ, 80ʳ); also *Speculum Morale*, lib. iii, pars iii, dist. 8: *De peccato inanis gloriae* (iii, fols 185ʳ–6ᵛ), and dist. 9: *De speciebus inani gloria, et de filiabus eiusdem* (iii, fols 186ᵛ–8ʳ —incorrectly foliated).

72 In this context, these terms may be regarded as synonymous: see Bersuire, *Dictionarius*, p. 100: 'Fama idem est, quod bonum nomen, bonus rumor, vel bona opinio de aliquo'.

73 Milton, *Lycidas*, 70–1. For discussion of the origins of Milton's concepts see J. S. Coolidge, 'Boethius and "That Last Infirmity of Noble Mind"', *PQ*, xlii (1963), 176–82.

74 See Boitani, *Chaucer and Boccaccio*, pp. 49–51, who claims that Emilia is 'undoubtedly the most fascinating of all the characters in the *Teseida*'.

75 *Teseida*, viii, st. 98 (ed. Roncaglia, p. 246; trans. McCoy, p. 229).

76 *Teseida*, viii, st. 100 (ed. Roncaglia, p. 246; trans. McCoy, p. 230).

77 *Teseida*, viii, st. 127 (ed. Roncaglia, pp. 253–4; trans. McCoy, p. 235).

78 *Teseida*, ix, sts 10–12; x, sts 69–71 (ed. Roncaglia, pp. 260–1; 302–3; trans. McCoy, pp. 243, 274).

79 This suggestion could be countered with the argument that the problem in question is not susceptible of easy solution. One of the cousins has to lose, whatever happens; consequently, what could even a benevolent god (e.g. Jupiter or the Christian God Himself) have done? Two kinds of reply may be offered, the first being that Chaucer was concerned to emphasize that the malevolent Saturn was ruling the roast, thereby alerting the reader to the issues described on pp. 139–141 above. Therefore, the question of what Jupiter could or could not have done simply does not arise. Secondly, one could reply that, in the case of the Christian God, the problem caused by different gods promising different things would not have occurred in the first place, since He is single, complete and consistent, in contradistinction with the pagan gods, who act on personal whim in a manner which is unco-ordinated and divisive. In sum, Chaucer did not intend us to consider the problem divorced from its historical pagan context. I am grateful to John Burrow for valuable discussion of this point.

80 *Teseida*, vii, 23–41 (ed. Roncaglia, pp. 185–90; trans. McCoy, pp. 171–5).

81 Cf. Boitani, *Chaucer and Boccaccio*, pp. 81–2, who notes that the 'dramatic' and 'delphic ambiguity' of Arcite's prayer and the god's response 'differs from Boccaccio's vagueness'.

82 See above pp. 34–5.

83 This is, of course, to read the relevant part of *The Knight's Tale* from the human point of view. On considering the situation from the gods' point of view, a rather different reading offers itself, although the basic point concerning the ambiguity of the oracle remains unchanged. Both Mars and Venus grant favours to their respective devotees, then discover that they have promised contradictory things—had Mars planned at the outset to give Arcite victory in battle alone, Venus would not have been upset. It is, therefore, Saturn who turns the response of Mars into an ambiguous answer: i.e., this is a case of retrospective ambiguity! Moreover, it should be noted that there may be another ambiguous oracle in the tale (again, of this retrospective kind). Mercury urges Arcite to return to Athens in the following manner:

> 'To Atthenes shaltou wende,
> Ther is the shapen of thy wo an ende'
> (I, 1391–2)

This is ambiguous, since it can mean either:
1. In Athens your woe shall end and you shall be joyful, or
2. There you shall meet your end or death, which will put paid to your woe—and any other emotion whatever! This episode is particularly significant because it is unprecedented in *Il Teseida*, where Arcita makes the decision to return to Athens without divine prompting. Could Chaucer have been inspired by a reminiscence of the passage in the *Roman de Thebes* where Apollo, speaking in a manner which the anonymous poet describes as obscure and deceptive, tells Oedipus that if he journeys to Thebes he will learn all about his parentage?

> 'Pour tant, se tu vers Thebes vas,
> De ton pere nueves orras'.

Le Roman de Thebes, 167–8 (ed. Constans, i, 10). In Lydgate's version the ambiguous response is put in the third person, but the grim irony is maintained. The fiend orders Oedipus

> in hast / taken his viage
> Toward Thebes / wher of his lynage
> He heren shal / and be certefied.

Lydgate's *Siege of Thebes*, 555–7 (ed. A. Erdmann, EETS ES cviii (Oxford, 1910), p. 25). For discussion of the crucial episode in the *Roman* see McGalliard, *Classical Mythology in certain Mediaeval Treatments of the Legends of Troy, Thebes and Aeneas*, pp. 180–2.

84 *Lydgate's Troy Book*, part 3, ed. H. Bergen, EETS ES cvi (Oxford, 1910), p. 767.

85 *Lydgate's Siege of Thebes*, ed. Erdmann, p. 25.

86 *Teseida*, ed. Roncaglia, p. 197; trans. McCoy, p. 179.

87 *On the Properties of Things*, viii.12 (ed. Seymour et. al., i, 479). Cf. Richard of Wallingford's *Exafrenon* (ed. North, *Richard of Wallingford*, i, 200–1, 212–5, 233; John Ashenden's *Summa Iudicialis*, i, dist. iv, cap. 1 (MS Bodley 369, fol. 41ʳ–42ᵛ), which may be compared with Ptolemy's *Tetrabiblos*, ii.9 (trans. Ashmand, pp. 85–6); Vincent of Beauvais, following William of Conches, in *Speculum Naturale*, xv.27 (*Speculum Maius*, i, fol. 188ᵛ). For general discussion of Saturn in medieval literature see Klibansky, Panofsky and Saxl, *Saturn and Melancholy*, pp. 159–95.

88 *Reductorium Morale*, v.23 (p. 121); *Ovidius Moralizatus*, ed. Engels, p. 6.

89 *Anticlaudianus*, IV, 482–3 (ed. Bossuat, p. 121). In his commentary on the *Anticlaudianus* (c.1212), Radulphus de Longo Campo expands on this consider-

ably: *Radulphus de Longo Campo in Anticlaudianum Alani Commentum*, ed. Jan Salowski (Wrocław and Warsaw, 1972), pp. 84–6.

90 Critical opinion on the role of Saturn is sharply divided. Helpful summaries of the differing views are included in Gaylord, 'The Role of Saturn'. Those who emphasize the planet-god's malevolent aspects include Curry, *Chaucer and the Medieval Sciences*, pp. 127–30; Muscatine, *Chaucer and the French Tradition*, p. 190; D. B. Loomis, 'Saturn in Chaucer's *Knight's Tale*', in *Chaucer und seine Zeit. Symposion für Walter F. Schirmer*, ed. Arno Esch (Tübingen, 1968), pp. 149–61; Wood, *Country of the Stars*, pp. 74–5; Gaylord, 'The Role of Saturn'; Burnley, *Chaucer's Language and the Philosophers' Tradition*, p. 38. Those who emphasize his sage wisdom include Twycross, *The Representation of the Major Classical Divinities*, pp. 148–50; Brooks and Fowler, 'The Meaning of Chaucer's *Knight's Tale*', p. 126; Kean, *Chaucer and the Making of English Poetry*, ii, 38–41; McCall, *Chaucer among the Gods*, pp. 79–80; Burrow, 'Chaucer's *Knight's Tale* and the Ages of Man'.

91 Quoted by Klibansky, Panofsky and Saxl, *Saturn and Melancholy*, p. 166.

92 *Fulgentius Metaforalis*, ed. Liebeschütz, p. 71.

93 *Ovidius Moralizatus*, ed. Engels, pp. 9–10.

94 Kean, *Chaucer and the Making of English Poetry*, ii, 32–4.

95 As argued, for example, by McCall, *Chaucer among the Gods*, pp. 80, 173.

96 It may be added that Saturn seems to have been responsible for the complications which render Arcite's injury fatal: Curry, *Chaucer and the Medieval Sciences*, pp. 139–48. Note also the role of Saturn in *The Legend of Hypermnestra*: it was the 'badde aspectes' which she had 'of Saturne, / That made hire for to deyen in prisoun . . .' (*Legend of Good Women*, 2597–8).

97 *Ovidius Moralizatus*, ed. Engels, p. 11.

98 See Bennett, 'Some Second Thoughts on *The Parlement of Foules*', p. 133.

99 *The Book of Theseus*, trans. McCoy, p. 14.

100 *Sap. Sal. praelectiones*, lectio 2 (pp. 8–9).

101 With regard to the musical metaphor (used in describing harmony and concord), cf. John of Wales, *Communiloquium*, pars i, dist. i, cap. 2 (fols 4r–5r).

102 Plato's commendation of the philosopher-ruler is cited by John of Wales also, in a chapter on the usefulness of philosophy in the *regimen vitae*. A state cannot be governed without just laws, he emphasizes, and philosophy is the inventor of laws. Moreover, certain ancient rulers had philosophers as counsellors: Alexander the Great had Aristotle, Nero had Seneca, and Trajan had Plutarch. *Compendiloquium*, pars i, cap. 6 (p. 53); cf. the *Communiloquium*, pars i, dist. iii, cap. 7 (fols 22r–3v), on the importance to a prince of knowledge (*scientia*).

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