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Chaucer's Critique of Romance: Anelida and Arcite, Troilus and Criseyde, and The "Knight's Tale"

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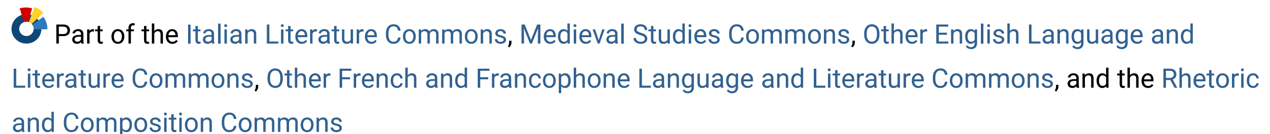

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Recommended Citation

Han, Vivian (Yuwei), "Chaucer's Critique of Romance: Anelida and Arcite, Troilus and Criseyde, and The "Knight's Tale"" (2020). *Senior Projects Spring 2020*. 324.
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Chaucer's Critique of Romance: *Anelida and Arcite*, *Troilus and Criseyde*, and The "Knight's Tale"

Senior Project Submitted to
The Division of Languages and Literature
of Bard College

by
Vivian (Yuwei) Han

Annandale-on-Hudson, New York
May 2020

Acknowledgements

To Marisa Libbon,

This project would not have been possible without your constant support and tireless guidance. During the past whole year, you have continuously pushed me to new heights when I did not even have the faith in myself. You would indulge all flights of fancy yet manage to keep me grounded in texts and help me to recognize my strong points like close-reading analysis. I would say in full earnest that having you be my advisor and working with you in my four-year college life is one of the luckiest things that happened to me. You are the one that truly invited me to the world of medieval English poetry, taking my hand and showing me all the greatness inside of it with your rich knowledge.

To Rufus Müller,

As I have said many times to you, you are not only the most talented voice professor I have ever met but also my best life coach who helped me to overcome all my highs and lows and kindly witnessed my growth from a naive girl with all the "cute thoughts" into a rather mature woman who is now ready to face more challenges and to explore new things.

To Kyle Gann,

You are a rather special person to me that, deep in my heart, I always think of you as truly my grandfather, who was always so kind and positive yet passed away during my last year of high school when I was in the U.S. You are like him too, always smiling and patiently waiting for me even though you have already realized that I am bad at time keeping. So thank you! You make me become more positive.

To Adhaar Noor Desai and Elizabeth Frank,

You are the professors that have not only taught and guided me with your insights of literature but also witnessed my growth in literary studies early since I was not yet moderated into the program. I am so glad and grateful to have you on both my Moderation broad and senior broad.

To my dearest friends, Sabrina Huang, Yifan Gu, Yibin Wang, Yidao He, Jeffrey Chen, Jason Yang, Rock Huang, Dwayne Tang, BK Xue and Mike Li,
You are truly my second family, who can always take care of me, make me feel warm even during the harsh winter season, and cheer me up even when I am depressed.

To my boyfriend, Ruiqi Zhu,
I am most grateful for having you accompany me during the whole four years at Bard, as both a nice friend and the best boyfriend. Thank you for always being there for me, spoiling and indulging my childishness, stubbornness, and wildfulness. "So many times we have seen the morning stars burn, kissing our eyes, and over our head the grey light unwinds in turning fans."

Table of Contents

Abstract ------ 5

Chapter 1 Chaucer's Treatment of Romance: Sources, Narrator, and "Absence" ------ 7

Chapter 2 The Other Side of the "Ideals" in the "Knight's Tale" ------ 30

Conclusion ------ 63

Bibliography ------ 64

Abstract

The late fourteenth-century poet Geoffrey Chaucer played a significant role in the legitimation of the literary use of the Middle English vernacular when Latin and French were still the dominant literary languages in medieval Europe. In a fourteenth-century French ballade, Eustache Deschamps addresses Chaucer as a “grant translateur,” mentioning his Englishing of the Old French allegorical and courtly love poem, "Roman de la rose." However, Chaucer’s greatest contribution to Middle English literature are, perhaps, his own, long narrative poems, in which he takes well-known epics about Troy and the Trojan War and combines a pseudo-historical mode of representation with the ideology courtly romance. In my senior project, I am studying three of these poems: *Anelida and Arcite*, *Troilus and Criseyde*, and the “Knight’s Tale” in *The Canterbury Tales*. Accounts of the Trojan War were popular topics among medieval chroniclers and continental poets, particularly, in the hands of Chaucer, these stories delicately focus on the relations of lovers living amongst war. Distinctly, Chaucer amplifies the romantic ideal of chivalry and courtly love. His poems contrast greatly with their sources, especially those by the Italian poet Boccaccio. Chaucer inserts narrators, who are given enough power to get involved freely and frequently in the plot of each poem, as intermediaries between the audience and the tale. I argue that, it is worth underlining the idea Chaucer’s narrators embody passionate readers instead of skillful adaptors of the work. Through those narrators who ensemble readers, Chaucer is, I think, offering a significant and unique perspective on the convention of romance.

By analyzing *Anelida and Arcite, Troilus and Criseyde*, and the "Knight's Tale" together, I am finding that Chaucer may have been commenting through his narrators on the uncritical way people viewed and praised the courtly romance as the literary ideal. In these poems, Chaucer seems to lead this audience to the question: What can the old genre of romance contribute to the "modern" world of the late fourteenth-century England? If romance in part feeds its audience's appetite for fantasy, would it still be impeccable and truly satisfying if we add realistic values into our literary experience?

Chapter 1

Chaucer's Treatment of Romance: Sources, Narrator, and "Absence"

Geoffrry Chaucer, being highly praised as the greatest English poet of the Middle Ages, is seen as crucial mainly in legitimising the literary use of the Middle English vernacular when Latin and French were still the dominant literary languages in medieval Europe.[1] In a fourteenth-century French ballade, Eustache Deschamps addresses Chaucer as a "grant translateur,"[2] mentioning his Englishing of the Old French poem, *Roman de la rose*, which is notable as an early model of courtly romance (*roman courtois*) that expresses the art of love through allegories of dreams.[3] However, Chaucer's literary contribution in promoting "Middle English vernacular" refers to not merely his faithful translation of great works from other languages, but also, more importantly, his own compositions of courtly literature in English vernacular, in which he turned from an allegorical to a pseudo-historical mode of representation by demonstrating the modern (14th-century) literary ideal of courtly love, absorbed from the French, through his reconsideration of the classical themes in epic, a long narrative form common to many ancient poems recounting heroic deeds. *Anelida and Arcite, Troilus and Criseyde*, and the "Knight's Tale" in *The Canterbury Tales* are Chaucer's own pieces that show his remarkable combination of courtly romance and conventional machinery of epic with which the narrative is introduced: While being set under the ancient Greek mythologies of Thebes and Troy — which were long-standing topics popular among medieval writers and had appeared in a

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[1] Machan, Tim William. "Chaucer and the History of English." *Speculum* vol. 87, no. 1 (2012): 147-75.
[2] "Introduction of *Troilus and Criseyde*." *The Riverside Chaucer*. Edited by Larry D. Benson. Third ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 471.
[3] Baldick, Chris. "Courtly love." *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1990).

number of full-scale accounts yet were mostly told in the manner of chroniclers — each story delicately focuses on the romantic relation and struggles of a pair of lovers living amongst war. Different from his ancestors and most of the continental poets in the Middle Ages, Chaucer largely amplified the French motifs of chivalry and courtly love in re-conceiving the events of the Theban and Trojan wars, effectively removing the topics in the three poems outside latinate scholarly discourse.

Such innovative form, however, is actually developed by Giovanni Boccaccio, a great Italian poet who "stimulated a new tradition that flourished in the fourteenth century — taking a small episode or group of episodes from the great chronicles and treating them in more elaborate detail."[4] As Chaucer's predecessor, Boccaccio is believed to be multilingual and a scholar of French literature, since historians have been uncertain whether he was born in Paris or Certaldo.[5] Boccaccio indeed held a strong passion for courtly poetry and was strongly inspired by the French notion of courtly love throughout his career, starting with his early lyrics — several of which evoke a courtly atmosphere and an idealized sense of love of the Kingdom of Naples, where he completes his earliest works.[6] After receiving a good education in Latin and being introduced to ancient epic writers later, Boccaccio expanded his exploration of the courtly ideals into his works of long narrative prose and verses in Italian vernacular, in which he showed an unprecedented success in the imaginative blending of classic elements in Greek myths and courtly motifs in French romance.[7]

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[4] "Introduction of *Troilus and Criseyde.*" *The Riverside Chaucer*, p. 471.
[5] Wilkins, Ernest Hatch. "Boccaccio." *The Cambridge History of Italian Literature*, revised by Thomas G. Bergin (Massachusetts, Harvard University Press, 1974), p. 101.
[6] Havely, N. R., *Chaucer's Boccaccio: Sources for Troilus and The Knight's and Franklin's Tales* (Cambridge, D. S. Brewer, 1992), "Introduction," p. 1.
[7] Wilkins. pp. 101-112.

Scholars have confirmed that Chaucer largely modeled such an epic-romance structure of the Italian and took two of Boccaccio's famous narrative works, *Il Filostrato* and *Il Teseida*, as the primary sources of *Troilus and Criseyde*, *Anelida and Arcite* and the "Knight's Tale." *Il Filostrato* can be seen as an early instance closer to what we now category as historical romance, which is distinguished from epic by its concentration of love rather than warlike heroism, just as its title indicates, "Laid prostrate by love." In doing so, Boccaccio made use of Benoît's *Le Roman de Troie*, a 12th-century Old French epic retelling the Trojan War, yet develops merely the brief episode of Troilo and Briseida (i.e. Criseida).[8] By bringing into the inherited story a new personage, Pandaro, and his own plot design that set forth Troilo's love towards and wooing of the faithless Creseida, Boccaccio gave Troilus' story its first independent form.[9] The tale was then taken up by Chaucer and adapted into *Troilus and Criseyde*, "from whom the story passed to still more famous hands."[10]

Il Teseida as a whole reflects a greater aspiration towards epics than *Fliostrato*: It is Boccaccio's first and only thoroughgoing imitation of authoritative epics — Virgil's *Aeneid* and Statius' *Thebaid* — having the notional subject to be the career and rule of the legendary hero Theseus.[11] However, it may have been one of Boccaccio's ambitions at the time to become "the *canterino* [Italian verse narratives which plots drawn ultimately upon a wide variety of sources in classical, Arthurian and Christian legend] for the chivalrous and courtly society in which he lived."[12] Although a number of episodes in the poem are modelled on parts of *Thebaid*, the main

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[8] Young, Karl. 1965. "The Origin and Development of the Story of Troilus and Criseyde." (London: Chaucer Society, 1908), p. 5-8.
[9] Lumiansky, R. M. "Aspects of the Relationship of Boccaccio's "Il Filostrato" with Benoit's "Roman De Troie" and Chaucer's "Wife of Bath's Tale"." *Italica* 31, no. 1 (1954): p. 1.
[10] "Boccaccio." *The Cambridge History of Italian Literature*, pp. 104.
[11] Wilkins, p. 104.
[12] Havely, p. 7.

story of the two young Theban knights, Arcita and Palamone, has no ascertainable classical source and seems to be Boccaccio's own creation.[13] While the background of the *Teseida* is amply martial, as to carry on the conventional feature of epic, the foreground is filled with a romance, that most of the battle scenes in the poem are the rivalry of Palemone and Arcita for the love of a fair lady, Emilia. In short, Boccaccio "substituted rivalry in love for rivalry in political affair."[14] Taking the epic materials, he embellished the sober history of Troy and Thebes with the courtly theme, writing at the time when love stories were all the fashion. Chaucer was enlightened by the way the romance's convention is used as a method of treatment for epic in the *Teseida* and borrowed the materials many times throughout his career as a poet,[15] of which *Anelida and Arcite* and the "Knight's Tale" are the most obvious adaptations. usually taken to be Chaucer's first attempt to make use of Boccaccio, opening the story with a few stanzas about Theseus and the mythical civil war drawn directly from the *Teseida*, as to set up his own version of romance narrative within the epic realm. And the "Knight's Tale" is a relatively complete adaptation of the romantic tale in *Teseida*.[16]

Nonetheless, what makes Chaucer a truly outstanding writer of romances is his originality of *Anelida and Arcite, Troilus and Criseyde* and the "Knight's Tale," which lies in his unique handling of the adapted materials; his ability to disrupt, to startle, and to shock. While taking the basic structure and plots from Boccaccio, Chaucer radically transforms the meanings and alters the tones of the original texts in his recomposing of the tales of romance — he re-imagines the characters, redistributes the weight given various parts of the plots, and inserts

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[13] Havely. p. 6.
[14] Boitani, Piero. "Reviewed Work: *Before the Knight's Tale: Imitation of Classical Epic in Boccaccio's 'Teseida.'* by David Anderson." *Speculum* vol. 65, no. 3 (1990): 601-03.
[15] Wilkins, pp. 104.
[16] See the Introductions of the "Knight's Tale" and *Anelida and Arcite*, *The Riverside Chaucer*, pp. 6-7 & 375.

long scenes and rich dialogue. Applying his sophisticated knowledge of French courtly poetry into the approach of historical romances, Chaucer shows an unique understanding of the current fashion of courtly literature. With all the substantial variations and inventions, Chaucer successfully makes his works of historical romance become distinct from the sources so much that they could almost be considered essentially new. Interestingly, however, though fully elaborating the French romance tradition that is of undoubted importance in relation to *Anelida and Arcite, Troilus and Criseyde* and the "Knight's Tale," Chaucer lets the narrators of all three tales pretend as if their plots draw ultimately and only upon a wide range of classic legends and myths instead of the 14th-century historical romances. In each of the three poems, we cannot find any explicit reference that the tale, though grounded on a historical topic, is mainly based on courtly and chivalrous ideals in regard to the contemporary cult of romance's tradition in Wester literary world.

For instance, in *Troilus and Criseyde*, it is distinctly notable that Chaucer makes his use of Italian historical romance extremely ambiguous yet pointedly alludes to the antiquity of his source. At the end of the poem when the entire story has been told, the narrator concludes the work as a "litel bok" that "subgit be to alle poesye"[17] and introduces a list of the influential ancient Greek poets that he claims to have follow in telling the tale: "And kiss the steppes where as thow seest pace / Virgile, Ovide, Omer, Lucan, and Stace."[18] Those poets being pointed out here all had given detailed and comprehensive accounts to Trojan history in their martial epics, while the accounts of crisis and battle in the poem are undoubtedly adapted from the Boccaccio's *Il Filostrato*, a modern, gentle version of the violent Trojan wars. Such a reference to the

[17] Chaucer, *Troilus and Criseyde*, Book V, ll. 1789-90.
[18] Ibid. Book V, l. 1792.

classics, in the very first place, reveals Chaucer's rich knowledge in the full tradition of Troy in Greek mythology, including the settings of not only *Troilus and Criseyde* but also *Anelida and Arcite* and the "Knight's Tale," and consequently suggests when Chaucer took up the "epic-romance" elements from the great Italian, he was probably treating familiar materials with profound perspective. On the other hand, however, by letting his narrator in *Troilus and Criseyde* discuss the tale as merely a romanticized epic rather than a historical romance, Chaucer is, perhaps, treating the convention of romance with a rather skeptical view when the ideals are performed under a historical context.

Such a hypothesis should be worth pondering, because otherwise it would be a paradox for Chaucer to specifically displays his narrator as a highly educated and skillful writer like himself, while leaving the basic materials drawn from Boccaccio in seemingly unassimilated states — which happens in not only *Troilus and Criseyde* but also the other two poems — as straight imitations easily detectable by not only the present-day readers who have certain literary experience of medieval romances but also the 14th-century English readers who were educated, since Boccaccio's works were in circulation in Italy and "English travellers there [Italy] were not a rare or restricted class in Chaucer's time."[19] In *Anelida and Arcite*, although the poem begins with an elaborate Invocation drawn mainly from the *Teseida*, Chaucer's narrator states that the tale is an English translation of an "olde storie, in Latyn which I fynde,"[20] instead of an adaptation from a vernacular language, i.e., the Italian, thereby making his work appear more venerable as if its idea is derived from a Roman poet rather than his contemporary. Chaucer further referring to the classic aspect of the poem by giving an explicit statement, "First folowe I

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[19] Havely, p. 10.
[20] Chaucer, *Anelida and Arcite*, l. 10.

Stace,"[21] and adducing an exact epigraph from Statius' *Thebaid*[22] — the reputable epic from which Boccaccio took as the most primary source of his *Teseida* — in the original language of Latin as the lead to the Story:

> *Iamque domos patrias Cithice post aspera gentis*
> *Prelia laurigero subeunte Thesea curru*
> *Letifici plausus missusque ad sidera vulgi* [23]

> ["And now Theseus, after his fierce battle against the Scythians, was drawing close to his native land in laurelled chariot, to the applause of the joyful people resounding to the stars."]

The Story opens with a relatively romantic scene of Theseus' triumphant return to Athens with queen Hippolyta as his wife and her fair sister Emelye, yet a rather bald transition of the mythical god and goddess of war shifts the peaceful scene to fratricide and violent battle in Thebes, which Chaucer gives a brief summary of Statius' entire account of the "Seven Against Thebes;"[24] from this point to the end of the Story the narrator finally stays steady and focuses on the romantic relation of Anelida and Arcita. All the abrupt shifts of scenes from romantic to epic seems to have nothing to do with the main idea of the poem but to give the audience a false expectation of the poem as if it is to be a tale of epic warfares.

It is worth noting that, while Boccaccio's innovative way of reconceiving a well-known historical events accounted in epics through the lens of romance — having a love fiction that resembles in the vicissitudes of legends — provides the structure and an insight for Chaucer to

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[21] Chaucer, *Anelida and Arcita*, l. 21.
[22] Ibid, [n.21].
[23] Ibid, l. 21.
[24] The "Seven Against Thebes" is the third play in an Oedipus-themed trilogy produced by Aeschylus in 467 BC. In Aeschylus' tragedy, the Seven were seven champions of Argos, leading by Polyneices, one of the successors to the throne of Thebes who withdrew to Argos and married their princess, who were killed fighting against Thebes ruled by Eteocles, Polyneices' brother, for the imperial authority after the fall of Oedipus, the king of that city. The story of the Seven was a great favourite in antiquity, and it became a popular subject widely used in many classic epics.

further amplify the courtly notion of love and chivalry, *roman courtois* in French romance, through the authoritative realm of ancient legends, Chaucer seems to provide a contradicting view on the ambitious combination of martial epic and courtly romance by letting the narrator of his poem stresses intensively on the classic authority and the epic reference yet having the story turn out to lay on the romantic ideals of love and chivalry.

In fact, in all of the three poems, Chaucer is likely reconceiving the cult of romance in Western literary world in the 14th century, examining the ways that the modern ideals of courtly love and chivalry would be demonstrated by characters living in a rather realistic and brutal society remote in history, and consequently revealing the possible issues and conflicts existed in the belief of romance. To imply his criticism of the convention of romance while still presenting the tale in a complete narrative structure, Chaucer uses his narrator in each poem as the intermediary between his comments and the audiences' understanding of the tale in order to raise people's awareness on the idea of readership — how the convention of the romance and the belief of literary ideals may alter people's perception for the characters and confuse the real situation in the story. The anonymous narrator in each poem is neither a self-portrait of Chaucer nor a representation of the authorship. Rather, the narrator serves as the most unique persona in the whole structure of the poem, with the ability to engage with his audience as well as the freedom to step in and out from the tale of romance. He is a fictitious storyteller who reframes, rethinks, and retells an old story by focusing only on the aspects that impressed themselves on his memory when he was a listener as well as adding his personal understanding to what happens in the plot.

1.1 Chaucer's Narrators as Personas

The significance of Chaucer's narrator in each of the three poems is first recognized for the exclusive power they have as a storyteller to decide the way the tale is presented. In *Anelida and Arcita*, all the bald transitions that shift the tale back and forth between the romantic and epic scenes actually come with the narrator's voice informing the audience about the shift. After telling us Theseus' triumphant return after a battle, the narrator moves on from the epic setting of Theseus right away to tell the story of the lovers:

> Let I this noble prince Theseus
> Toward Athens in his wey rydinge,
> And founde I wol in shortly for to bringe
> The slye wey of that I gan to write,
> If quene Anelida and fals Arcite.[25]

By taking a first person perspective, "Let I," as if he is somehow involved in the tale as well, the narrator pointedly underlines his leading role in the poem, as having the full control of the storytelling and being mindful about his choice in terms of what aspects of the tale should be emphasized and discussed and what is not necessary to be mentioned. With this recognition that there existed a distance between the precise meaning of the original tale and what we are told by the narrator here in the poem, a modified version of the tale, we shall go back to the moments in the text where the narrator pauses and decides his next move in the storytelling, and consider the possible intention for Chaucer to specifically lead us see such a narrative choice of the narrator.

Though the narrator in *Anelida and Arcita* sets up the tale as definitely in respect of Statius' epic, he does not further provide any concrete description of how the hero Theseus, who is said to be "in signe of victorie,"[26] actually fight in the wars as a valiant soldier, besides giving

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[25] Chaucer, *Anelida and Arcita*, ll. 45-49.
[26] Chaucer, *Anelida and Arcite*, l. 29.

a brief summary that introduces Theseus' deeds. On the other hand, the narrator makes us to see Theseus as a great hero by showing other people's honors him: "For which the peple, blisful al and somme, / O cryeden that to the sterres hit wente, / And him to honouren dide al her entente."[27] The opening description on Theseus' homecoming with his new wife Hippolyta is the only opportunity for us to truly see Theseus as a vivid character before the the narrator "lets go" this classic hero, yet by choosing to include such a particular scene of Theseus, the narrator seems to concern more about the romantic aspect rather than the epic heroism of the characters in his tale. Notably, the narrator even spends additional lines discussing the impressive beauty of the women in this short poem that shows Theseus never again soon afterwards:

> Faire in a char of gold he with him ladde
> That al the ground about her char the spradde
> With brightnesse of the beaute in her face,
> Fulfilled of largesse and of alle grace.[28]

By omitting the classic account of the heroic deeds and adding some new insight of romance to Theseus, the narrator rebuilt this epic figure as a vivid human who fights not only righteously for his country or justice but also personally for his own desire of marrying the fair lady. On the other hand, however, since the romantic quality is not fully demonstrated enough, for it is simply based on the narrator's own thoughts and imagination beyond the original account of Theseus, this legendary lord lacking his typical heroism appears to be too obscure in character — it would be hard for the audience to arrive at a certain idea of what kind of tradition and moral should they keep in mind when interpreting the "epic-romance" kind of characters in the tale.

[27] Ibid. ll. 26-28.
[28] Ibid. ll. 39-42.

Note the fact that though the narrator in *Anelida and Arcite* reconstructs the focus of the tale based on his own judgement and will, he has claimed at the very start of the poem that he serves as a *latimer* (translator), a role that requires him to represent the tale in the most exact and faithful way. In this case, Chaucer seems to have the narrator contradict himself and his truthfulness and authority as the storyteller. We may say that it is a purposeful decision of Chaucer for letting his narrator in *Anelida and Arcita*, who has shown that he is consciously picking the materials instead of taking everything from the source for his storytelling, to display such a problematic attempt in applying the romantic value to a legendary character. Chaucer is, perhaps, taking a psychological approach to the teller/listener dynamic through his narrator and leading the audience to realize the subjectivity lies in the art of storytelling — since one needs to be a reader of the foreign text first before he does the job as a translator. By making his narrator be as well a listener who is affected by the text, Chaucer plans the way the tale of historical romance would be perceived for his real-life readers and offers them an unique understanding of how the literary traditions may be demonstrated.

Indeed, it is quite obvious that Chaucer places a great importance on the narrator's voice and thoughts as much as the actual plot, as he gives enough power to all his narrators that allows them to freely involve, disrupt, and comment on the ongoing plot and characters in their tales. In each poem, we can constantly see the narrator justifying his authority over the narrative, commenting on the plot or characters with personal attitude, and calling the attention of the audience at some particular moments. For instance, in the "Knight's Tale," before introducing the romantic encounter of Emelye and the two knights, the narrator inserts an additional explanation that emphasizes simply his dominance over the narrative of the tale, since the detail

has just been told in the previous stanza: “Ther as the knyghtes weren in prisoun / Of which I told yow and tellen shal.”[29] In *Troilus and Criseyde*, after discussing the passionate emotion and sharp change in behavior of Troilus after losing his heart to Criseyde, the narrator offers a philosophical advice on the issue of love, leading the audience to think in his manner about the tragic love of the characters even before indicating what exactly happens to Troilus as a man being subject to love:

> That this be soth, hath preved and doth yit.
> For this trowe I ye knowen alle or some,
> Men reden nat that folk han gretter wit
> Than they that han be most with love ynome;
> And strengest folk ben therwith overcome,
> The worthiest and grettest of degree:
> This was, and is, and yet men shall it see.[30]

Similarly, in *Anelida and Arcite*, after finishing displaying the sorrow of Anelida as falling deeply in love yet being abandoned by Arcite, the narrator gives a further explanation on the failed relationship between Anelida and Arcite based on seemingly his own point of view, as he clearly shows a very personal attitude towards Arcite:

> The kynde of mannes herte is to delye
> In thing that straunge is, also God me save!
> For what he may not gete, that wolde he have. [31]

Nonetheless, although the narrators in the three poems extensively bring in their own perspective to explain, interpret, and discuss the historical romances — or the romanticized epics, precisely — in a way in which the tales seem to be independent from the original sources of the Italian and the French, each of them has, in some way, implicitly underlined the fact that

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[29] Chaucer, “Knight’s Tale,” ll. 1058-59.
[30] Chaucer, *Troilus and Criseyde*, Book I, ll. 239-45.
[31] Chaucer, *Anelida and Arcite*, ll. 201-03.

he is essentially a reader instead of an adaptor of the work. In *Troilus and Criseyde*, while giving a comprehensive introduction of the sorrowful history of Criseyde, the narrator points out an additional aspect of the character and then strangely declares his lack of knowledge of the plot, as though he is trying to challenge his solid knowledge of the story he has already proven: "But wheither that she children hadde or noon, / I rede it naught, therfore I late it goon."[32] There is also a moment in the "Knight's Tale" that the narrator deliberately acknowledges his inability in presenting all the details as exhaustive as the original story does: even though he has just given a long, impressive description on the temples of god and goddess that Theseus prepares form the tournament of the knights: "Suffiseth oon ensample in stories olde; / I may nat rekene hem alle though I wolde."[33] It is, however, a false statement, since this particular plot of Palamon and Arcite competing for the love of Emily is actually Chaucer's own fictional original creation. Therefore, the revealed intention of having the narrator admitting his absence of knowledge and regarding himself as mainly a reader in each of the three poems is very likely implying that Chaucer actually wanted the audience to realize that the basic elements of the romantic plot are taken from somewhere, but the sources might not be important to be known, because the work, after being narrated in his unique way, is suggesting some special meanings distinct from what the primary versions express.

The distinctly unique approach of historical romance displayed by the narrators in *Anelida and Arcite, Troilus and Criseyde* and the "Knight's Tale" allows us to arrive at the hypothesis that Chaucer had been taking the cult of historical romance as an occasion for showing a novel understanding on either the French tradition of *roman courtois*, which he was

[32] Chaucer, *Troilus and Criseyde*, Book I, l. 12.
[33] Chaucer, "Knight's Tale," ll. 2039-40.

already familiar with as a talented translator, or the later emergence of the combination of epic and courtly literature in Italian poetry. Although having demonstrated his skill in writing courtly fictions — his earlier works reflect his reading of and admiration for the French courtly verse[34] — and solid knowledge in Roman epic tradition, Chaucer, whom "added to rather than rejected his earlier enthusiasms"[35] in poetry as his career developed, clearly displayed his persistent effort toward pointing out some unconventional discoveries of the historical romance by imitating the particular sources of Boccaccio instead of creating independent tales, through his decisions of misleadingly introducing each of the three works as a faithful retelling of an "olde storie," yet, in fact, greatly compressing and altering his source as to offer a new perspective on the ordinary meaning of the romantic epic. Although there is little concrete evidence for determining exactly when Chaucer's works were written, scholars have agreed upon a general chronology that these three poems are composed at different times, following one after another in order. *Anelida and Arcite* is believed to be written first during 1372-80,[36] and it is usually taken to be his first attempt to make use of Boccaccio, combining it with the lyric love-complaint derived from French.[37] *Troilus and Criseyde*, with a romantic narrative much longer and detailed than that of *Anelida and Arcite*, was completed before in the mid-1380s.[38] The "Knight's Tale," now being read as part of *The Canterbury Tales,* was actually written in 1380-87 as an independent work that initially titled as *Palamoun and Arcite*,[39] much earlier than the entire accomplishment of the *Tales*; and the lines 875-92 in the beginning of the poem prove the fact that the tale was later

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[34] "Introduction: The Canon and Chronology of Chaucer's Works." *The Riverside Chaucer*, p. xxv.
[35] Ibid.
[36] Ibid.
[37] "Introduction of *Anelida and Arcite*." *The Riverside Chaucer*, p. 375.
[38] "Introduction of *Troilus and Criseyde*." *The Riverside Chaucer*, p. 471.
[39] "Introduction: The Canon and Chronology of Chaucer's Works." *The Riverside Chaucer*, p. xxv.

adapted to the bigger context: the description in lines 875-84 is noticeably duplicated with that in lines 859-74, and the following explanation on the way of storytelling given by the narrator in lines 885-92 is certainly redundant, but these lines together make the previously written tale well suited to the overall structure of the *The Canterbury Tales*.

While the narrator of the "Knight's Tale" remains seemingly impartial in the whole process of storytelling, both the narrators of *Anelida and Arcite* and of *Troilus and Criseyde* appear to have a higher sense of self and more subjective thoughts towards their romances, as we see each of them declares straightforwardly his side and purpose in telling the tale — to win the audiences' sympathy for one of the two romantic lovers. Therefore, I shall put the narrative structures in *Anelida and Arcite* and of *Troilus and Criseyde* together to analyze first, leaving the "Knight's Tale" aside for now. By presenting his narrator as a clueless reader, Looking carefully at the ways how the lovers are portrayed differently as well as holding a critical attitude towards the narrative, we would be able to discover a sharing motif of the "absence" in the romantic relationship that we see, promoted by the single-sided discourse of love and courtly ideals in *Anelida and Arcita* as well as *Troilus and Criseyde*. Having each of the narrators serve as a clueless reader, Chaucer invites his readers to challenge the narrator, letting them pay attention to the "things" that are not on the surface of the tale and be conscious about what they see and what is true. It is the "absence" that makes the courtly notion of love and chivalry become skeptical and far from being ideal, therefore leading both tales of romance to the ultimate tragic end.

1.2 *Anelida and Arcite*: The Female-focused Discourse of Romance

In *Anelida and Arcite*, the motif of "absence" is shown, first of all, in a very straightforward way. When the narrator introduces the relationship between the two lovers, he directly says that: "She loved Arcite so / That when that he was absent any throwe, / Anon her thoghte her herte brast a-two."[40] Anelida's love for Arcite seems to be completely based on the precondition that Arcite is physically presented in her sight. On top of that, Anelida's love is described more as an additional tail that follows Arcite in a geographical sense rather than a sincere affection she holds toward him: "So ferthroth upon throuthe is sher entente / That wher he gooth her hearte with him wente."[41] However, these two lines can also be interpreted in another way: as long as her heart follows him geographically, she would be so determined to be loyal and honest to him. If so, it would be necessary to doubt whether Anelida loves Arcite properly and sincerely.

In fact, the problem suggested by the motif of "absence" is so crucial for us to understand the real side of the story, as it twists the meaning of almost every detail that the narrator talks about in terms of the relationship between Anelida and Arcite. First, the narrator claims that Anelida has always been deeply as well as firmly loved Arcite. We see that Anelida would show Arcite each letter "that touched love"[42] whenever she receives it from another man. Yet, the specific word choice for "touched" implies that the love expressed by those men might not be aimed at wooing her, and there is no way for Anelida—"the quene of Ermony,"[43] who is definitely well-educated and able to write a well-ordered complaint in the form of poetry in rhyme—to not understand the meaning of their language correctly. Nonetheless, she still brings

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[40] Chaucer, *Anelida and Arcita*, ll. 92-94,
[41] Ibid. ll. 132-3.
[42] Ibid. ll. 113-4.
[43] Ibid. ll. 71-2.

all the letters to him, even if such an action would take the price of hurting their relationship by making Arcite feel jealous. Anelida's behavior here is in sharp contrast with her traits of empathy and kindness as a caring lover that have just been discussed by the narrator in the previous stanza: "She was so ferforth yeven hym to plese / That al that lyked hym hit dyde her ese"[44] Thus, It is reasonable to make the hypothesis that the seemingly innocent decision of Anelida is not truly made out of her honest characteristic but with the intention to let Arcite see and believe her constancy as his loyal lady. Accordingly, whether Anelida is an eligible and genuine lover is, indeed, highly questionable.

Speaking of Anelida's faithful quality, at this point, we see the narrator uses the term "stidfastnesse"[45] twice in such a short text to emphasize it. However, this word, rather than representing constancy, is better to be translated as steadfastness. This idea is being confirmed when Anelida is abandoned by Arcite, what she does is only wailing in sorrow and "to grounde ded she falleth as a ston"[46] — by describing her state as a deadly stone, the narrator vividly shows us her steadfastness, which indeed has no other meaning but "standing in a place without doing anything but forever waiting." Therefore, the connotation of the so-called faithfulness of Anelida in their relationship is worth pondering. Why would the narrator, or Chaucer, choose this specific yet odd term of "stidfastnesse," which would surely cause ambiguity, to discuss the character that he seems to sympathize with and speak for? Or, on the other hand, does the narrator really admire the steadfastness of Anelida?

The clue to these specific questions is probably involved in our initial concern that is central to the overall story: if Anelida is truly as perfect as the narrator portrays, why would

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[44] Chaucer, *Anelida and Arcita*, ll. 111-2.
[45] Ibid. ll. 81, 143.
[46] Ibid. l. 170.

Arcite choose to leave her and go to another woman, who is described as a "proud" (144) and severe lover that has no aspect equals to the "fredom" and "mek[n]e[esse]"[47] of Anelida? Why would he prefer to live with a woman whose "daunger made him bothe bowe and bende"[48] rather than with Anelida who "dide him honour as he were a kyng?"[49] The most possible reason would be that Anelida has never actually seen the real Arcite. The narrator tells us very early in the tale that: "For in her sight to her he bar hym lowe, / So that she wende have al his hert yknowe."[50]The idea of "sight" being brought up here is surely important as it is closely related to the motif of "absence"; Anelida believes in what she personally observes, based on merely her own mind, without considering any thought of Arcite. In fact, we never see Anelida and Arcite communicate with each other. What is more, we are not given any opportunity to see the will of Arcite. The narrative stays only on the side of Anelida, which means that we are also in the state of "absence"— missing the actual knowledge of Arcite in a story that we might expect to have both of the two characters being fairly involved. In the stanza that the term "absent" is mentioned again, we would find that the narrator defines the characters—Anelida as fair and Arcite as false—and concludes the state of their relationship for us from, indeed, a partial sight of view:

> When she shal ete, on him is so her thoght
> That wel unnethe of mete tok she kep;
> And when that she was to her reste broght,
> On him she thoghte alwey til that she slep;
> When he was absent, prevely she wep:
> Thus lyveth feire Anelida the quene
> For fals Arcite, that dide her al this tene. [51]

[47] Chauncer, *Anelida and Arcita*, ll. 106, 200.
[48] Ibid. l. 186.
[49] Ibid. l. 130.
[50] Ibid. ll. 95-6.
[51] Chaucer, Anelida and Arcita, ll. 134-40.

If we apply our objective judgment to look at the description here, aside from the previous discussion of the characters offered by the narrator as a biased foreshadowing for their failed relationship, we would realize the crazy "loving-pressure" that Anelida imposes on Arcite: Anelida has to see her lover actually being in front of her, or otherwise she cannot even live in a normal manner. Nonetheless, despite the rational logic, the narrator still uses the conclusive word "thus" to enhance the lopsided view that refers only to Anelida's perception—we are able to find a very similar opinion expressed by Anelida in her own language: "Now is he fals, alas, and causeles, / And of my wo he is so routheles."[52] When the storytelling part ends, the narrator directly presents the complaint of Anelida—the character's original piece of writing that laments on her poor love, giving us a further opportunity to know even more about Anelida's way of thinking, but, again, nothing from Arcite. It is surprising to see that Anelida does not realize the fact that her love towards Arcite is problematic, as she believes that his falseness is "causeles", because now it seems to be hard for any man to be with a woman who insanely cares about the physical present of her lover, especially for Arcite, who is a knight that "ful mykel besynesse had he er that he myghte his lady wynne."[53]

Troilus and Criseyde: The Male-focused Discourse of Romance

In the beginning of the tale of Troilus and Criseyde, the narrator presents us the relatively comprehensive introductions of both of the two characters, including their characteristics, life experiences, and behavioral manners. From the description, Troilus and Criseyde appear to be so different from each other in many aspects, and the distinctions lead me to a first-hand

[52] Ibid. ll. 229-30.
[53] Ibid. ll. 99-100.

understanding of why their love eventually fails, even without learning what actually happens between them. According to the sharp contrast between Troilus and Criseyde, it would be quite inappropriate and impractical for them to become lovers.

Criseyde is the first one being introduced, and the narrator gives us a melancholy and sympathetic impression of her before letting us see any niceness of her. She is, first of all, the daughter of Calkas, a Trojan prophet who foresees the fall of Troy and thus abandons the city in favour of the Greeks. Being left behind, Criseyde, consequently, "was in gret penaunce"[54] (I. 94) and living her life in fear on account of her father's betrayal as an innocent victim. Immediately after seeing her as a pathetic daughter, we learn another side of her identity as "a widewe."[55] So far, we get a lot of information about her pitiful background, yet the name of the character has not even been told; her name is finally given when the narrator starts to talk about her appearance, which, in most of Chaucer's poems, is usually discussed in the very first place when a main character enters. However, there is only one single stanze (Book I, 99-105) telling us about her beauty, and we are led back to the discussion of her struggle in terms of the heavy identity again right after it. Therefore, it seems that the narrator tries to make us think of Criseyde more as a poor carrier of the painful past than a fair woman.

Indeed, in the further descriptions of Criseyde, we see the references of her "widewes habit,"[56] loneliness, and gloomy impression very frequently, as if the narrator is trying to remind us about these particular traits of the character. At the Palladiones feast, where Criseyde and Troilus encounter, Criseyde appears to be so obviously distinct from the other folk. People attending the feast can be seen as, in general, a symbolic representation of young desire,

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[54] Chaucer, *Troilus and Criseyde*, l. 94.
[55] Ibid. l. 97.
[56] Ibid. l. 109.

attraction, and excitement, which are prasied by the tradition of romance: "So many a lusty knyght, / So many a lady fressh and mayden bright."[57] Whereas Criseyde, while standing among them, is "in widewes habit blak," as always, and so "makeles" [58] is separated from those liveliness, for the words applied to her all suggest a deep and gloomy sense of loneliness or solitude. The narrator metaphorically depicts her as "under cloude blak" though being "so bright a sterre,"[59] and accordingly it can be realized that no matter how "hire goodly lokyng gladed al the prees,"[60] the overall desperate characteristics of Criseyde, "sorwe and fere,"[61] is still too strong that can never be ignored. Nonetheless, none of the people in the tale actually understand or even care about the inner worries and pain of Criseyde, since all the reactions of her we see from other people are praises of her outer beauty. Being a single woman as well as an abandoned daughter with respect from the others, she is not restricted by anyone and does not have to always wear black clothing that indicates her identity as a widow, so it would be her own choice to present herself in that way. Such decision very likely indicate that she has not yet passed from the mourn of either her past husband or her city of Troy and that she actually wants herself to keep being "allone / Of any friend to whom she dorste hir mone,"[62] staying away from all the enjoyment.

In contrast, however, Troilus perfectly fit into the cheerful environment as part of that liveliness, that he not only highly involved in the passionate crowd but also seems to be a leader of them, "as he was wont to gide / His yonge knyghtes."[63] Indeed, through the description of

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[57] Chaucer, *Troilus and Criseyde*, ll. 165-6.
[58] Ibid. ll. 170, 172.
[59] Ibid. l. 175.
[60] Ibid. l. 173.
[61] Ibid. l. 108.
[62] Ibid. l. 97-8.
[63] Chaucer, *Troilus and Criseyde*, l. 183-4.

Troilus, we see that he is so different in any aspect from Criseyde. He is a "fierse and proude knyght,"[64] who actively does everything he is interested in and openly speaks about his opinion on love and women, and "a worthy kynges sone" who "wende nothing hadde had swich myght / Ayeyns his wille."[65] On top of that, Troilus, similar to the folk, falls in love with her simply due to her attractive appearance: "And of hire look in him ther gan to quyken / So grete desir and such affeccioun."[66] The narrator's discussion on Troilus' feeling towards Criseyde — "She, this in blak, likynge to Troilus / Over alle thing"[67] — can be thus interpreted as an irony made by Chaucer, for she is so obviously immersed in the feeling of isolation and depression yet he does not even notice. Consequently, the sense of *absence* is revealed in the language of the narrative: Neither Troilus nor other people around Criseyde in the tale realize the inner world of Criseyde, which seems to be emphasized by the narrator as the crucial elements of understanding her, but only pay attention to her outside.

In fact the single stanza of Criseyde's portrait also suggests the idea of absence. We might feel that although Criseyde is charming with extraordinary beauty, there is nothing truly special about her, since the description is relatively vague as well as short that we cannot actually picture her look in our mind through these lines. More importantly, her description is very similar to that of Anelida, the female protagonist in Chaucer's *Anelida and Arcite*, which clearly shows the motif of absence. Anelida is said to be so attractive "that fairer was then is the sonne shene,"[68] and the narrator of this poem emphasizes the opinion by declaring: "For, as of trouthe,

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[64] Ibid. l. 225.
[65] Ibid. l. 226-8.
[66] Ibid. ll. 295-6.
[67] Ibid. l. 309.
[68] Chaucer, *Anelida and Arcita*, l. 73.

is ther noon her lyche / Of al the women in this worlde riche"[69] (Ane, 76-77). Similarly to the way that the other narrator compares Anelida's appearance to the shining sun, our narrator here discusses Criseyde's beauty as unearthly as "aungelik"[70] and stresses on the idea by making a subjective claim as well: "As to my doom, in al Troies cite / Nas non so fair, forpassynge every wight."[71] Considering the fact that *Anelida and Arcite* was written earlier than *Troilus and Criseyde*, the repeated way of the narrator's description here reveals that the fairness of Criseyde is not something necessary to the overall idea of the character or the story. Accordingly, the fact that Chaucer also makes Troilus' affection mainly based on this unimportant aspect of Criseyde might indicate a sense of problematic sight and wrong understanding, as how the narrator cries for Troilus as a man in love: "O blynde entencioun!"[72]

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[69] Chaucer, *Anelida and Arcita*, ll. 76-7.
[70] Chaucer, *Troilus and Criseyde*, l. 102.
[71] Ibid. ll. 100-1.
[72] Ibid. l. 211.

Chapter 2

The Other Side of the "Ideals" in the "Knight's Tale"

Medieval romances, in short, are all narratives — if written in long verses after the 12th century — dealing with aristocratic personae and involving the courtly ideas of love and chivalry, as concluded by Faral in the early 18th century:

> Nous avons conservé, du XII siècle, un certain nombre d'oeuvres écrites en vers de huit syllables, généralement assez developpées (leur longueur varie de 8,000 à 30,000 vers), et qui ont pour sujet des histories de chevalerie et d'amour: elles portent le titre de romans. [73]

While sharing the same sources of the Italian historical romances and all amplifying the subject matters of courtly love drawn from French literature, *Anelida and Arcite, Troilus and Criseyde*, and the "Knight's Tale" are not stated clearly as romances. *Troilus and Criseyde* is claimed by its narrator as a "tragedye"[74] of a pair of star-crossed lovers; *Anelida and Arcite*, as directly indicated in its subtil — *The Compleynt of feire Anelida and fals Arcite*, is a combination of narrative and love-complaint, a kind of lyric common in medieval French poetry. Only in the "Knight's Tale" does Chaucer not give any clue of its literary form, however, we are told by reputable histories that the "Knight's Tale" is categorized as a romance, with an overall happy ending characteristic of the genre.[75] In fact, romance as an independent form of literature did not have a confirmed definition at Chaucer's time. The word romance (*romans*) itself initially meant plainly the vernacular languages originating in southern Europe, especially French, as distinct

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[73]Faral, Edmond. *Recherches sur les sources latines des contes et romans courtois du moyen âge* (Paris: E. Champion, 1913), p. 391.
[74] Chaucer, *Troilus and Criseyde*, Book V, l. 1786.
[75] "Introduction to *The Canterbury Tales*." *The Riverside Chaucer*, pp. 6-7.

from Latin, the most authoritative language since the early periods.[76] Although the term gradually came to be applied to a particular type of fictitious narrative written in vernacular languages with ubiquitous characteristics of love and courtly manner, and represented the bulk of major literary output at the time, there was very little theoretical discussion on vernacular genres in the Middle Ages, since "scholastic theoreticians confined themselves to writing about classical forms."[77] To some extent, it explains the possible reason for Chaucer to claim his fictitious love stories in *Anelida and Arcite, Troilus and Criseyde*, and the "Knight's Tale" as if they are mainly based upon the ancient epics. Yet, meanwhile, it leads to the ambiguity of the meaning of Chaucer's historical romances. It appears difficult for us to draw a positive clue whether Chaucer really meant to make the "Knight's Tale" be perceived as a satisfying "romance" that celebrates the courtly ideals?

Instead of considering *romance* as a definitive genre when dealing with medieval literature, it is better to discuss it as a kind of fictitious narrative that tends to present a particular system of values and literary standard, which had been wildly popular and immensely effective in the Middle Ages, through stories set remote in time and often in places.[78] We make the assumption that the vernacular narratives with common attributes of *romance* can, therefore, be judged according to the same criteria and discussed together. Courtly love (*armour courtois)*, as the core value and the inseparable theme of romance that dominates the characters and plots, is a concept emerged among the French aristocracy from the late 11th century onwards for the

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[76] Baldick, Chris. "Romance," *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1990).
[77] Cooper, Helen. *The English Romance in Time: Transforming motifs from Geoffrey of Monmouth to the death of Shakespeare* (New York, Oxford University Press, 2004), "Introduction," p. 9.
[78] See Finlayson, John. "Definitions of Middle English Romance." *Middle English Romances : Authoritative Texts, Sources and Backgrounds, Criticism*. First edition, edited by Stephen H. A. Shepherd, (New York, W.W. Norton, 1995), pp. 428-56.

literary cult of heterosexual love that emphasizes chivalry, nobility and loyalty, with a profound effect on subsequent Western attitudes toward love.[79] The most important literary treatment of romance and courtly love appears in the 13th-century allegorical poem, the *Romance de la Rose* by Guillaume de Lorris, and Chaucer, as the most crucial English translator of the text, was the person who brought it into the world of Middle English vernacular for the English audience. While successfully adapting the themes and structure of early romances into his own, unique works of courtly poetry — i.e. *Anelida and Arcite*, *Troilus and Criseyde* and the "Knight's Tale" —Chaucer lets his narrator in each of the poems indicate specially that they, as both readers of early romances and writers of new ones, were fully aware of the tradition in which they were writing. Thus, the discussion of Chaucer's "romance" here comes in the form of the comments on the courtly ideals given within his narratives of *Anelida and Arcite*, *Troilus and Creseyde* and the "Knight's Tale." By persistently and pointedly emphasizing the ideals of romance yet having a distinctly different approach each time, Chaucer breaks the fantasy and alters the convention we associated with romance. Knowing that Chaucer used his narrator in each of the three poems as a guide and an intermediate between the text and the audience's understanding of the story, we shall look at the romance in the "Knight's Tale" with a rather critical mind, referencing to the ideas learned from the narratives of *Anelida and Arcite* and *Troilus and Criseyde*, each of which bears a certain resemblance to the structure of the "Knight's Tale" and shares some prominent features of romance.

The "Knight's Tale" is indeed a special piece to be analyzed: It is not only an independent poem following the mode of romance but also a part of the *The Canterbury Tales*,

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[79] Baldick. "Courtly love."

which offers not only a collection of stories but also a representation on the social as well as literary enthusiasm in the fourteenth-century England — the idea of pilgrimage as a metaphor for the world and as an occasion for a collection of tales told by travelers in various tones. Note the fact that the "Knight's Tale" was not written together with the rest of the poems in the *Tales* but much earlier, before the whole composition was begun. It was Chaucer's later decision to adapt the "Knight's Tale" to the *Tales*, thereby placing the romance in competition with a wide range of subjects and literary forms, from racy fabliaux to sober tales of Chirstian suffering. Consequently, while *Anelida and Arcite* and *Troilus and Criseyde* are both written for ostensibly a similar purpose as to simply spread the idea of the stories — with "pitous hert,"[80] the narrators claim to "helpeth loveres, as I kan, to pleyne"[81] in recounting their tales — the "Knight's Tale" is imposed a distinct aim by its specific context of *The Canterbury Tales*: to win over the favor of the fictional audiences. Meanwhile, by setting it as the very first piece being told in the *Tales*, Chaucer is attaching great importance to the romance, indirectly calling the audience attention to both the ideas specifically shown in the work and the literary standard that people in the fictitious world hold for judging the quality of a story.

The narrator, or the Knight as a character in the *Tales* who belongs to the highest class in medieval England, starts his narrative in response to the storytelling game proposed by the Host:

> And which of yow that bereth hym best of alle —
> That is to seyn, that telleth in this caas
> Tales of best sentence and moost solaas
> Shal have a soper at oure aller cost. [82]

[80] Chaucer. *Anelida and Arcite*, l. 9.
[81] Chaucer. *Troilus and Criseyde*, l. 11.
[82] Chaucer. "General Prologue," *The Canterbury Tales*, ll. 796-99.

After the "Knight's Tale" is told, there is, remarkably, a definite consensus in the metaphorical society of *The Canterbury Tales* that this romantic story must be considered worthy, as the perfect model of how a good story should be like:

> Whan that the Knyght had thus his tale ytoold,
> In al the route nas ther yong ne oold
> That he ne seyde it was a noble storie
> ANd worthy for to drawen to memorie,
> And namely the gentils everichon. [83]

Note that when Chaucer lets all the pilgrims, "nas ther yong ne oold," to simultaneously give the "Knight's Tale" their highest admiration among all other kinds of tales, he pointedly underlines an unshakable position of the historical romance for being loved by everyone — whether or not being educated — in a way in which this influential poet of a higher class seems to challenge his richness in knowledge by subjectively disregarding the realistic factor that literary appreciation might vary significantly among different groups of audience. In fact, just as how the distinct behavioral manner and narrative style of each pilgrim possibly reflect the issues of hierarchy and gender stereotype in the medieval English society,[84] the oddness of the characters' unanimous reaction towards the "Knight's Tale" can be seen as an ironic comment on the uncritical way people in the fourteenth century viewed romance and praised its themes of courtly love and chivalry as the literary ideals, which the vernacular writers from the thirteenth century on chanced to excel.

It is likely that Chaucer's romance is used as a material for conversation and argument on the "perfection" of romance. At the end of the first section in the "Knight's Tale," the narrator

[83] Chaucer. "Miller's Prologue," *The Canterbury Tales*, ll. 3109-13.
[84] See "The Canterbury Tales." *Annotated Chaucer Bibliography: 1997–2010*, edited by Allen Mark and Amsel Stephanie (Manchester University Press, 2016), pp. 299-543.

invites his audience to consider with him which is the better off, the lover exiled from the sight of his lady or the lover in prison who can see her: "I noot which hath the wofuller mester. / … / Yow loveres axe I now this questoun: / Who hath the worse, Arcite or Palamoun?" The question is directed less by the Knight to the fictional pilgrims — since we see that none of the pilgrims show any concern about the plots or intention of responding to the narrator after the Knight finishes telling his tale — than by Chaucer's own narrator to the readers of this poem in reality. By inclusively referring to all kinds of audience as "loveres," the narrator suggests people to think about the romance in relation to their own judgement based on real-life experiences, moving the subject matter of love from the literary discourse of an ideal world in the remote history to a realistic context that allows modern understanding without the boundary of time periods, as the question can be applied to the audience in either the 14th century or the present days we are living. Literary critics have shown that among the medieval writers of romance, "there was a long fashion for debating formal love-questions, *demanddes d'amour*, which often took a romance-type story as their point of departure, and free-standing romances sometimes explicitly invite such debate."[85] By looking at the language of the "Knight's Tale" closely and critically, I believe that Chaucer treats the so-called "literary ideals" of romance skeptically, if sympathetically, and suggested a contrasting view towards the fantasy for the audience to reflect on the convention of romance

In order to express a criticism or raise a specific discussion on the romance ideology of courtly love and chivalry, it is necessary for the writer to make sure that his audience can arrive at the work with certain expectations. Although there had been no standard criteria for a

[85] Cooper, pp. 12-13.

medieval reader to recognize a work as romance like we do now, Chaucer successfully set up the horizon of expectation for his audience early in his narrative in the beginning of the "Knight's Tale," in which he spends up to 10 stanzas (ll. 859-1000) retelling the heroic deeds as well as chivalrous manners of Theseus, an epic hero in Greek mythology, as to builds up a realm of discourse on courtly romance though setting the tale remote in history. Doing so, Chaucer well-anticipated the perceptions of all kinds of reader: For educated people or poets, who are reasonably familiar with the contexts of Middle English fictitious narratives and classic texts, Chaucer's unique recount of the well-known hero of epic allows them to quickly sense the distinct approach of the courtly ideals inherent in the "shape" of historical romance; for ordinary people who do not have much literary experience, the closed focus on certain characteristics of Theseus as an honorable figure of legend illuminates them the structure of values that are to guide their judgements in understanding the central characters as well as the rest of the tale. Such an introduction of Theseus — of which the narrator gives a fairly detailed enough account on the behavioral manners of this great conqueror outside of the battlefield — might be easily considered insignificant and long-winded as having no obvious influence on the main development of this tale of romance. On the contrary, the specific focus on the seemingly irrelevant details, which are traditionally not included in the heroic portraits of Theseus, allows the audience to realize the full import of the courtly ideals pointed out by the narrator. By including the occasions of Theseus being less a legendary knight but more a real person of high reputation as well as social rank — "those who fight" in the early medieval society — the narrator explains the chivalrous characteristics from a rather practical point of view, showing the conflict between the belief of romance and the reality in terms of the performance of the ideals of

knighthood. Chaucer seems to raise the audiences' attention on those literary ideals of romance emphasized in the "Knight's Tale" and lead them to realize the problems likely existed in romance's convention and the "perfection" of courtly love.

2.1 Theseus as A Chivalrous Knight of Romance

By almost common consent, the intense focus on courtly manner and love is the defining parameter for a verse-narrative to be identified as romance. Chivalry is an idealized code of civilized behavior that combines honour, courage, kindness, loyalty, and love, and thereby considered to be the essence quality of all male protagonists in romance. The knight is the primary exponent of the chivalrous ideal in medieval romance: "If the protagonist is not already a knight when his story opens, it will be concerned with his education in prowess, love, and just action that constitute his winning of his spurs. The nature of those chivalric ideals was set out in the ceremonies of knighthood."[86] The narrator of the "Knight's Tale" constructs this convention of romance for the audience early in the opening stanzas of the poem by making Theseus, the mythical king of Athens who had conquered Thebes as well as many other lands, a distinct representation of a courtly knight who is acknowledged by his chivalry rather than a mighty warrior who is righteous yet violent as portrayed in ancient epics. Consequently, when the narrator starts to introduce the main lovers of the tale, Arcite and Palamon, by simply addressing them as "two yonge knyghtes"[87] without discussing their honorable qualities, the audience would automatically associate the two lovers with the ideal of chivalry, since the term is already grounded in their minds.

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[86] Cooper, p. 41.
[87] Chaucer, "Knight's Tale," l. 1011.

Theseus would be recognized easily as a brilliant figure by not only educated people who have learned about this epic hero through previous literary experiences but also unalerted audiences, since the narrator has already acknowledged the significance of this character: “Ther was a duc that highte Theseus; / Of Atthenes he was lord and governour, / And in his tyme swich a conquerour.”[88] However, the narrator underlines specifically on the knighthood in approaching the greatness of Theseus: Almost every time a heroic moment of Theseus is mentioned, his identity as a knight would be brought up. When Theseus shows his generosity and integrity of keeping his words, we see that, “hem conforeth in ful good entente, / And swoor his ooth, as he was trewe knyght;”[89] when Theseus displays his bravery and power on the battlefield, “with Creon, which that was of Thebes kyng, / He fought, and slought hym manly as a kynght / In pleyn bataille.”[90] The uses of Theseus’s knighthood is rather intentional, since, without any further demonstration, neither “trewe knyght” nor “manly as a kynght” as a describing phrase by itself can justify any concrete virtue. By raising the audience’s attention on this particular identity, the narrator is bringing the concept of romance into the historical context that the knighthood no longer suggests merely the social rank and/or military strength of a man but, instead, represents the chivalrous code that a man possesses. The unshakable fame of this legendary hero is well-utilized as a symbolic representation for the literary ideal of chivalry and knighthood in the convention of romance.

Throughout the depiction of Theseus, the word “chivalrie” is, indeed, raised frequently, and its importance is indicated in a straightforward and somehow deliberate way, as we see that all the honors and achievements of Theseus are attributed mainly to his chivalry:

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[88] Chaucer, “Knight’s Tale,” ll. 860-2.
[89] Ibid. ll. 958-9.
[90] Ibid. ll. 986-8.

> Ful many a riche contree hadde he wonne,
> What with his wysdom and his chivalrie.
> ……
> How wonnen was the regne of Femenye
> By Theseus and by hie chivalrye;
> ……
> And in his hoost of chivalrie the flour,
> Til that he cam to Thebes.[91]

Nonetheless, while understanding that chivalry is the key contributing factor to Theseus' victories of wars, we are not given a single scene of how Theseus vividly fights on the battlefield as a valiant warrior. Though the narrator praises Theseus highly, "that gretter was ther noon under the sonne,"[92] he never intends to further demonstrate such chivalric prowess in practice. Only the Theben battle, as the lead to the main love story of the poem, does the narrator offer some insight into Theseus, yet, instead of showing the actual moment of how this legendary knight successfully defeats Creon, the narrator gives an elaborate description on Theseus' previous encounter with a group of ladies lamenting in black, who come to Theseus for help in the hope that he would save them from Creon's tyranny. The honor of Theseus as a worthy knight with "chivalry" thus appears to be empty, because we get the idea based on not our own judgement but the view of other people.

Such a narrative choice is indeed worth pondering, because, by adapting the "Knight's Tale" into the overall setting of *The Canterbury Tales*, Chaucer actually lets the narrator of the poem also be a vivid character with distinct personalities that influence his way of storytelling. It would then be indeed strange for the narrator of this tale, the Knight to hastily slide over the

[91] Chaucer. "Knight's Tale," ll. 864-5; ll. 877-8; ll. 982-3.
[92] Ibid. l. 863.

actual combat — "shortly for to speken of this thyng"[93] within only a few words — because he is supposed to be familiar with all kinds of battleground: We have been informed by Chaucer's narrator of the *Tales* in "General Prologue" that "at mortal batailles hadde he [the Knight] been fiftene."[94] On the other hand, Chaucer constructs the character of the Knight as not only a worthy lord but also a very romantic Knight who "loved chivalrie, / Trouthe and honour, fredom and curteisie."[95] In this case, the narrative choice in spending much more effort explaining the occasion that makes Theseus to conquer Thebes, showing specifically the kind reaction of Theseus to the speech of the anonymous lady from the group, is very likely to be a meticulous arrangement of the Knight for highlighting the courtly manners of Theseus as something more worth knowing of a chivalrous knight than his real military exploits. The description of Theseus interacting with the ladies suggests that what leads Theseus to fight is not the desire for power or kingship but his "herte pitous."[96] Being a lord already, without any necessary duty to serve someone, Theseus is driven by his own impulse of showing generosity towards those wretched women earnestly begging for his help: "Have on us wrecched wommen som mercy, / And lat oure sorwe synken in thyn herte!"[97] By this means, the narrator justifies the honor of Theseus by his courtly manners instead of masculine power — "the grete honour / That Theseus, the noble conqueror, / Dooth to the ladyes"[98] — and successfully builds up the audience's expectation for a romantic knight that possesses chivalry, distinguishing the term from its basic meaning of "soldier." Chaucer therefore twists the traditional way people would think about knighthood, as

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[93] Chaucer, "Knight's Tale," l. 985.
[94] Chaucer, "General Prologue," l. 61.
[95] Ibid. ll. 45-46.
[96] Chaucer, "KT," l. 953.
[97] Ibid. ll. 950-1.
[98] Ibid. ll. 997-9.

separated from that in the *chanson-de-geste* and other kinds of epic, in which military heroism predominates.

Showing how Theseus' honor is built largely upon his chivalrous acts, however, the narrator of the tale, i.e. the Knight, embodies the notion of chivalry as related too much with one's reputation in his narrative, in a way in which the supposingly uncontroversial heroism of Theseus, as an noble figure in epics, is somehow challenged by the way he reacts to his own fame. Readingly closely and more critically, we would be able to realize that the high field of honor that Theseus enjoys does not merely come from people's spontaneous celebration for his accomplishments and virtues, but it is also due to his own attempt in preserving and obtaining more of his reputation. Besides the feeling of sympathy and sense of duty for the group of ladies who are suffered by the fleetness of fate and come to him for help, the fame he could possibly gain from helping them to slain Creon is certainly a primary factor that motivates Theseus to fight, because the narrator indicates pointedly in his narrative that Theseus takes his own fame into consideration when making the decision of going to Thebes and fight:

> He wolde doon so ferforthly his myght
> Upon the tirant Creon hem to wreke
> That al peple of Grece sholde speke
> How Creon was of Theseus yserved
> As he that hadde his deeth ful wel deserved.[99]

Through the quote, we see how Theseus particularly cares about his own reputation and is cautious about his behavior for affecting the way others view about him, as he even anticipates people's reaction to his victory in a battle that has not yet happened. While showing the other, not-so-ideal side of Theseus' honor, it seems weird for such a successful knight — who has

[99] Chaucer, "Knight's Tale," ll. 960-4.

already been celebrated by people, "in al his wele and in his mooste pride,"[100] and is reputed to be invincible, "now help us, lord, sith it is in thy myght."[101] — to still be so conscious about and have the desire for his fame.

In fact, looking at the record of medieval vernacular narratives, the emphasis on knighthood that characterizes the early chivalric romances celebrates a comparatively recent phenomenon that the knight would be "a person of notable merits" and, at the same time, "a person of honour" in social rather than ethical sense.[102] Historically indeed — as Chaucer has already demonstrated to us in the *General Prologue* — in the tripartite division of hierarchical society implemented in the early Middle Ages into those who fight, those who pray, and those who labor, it was the knight that represented the highest social rank. However, what Chaucer does differently here in the "Knight's Tale" is that he lets a Knight in "reality" be the narrator to demonstrate the ideal image of a knight in romance. In this way, Chaucer brings the representative figure of chivalry and honor closer to his audience, showing the more realistic and critical understanding of knighthood beyond the literary convention. The Knight, who served as both a storyteller and a pilgrim with distinct characteristic, seems to rebuild the character of Theseus in a more courtly than heroic way as similar to his own self, who is aspiring to the romantic ideals: "He nevere yet no vileyne ne sayde / In al his lyf unto no maner wight."[103] It is worthy noting that the language Chaucer uses to describe the courtly manner of the Knight is through a rather mock-heroic representation: "And though that he were worthy, he was wys, / Of his port as meeke as is a mayde."[104] By comparing this valiant Knight to a maid for his kindness,

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[100] Chaucer, "KT," l. 895.
[101] Ibid. l. 930.
[102] Cooper, p. 43.
[103] Chaucer, "GP," ll. 70-1.
[104] Ibid. ll. 68-9.

Chaucer is likely satirizing the cult of chivalry, showing how this concept is far from being unconditionally perfect when being performed not by a legendary figure in epic whose honorable character has already been ensure by the books but by a realistic man at the top of the social rank, who needs to act in a way corresponding to the role he served in the society. Nonetheless, though implying a sense of criticism, Chaucer's narrator of the *Tales* still praises the Knight as "wys" (wise) for showing such extreme politeness and gentleness, which lead him to be considered as "a verray, parfit gentil knyght."[105]. With the word "wys," the Knight's exaggerated performance of courtesy became rather intentional, as if he is deliberately letting the public see him acting out chivalry in order to win himself a higher reputation. Indeed, no matter how much the Knight is aspiring to the courtly ideals, he is still an ordinary human rather than the archetypal knight in chivalric romance who possesses exceptional virtues and power.

Accordingly, as a dramatic monologue spoken by the Knight with Chaucer's attitudes spilling into it, the "Knight's Tale" offers a close insight to its characters as well as a more realistic point of view towards how the literary ideals are performed. While the Knight displays specifically how fame and pride dominate the character of Theseus — for he is telling this tale in a "modern" society where knighthood was no longer synonymous with definite excellence — Chaucer further adds a strong sense of individuality and self to this unearthly hero of historical romance. Although Theseus' actions of gently promising to help those poor women and setting out without delay to defeat Creon qualify him for being a chivalrous knight, it is worth noting that what essentially makes Theseus pause on his way and give his attention to the women is not his kindness or sense of responsibility, but the worry for his reputation being threaten. Initially

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[105] Chaucer, "GP," l. 72.

when Theseus runs into those ladies, who make themselves very obvious that they are in great misery — "ech after oother clad in clothes blake" at the cheerful feast of Theseus' homecoming, with "swich a cry and swich a wo they make, / That in this world nys creature lyvynge / That herde swich another waymentynge"[106] — he shows no intention of bothering himself with their trouble and pain, since we see that though "he was war as he caste his eye aside,"[107] he acts indifferently to such a noticeable lament as far as he realizes that the cry is not going to stop easily until he steps in: "And of this cry they nolde nevere stenten / Til they the reynes of his brydel henten."[108] Nonetheless, instead of performing immediately the courtly manners, this great lord seems to be mostly annoyed about the fact that they are disturbing his feast, which people hold for him in celebration of his honor, and the very first thing he concerns about their situation is not whether they are in desperate need of help from him but if they envy his high reputation:

> 'What folk been ye, that at myn homcomynge
> Perturben so my feste with criynge.'
> Quod Theseus. 'Have ye so greet envye
> Of myn honour that thus compleyne and cry?'[109]

Consequently, Theseus becomes no more a heroic figure in mythical history, who is described as unquestionably honorable and thereby different from normal people for his unchallengeable power and great fortune gifted by the deities, but a vivid, higher-classed man who carries not only courtly manner but also authentic feelings and reasonable desires; a noble seeker after fame in the actual society of hierarchy. This conclusion is ascertained at the end of the poem, when we have Theseus shows up again and gives a long speech at Arcita's eulogy that

[106] Chaucer, "KT," ll. 899-902.
[107] Ibid. l. 894.
[108] Ibid. ll. 903-4.
[109] Ibid. ll. 905-8.

it is "wysdom, as it thynketh me / To maken vertu of mecessitee,"[110] for a man to die at the highest of his reputation than living a longer yet normal life:

> And certeinly a man hath moost honour
> To dyen in his excellence and flour
> Whan he is siker of his goode name.
> Thanne hath he doon his freend ne hym no shame.
> And gladder oghte his freend been of his deeth,
> Whan with honour up yolden is his breeth
> Than whan his name apalled is for age,
> For al forgeten is his vassellage.
> Thanne is it best as for a worthy fame
> To dyen whan that he is best of name. [111]

Therefore, by spending fairly long enough lines at the beginning of the poem meticulously describing the behavioral manners of Theseus outside of the mythical battlefield, Chaucer well demonstrates the courtly idea of chivalry in the convention of romance and, at the same time, suggests an unique approach to such a literary ideal by taking Theseus, this supposingly perfect knight, to a less optimal but rather realistic level for interpretation. By this means, Chaucer leads his audience to think about each character in the poem more as an independent person than an archetype of romance. He was writing in a society where knighthood was no longer synonymous with physical and moral excellence, either in aspiration or in practice.

When the "veil of perfection" that the convention of romance has the chivalrous knight to wear is lifted by Chaucer's narrator in the "Knight's Tale," we shall pay more attention to how love, the core element of romance, is constructed from the very start of the tale. Though focusing mainly on the chivalry of Theseus, the narrator alludes to the idea of love, which is mentioned as a major part of Theseus' life. We are particularly given the opportunity to see, though briefly,

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[110] Chaucer, "KT," ll. 3041-2.
[111] Ibid. ll. 3047-56.

how Theseus behaves courtly as a lover. Before Theseus rides towards Thebes to set the fight against Creon, he makes sure to take good care of his queen Ypolita as well as her sister Emiley first, as if their safety is his priority, even when he is in an urgent state:

> No neer Atthenes wolde he go ne ride
> Ne take his ese fully half a day,
> But onward on his wey that nyght he lay
> And sente anon Ypolita the queene
> And Emelye hir yonge suster sheene
> Unto the toun of Atthenes to dewelle.
> And forth he rit. [112]

Indeed, at the beginning of the poem, the narrator gives credit to Theseus for not only his military achievements but also his successful marriage with the noble queen, Ypolita, whom this worthy knight "broughte hire hoom with hym in his contree"[113] from Scithia after successfully conquering the land there:

> And of the grete bataille for the nones
> Bitwixen Atthenes and Amazones
> And how asseged was Ypolita,
> The faire, hardy queene of Scithia,
> And of the feste that was at hir weddynge
> And of the tempest at hir hoomcomynge. [114]

Nevertheless, though underlining the importance of love to the knight of romance, the narrator describes this supposingly perfect marriage between Theseus and Ypolita with some thoughtful words that make the concept of love become less appealing and even ironic.

Note that in the quote, Ypolita is described as a queen who is not simply fair, as how women are generally depicted in traditional romance, but also "hardy," a romance term usually

[112] Chaucer, "KT," ll. 968-74.
[113] Ibid. l. 869.
[114] Ibid. ll. 879-84.

applied to men, especially the valiant knight. The word here implies that it would be quite unlikely for this tough, confident and kingly woman, who has just lost her country in a big war that "asseged" (besieged) her, to happily accept the offer of marriage from Theseus her enemy. In fact, Ypolita, like Theseus, is also a famous figure in classical Greek mythology and thus might be known by some audiences already. According to various ancient texts where her name is mentioned, she is portrayed as not only an authoritative queen of the Amazons but also a brave warrior who is unmarried. Therefore, by including such a detail of the character of Ypolita, the narrator of the "Knight's Tale" adds a sense of compulsivity to the relationship between Theseus and Ypolita. Claiming that he is not going to go into the details of this marriage, the narrator does not give the audience a chance to see the side of Ypolita, and in this way the audience could only go with their own assumption based on the textual language that Ypolita might not be willing to marry Theseus. On top of that, the brief summary of their wedding ceremony makes Theseus become thoughtless, impetuous, and even selfish in the matter of love. Having the wedding go together with the celebration of his homecoming from the battle between Athens and Amazons, Ypolita's home country, Theseus likely receives much public honor for himself, yet he hardly shows any gentleness to Yolita — the "tempest" on the feast for the news of their marriage would certainly hurts Ypolita by blowing her pride. The behavioral manner of Theseus as a chivalrous lover shows less concern to Ypolita as an independent woman whose opinion should be involved in the marriage, since she is treated more as a desirable object for a knight to pursue.

Accordingly, Chaucer's use of language in describing Theseus's chivalry as both a symbolic and realistic matter implies a commentary on the convention of romance for having a

heroic knight as the perfect subject of the courtly ideals centered on love. The narrator has clearly made his claim early in the poem that he must omit all the exciting accomplishments of Theseus in warfares, for there are too many things more necessary to be covered in his storytelling — "I have, God woot, a large feeld to ere, / And wayke been the oxen in my plough. / The remenant of the tale is long ynough."[115] Here, Chaucer is drawing an interesting parallel between an actual ploughman ploughing his land and a narrator telling a fictitious story. Note that a ploughman has a limited control over his land: He can provide a base and set up a way for the plants to start growing on his land by sowing the seeds, but he is not able to control the final look or taste of the products growing out of his effort. Accordingly, by this means, Chaucer takes the power from his narrator to the audience in judging the characters in this romance. Bringing Thesesus closer to the readers beyond the authority of classic realm, Chaucer's narrator invites his real-life audience to see the down-to-earth aspects of this literary figure, and thereby suggests people to consider the characters in the poem more as vivid humans with distinct personalities — though not necessarily worthy — than archetypal knights in romance who is designated to be undoubtedly ideal in his performances of honor and love. Therefore, it is likely that Chaucer is providing an insight to the more critical side of romance hidden behind its "satisfying" end through the tale of two young knights, Palamon and Arcita, pursuing their love for Emelye.

2.2 The Performance of Love and Chivalric Ideals in Epic

[115] Chaucer, "KT," ll. 885-8.

Romance in part feeds its audiences' appetite for fantasy. Chaucer's "Knight's Tale" offers us an insight into such a fantasy, since we see that the Knight as the fictitious teller is asked by the Host to give a tale "of best sentence and moost solaas."[116] Yet such a statement raises a set of questions on the perception of romance: For whom does the fantasy of romance serve? And if romance provides mainly a fantasy, should people always cherish its convention as uncritically worthy and consider its presentation of love as truly satisfying, even when the ideals are taken out from the literary and aesthetic realm? In another way of asking, what kinds of "sentence" (meaning) and "solaas" (enjoyment) can we actually get from this tale of romance under the backdrop of an epic war?

After the conflicts existed in the courtly characteristics of Theseus are suggested, the set of concerns for the ideals of romance arises immediately in the narrator's, or Chaucer's, treatment of the falling-in-love scene, presented by the two young knights, Palamon and Arcita, gazing at the same fair lady, Emelye, and being smitten with her beauty. Love at first sight, irresistible, absolute, and everlasting, is the typical way of falling in love throughout all romance narratives. Although the tradition of romance praises a knight for having a passionate desire for as well as a lifelong commitment to the lady he is to love, Chaucer, however, has the chivalrous lovers in his romances resolving the inevitable feeling of love follow a less cheerful pattern, which embodies the convention in an exaggerated way by making the strong sense of pain an indispensable element of a knight's fateful encounter with the lady. Similar to Troilus, who is struck by the God of Love through the eyes to the heart's root when having the sight of Criseyde for the first time, Palamon and Arcita in the "Knight's Tale" both experience their initial

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[116] Chaucer, "GP," l. 798.

perception of love both through a suffering manner and without any positive attitude. When Palamon and Arcite are simultaneously and deeply attracted by their sights of Emelye, each of them has an unprecedented feeling of immense pain — which, in a subjective way, is thought to be caused by the innocent lady — instead of a nice aspiration of love. Palamon describes the fine appearance of Emelye as something that "hurt right now thurghout myn ye / Into mye herte, that wol my bane be;"[117] Arcite has the exact same when he sees Emelye: "with that sighte hir beautee hurte hym so, / That, if Palamon was sorely wounded, / Arcite is hurt as muche as he, or moore."[118] Such an unique connection between physical pain and love — the finest thing that shines the world of a courtly lover in romance — may look relatively reasonable on Troilus, since the narrator in *Troilus and Criseyde* has already informed the audience the sorrow of Troilus for his tragic love, but it certainly becomes problematic, and to some extent ironic, when being applied to Palamon and Arcita, the lovers in a tale of "moost solaas." Being the chivalrous knights of romance, Arcita and Palamon still possess the courtly convention by promising a lifelong commitment to serve their beloved lady right after seeing her for the very first time from afar, yet the exaggerated reactions of the two knights to their feelings of love make the meaning of love a heavy burden than a gratified desire. The invincibility of love imposed by the romance tradition puts the young lovers beyond the possibility of resistance, even though they are overwhelmed by the paradoxical nature of the feelings that ensue.

Interestingly, the approach of love that Palamon and Arcite show forms a great contrast with that of Theseus mentioned briefly in the early narrative. The love of Theseus is presented in all its glory: After Theseus encounters his love by chance in a great war, he successfully achieves

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[117] Chaucer, "KT," ll. 1096-7.
[118] Ibid. ll. 1114-6.

his heart's desire for the lady through a knight's distinctive method of fighting in "the grete bataille for the nones."[119] In contrast, what Palamon and Arcita do initially in the attempt to pursue the lady is merely by quarrelling against each other about who falls in love first as well as suffers the greater pain caused by the feeling of love, just as two childish boys trying to show themselves as being more qualified to be rewarded with the only one toy in front of their parents. In fact, we do get to see a real combat happening between Palamon and Arcita for winning the lady close to the end of the tale, but the tournament is set not by the young knights but by Theseus, who promises that the winner will be awarded Emelye's hand.

Nevertheless, if taking the situation of Palamon and Arcita into a more realistic level, considering the very basic fact that they have been prisoned in a tower in Athens for years after their country is defeated, the less ideal manners as well as passivity of the two knights in dealing with their desire of love would become understandable. In general, a man's knighthood automatically represents the high social position he gets in the society. Indeed, the narrator introduces Palamon and Arita by underlining their honorable status, as two loyal knights of Thebes, in a way in which it seems to be the only defining characteristic that shapes the two lovers. Though in a poor state as being seriously injured by the war, Palamon and Arcita can be easily recognized for their nobility, which fully distinguishes them from all other soldiers lying beside them:

> Nat fully quyke ne fully dede they were,
> But by hir cote-armures and by hir gere
> The heraudes knewe hem best in special
> As they that were of the blood roial
> Of Thebes. [120]

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[119] Chaucer, "KT," l. 879.
[120] Chaucer, "KT," ll. 1015-9.

It is thus reasonable for these two young knights — who have once enjoyed so much fame and wealth but now being defeated and confined in a tower by the duke of Athens who "nolde no raunsoun"[121] as far as they know — to hold a rather negative attitude towards love, since, with the great losses of honor and freedom, they are not even seeing any hope in their own lives.

Having shown to us already the importance of reputation to a noble knight through the description of Theseus, the narrator further suggests us to applied such a understanding of knighthood to the state of Palamon and Arcita by specially drawing a further comparison of Theseus, as a successful conqueror crowned with honor, with Palamon and Arcite, as woeful prisoners falling from the high position to such a low state:

> And whan this worthy duc hath thus ydon,
> He took his hoost and hoom he rood anon
> With laurer crowned as a conquerour.
> And ther he lyveth in joye and in honour
> Terme of [his] lyve. What nedeth wordes mo?
> And in a tour in angwissh and in wo
> This Palamon and his felawe Arcite
> For everemoore ther may no gold hem quite. [122]

The rhetorical question the narrator raises in the middle of this comparison calls the audience' attention to the difference between Theseus, the epic hero in classic literature, and the knightly lovers, who do not actually belong to the mythical world of legends and thus have to bear the harsh "reality" of life while carrying out the romantic ideals. By reminding the audience the unchallengeable honor and good fortune of Theseus — the "Lord to whom fortune hath yeven / Victorie and as a conquerour to lyven"[123] — the narrator underlines the lack of such epic heroism in the characters of Palamon and Arcita. While Theseus is fully qualified to perform the literary

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[121] Ibid. l. 1024.
[122] Ibid. ll. 1025-32.
[123] Chaucer, "KT," ll. 915-6.

ideals, Palamon and Arcita seem less capable of achieving both honor and love in a perfect manner due to the fleetness of fate in the actual circumstance they cannot avoid.

Consequently, Chaucer's choice of having two knightly protagonists, who are alike in both chivalrous characteristics and fate, to both fall in love faithfully with one lady as well as suffer from such an intense desire seems profound. By giving one of them an abrupt reversal of fortune and thereby restricting the protagonists to only two alternatives — either keep pursuing his love as a humble prisoner or remaining honorable and faithful as a knight — Chaucer is likely challenging the feasibility of romance' convention for having the hero to perform simultaneously as both a chivalrous lover, who fulfills the courtly ideals celebrated in 14th-century narratives, and a classic knight, whose greatness is grounded by his honor and heroism. Therefore, after demonstrating the whole situation of the romantic knights falling in love in a conventional yet unpleasant way, the narrator raises the question that reflects the sense of disenchantment with the ideal of romance on a practical level:

> Who hath the worse, Arcite or Palamoun?
> That oon may seen his lady day by day,
> But in prison he moot dwelle always.
> That oother, wher hym list may ride or go,
> But seen his lady shal he nevere mo."[124]

The narrator, or Chaucer, puts the discussion of romance into a realistic realm beyond the literary convention for the audience to examine: What would be truly better off for a knight, if he has to live a life with either love or honor / dignity instead of both?

On top of that, just as the "perfection" of Theseus, who fulfill the romance's expectation of a chivalrous knight, is more or less weaken when his love is discussed as rather a heroic deed

[124] Ibid. ll. 1348-52.

of which he acts more as a conqueror than a gentle lover, Palamon and Arcita's performances of courtly love, the ideal of romance with its emphasis on chivalry, seem to be challenged by their brotherhood — "of sustren two yborn"[125] — which is introduced briefly by the narrator as the very basic fact. Being set under the ancient setting of Greek wars, Palamon and Arcita might be easily associated with the classic image of knights in shining armor, and their brotherhood consequently required to carry out the expected performance of loyalty and devotion to each other. The narrator mentions Theseus again as to demonstrate how an authoritative knight of epic possesses the idea of brotherhood:

> A worthy duc that highte Perotheus,
> That felawe was to Duc Theseus
> Syn thilke day that they were children lite.
> Was come to Athenes his felawe to visite
> And for to pley, as he was won to do.
> For in this world he loved no man so.
> And he loved hym als tendrely agayn.
> So wel they lovede, as olde bookes sayn,
> That whan that oon was deed, soothly to telle,
> His felawe wente and soughte hym doun in Helle![126]

However, we see that Palamon and Arcita, being driven by the irresistible desire of love ends up fighting against each other with swords that symbolized their knighthood, and the final satisfaction of Palamon for winning his beloved lady comes at the cost of Arcita's death, though it is not necessarily through Palamon's own hand that his brother is killed. Such a paradoxical nature of the chivalrous lovers in the romance is underlined when the narrator signs for the impending battle between Palamon and Arcita by saying that, in truth, neither love nor lordship will willingly have fellowship:

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[125] Chaucer, "KT," l. 1019.
[126] Ibid. ll. 1191-200.

> O Cupide, out of all charitee!
> O regne, that wolt no felawe have with thee!
> Ful sooth is seyd that love ne lordship
> Wol noght, hir thankes, have no felaweshipe.
> Wel fynden that Arcite and Palamoun.[127]

The narrator likely triggers such a reflection on the concepts of classic knighthood and romantic chivalry as conflictive with each other quite earlier in the narrative by offering a notably long dialogue between the two brothers about whose action shall be considered false, through which the distinct arguments of the two knights thoroughly demonstrate the two understanding of as well as clearly point out that they are fundamentally incompatible in practice:

> [Palamon] 'It nere,' quod he, 'to thee no greet honour
> For to be false ne for to be traitour
> To me that am thy cosyn and thy brother
> Yesworn ful depe and ech of us til oother
> That nevere for to dyen in the peyne
> Til that 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 shal forthren thee.
> This was thyn ooth and myn also, certeyn,
> I woot right wel, thou darst it nat withseyn.
> ……
>
> [Arcita] 'I pose that thow lovedest hire before.
> Wostow nat wel the olde clerkes sawe
> That 'Who shal yeve a lovere any lawe?
> Love is a gretter law, by my pan,
> Than may be yebe f any erthely man.
> And therefore positif lawe and swich decree
> Is broken alday, for love, maugree his heed.

[127] Chaucer, "KT," ll. 1623-7.

> He may nat flee it thogh he shold be deed,
> Al be she mayde or wydwe or elles wyf.
> And eek, it is nat likely al thy lyf
> To stonde in hir grace. Namoore shal I.
> ……
> And therfore at the kynges court, my brother,
> Ech man for hymself. Ther is noon oother.
> Love if thee list, for I love and ay shal!' [128]

It is therefore hard to find a moral or to decide whether Palamon or Arcita should be admired as a truly honorable knight, for their behaviors seems to respectively negate the old-fashioned code of conduct indispensable for knighthood — "For which thou art ybounden as a knyght"[129] — and disapprove the "modern" ideology of chivalry celebrated in romance, which values love on top of all heroic traits as the most graceful and worthwhile desire worth for every noble man to pursue with equal chance. From this point of view, the narrator, or Chaucer, further enhances the intense conflict between the tradition of knighthood and the romantic ideal of chivalry presented in the "Knight's Tale," which consequently contradicts the satisfying characteristic of this tale of romance.

It is indeed likely that the overall happy end of the "Knight Tale" is an irony made by Chaucer on the unchallengeable convention of romance, for the poem displays Love, the core of romance, in a problematic way. While inviting his 14th-century-onward audiences to set into such a fictitious world remote in mythical history and take their own, modern understanding to interpret the subject matter of love presented in this historical romance, the narrator still lets the one who treats love in a less practical yet more old-fashioned manner, i.e. Palamon, to be the final winner of the love court. From the dispute between Palamon and Arcita, we see Arcita

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[128] Chaucer, "KT," ll. 1129-40; ll. 1162-73, ll. 1181-83.
[129] Ibid. l. 1149.

speaks in a way that fully embraces love and seriously brings it into reality. While Palamon challenges Arcita for being a false brother as well as knight about loving his lady, Arcita "pul proudly" refutes Palamon's statement by criticizing him 'be rather false than I'"[130] and his love as a blind worship:

> And thou art fals, I telle thee outrely,
> For paramour I loved hire first er thow.
> What wiltow seyn, thou wistest nat yet now
> Wheither she be a womman or goddesse.
> Thyn is affeccioun of hoolynesse,
> And myn is love, as to a creature,
> For which I tolde thess myn aventure
> As to my cosyn and my brother sworn. [131]

The love of Aricta, which treats Emelye as a distinct, living human actually involved in his life, seems much more authentic and credible than that of Palamon, which admires Emelye as a divine figure with enchantment in deep mystery.

In truth, Arcita seems to be the one more appropriate to be considered as a chivalrous knight of courtly ideals in the modern 14th-century ideology of romance than Palamon. We see that Arcita thinks and behaves in a way that concerns not only the desire of love but also the code of chivalry, which largely incorporates the notion of courtly love into the idealized understanding of knighthood:

> What, verray fool, thynk wel that love is free,
> And I wol love hire maugree al thy myght!
> But for as muche thou art a worthy knyght
> And wilnest to darreyne hire by bataille,
> Have heer my trouthe: tomorwe I wol nat faille
> Withoute witynge of any oother wight,

[130] Chaucer, "KT," l. 1153.
[131] Ibid. ll. 1154-61.

That heere I wol be founden as a knyght. [132]

Indeed, we see that for the very first time Arcita brings up his belief of love, Chaucer lets him to present himself as a writer with pen instead of a knight with weapon, as if love is the subjective matter in his own literature of romance: “Love is a gretter lawe, by my pan.”[133]

Ironically, however, having shown his quality as a courtly lover of romance and successfully defeated his rival Palamon in the tournament with the aid of Mars, Arcita ends up dying tragically in an artificial earthquake made by Saturn at the request of Venus, who has assured Palamon for having his lady at the end. In this case, Chaucer’s choice of having Arcita praying to Mars, the god of war, while Palamon praying to Venus, the goddess of love, and becoming the final winner of the love competition is worth pondering. It seems to be a dramatic reversal for Arcita, the more courtly character who gently offers the chance for happiness to his brother by applying all the courtly ideals to Palamon for Emelye to remember — “trouthe, honour, knyghthede, / Wysdom, humblesse, estaat, and heigh kynrede, / Fredom, and al that longeth to that art.”[134] — to seek for power and Palamon, the more valiant one who initially brings up the violent approach for love, to seek for love:

I wol be deed or elles thou shalt dye!
Thou shalt nat love my lady Emelye.
But I wol love hire oonly and namo,
For I am Palamon, thy mortal foo,
And thought that I no wepene have in this place,
But out of prison am astert by grace,
I drede noght that outher thow shalt dye
Or thow ne shalt nat loven Emelye! [135]

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[132] Chaucer, “KT,” ll. 1606-12.
[133] Ibid. l. 1165.
[134] Ibid. ll. 2789-91.
[135] Chaucer, “KT,” ll. 1587-94.

It is perhaps because that for Arcita, who already possesses the courtly manner of love, to live in such a legendary world with divine forces, he has to seek for more power; whereas for Palamon, who is more comfortable with the classic tradition and heroism, he needs to be guided for applying his chivalry to the matter of love. Either way, Chaucer seems to comment on the convention of romance for having the courtly ideal of love as well as the romantic notion of chivalry associated with the ceremonies of knighthood.

Overall, the two young knights living up to the literary ideals are irreconcilable with realism. Chaucer implies such a criticism by constantly bringing up an abstract idea of "Fortune and hire false wheel,"[136] which directly is applied to the tragedy of Arcita by the narrator in his narrative: "Now wol I turne to Arcita ageyn, / That litel wiste how ny that was his care. / Til that Fortune had broght him in the snare."[137] In fact, Fortune, derived from the Latin word *Fortuna*, is a long-standing theme in the Western literary history. By capitalizing the term every time it is mentioned, Chaucer is referring to the goddess Fortune with her wheel, which symbolizes the inevitable falls and rises in human life through an unearthly way. The Wheel of Fortune first made its appearance in Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy*, one of the most influential works of the late classic period, which Chaucer translated into English vernacular. In the "Knight's Tale," the gods, whose role is to develop instability in the lives of the proganoists, are the instruments of Fortune. The symbolic decoration of each of the three temples, which is definitely meaningful for the extensive description given notably by the narrator, shows the wills of the gods as opposite to human desires. The walls in Venus's temple, instead of praising the grace of

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[136] Ibid. l. 925.
[137] Ibid. ll. 1488-90.

love, is described as “ful pitous to bihold,”[138] since they first depict all the possible sufferings of the lovers:

> The broken slepes and the sikes colde,
> The sacred teeris and the waymentynge,
> The firy strokes and the desirynge
> That loves servantz in this lyf enduren; [139]

Referring to the lovers all as “loves servantz,” followed by their willingness to bear all the miseries that ensue — “The othes thst hir convenantz assuren, / Pleasure and Hope, Desir, Foolhardynesse”[140] — the walls of Venus echo the moment when Arcita and Palamon fall in love with both immense pain and firm dedication. Most significantly, the walls in Venus’s temple suggest the absolute invincibility and irresistibility of love regardless of its practicability in the realistic aspect, turning the lover’s desire into something being imposed by the divine power of a goddess, just as how romance idealized its subject matter of courtly love as the greatest pursuit worth for every man to die for:

> Thus may ye seen that wysdom ne richesses,
> Beautee ne sleighte, strengthe, hardynesse
> Ne may with Venus holde champartie.
> For as hir list, the world than may she gye. [141]

However, after showing all the paradoxical characteristics of love, the narrator leaves them unresolved and moves on to describe the next temple.

The temple of Mars is also remarkable, for it seems to challenge the honor that a knight achieves from his military accomplishments and victories of wars, like Thesesus does. Instead of presenting the glories of battles, the first sight of the walls in the temple of Mars convey a sense

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[138] Chaucer, “KT,” l. 1919.
[139] Ibid. ll. 1920-3.
[140] Ibid. ll. 1924-5
[141] Ibid. ll. 1947-50.

of desolation and loneliness, as if everything is destroyed by the brutal violence of wars, through the abstract image of a lifeless forest, “In which ther ran a rumble and a swough / As though a storm sholde bresten every bough.”[142] In addition, the inside of the temple with extreme darkness evokes a strong sense of pressure and depression. While the paintings further down are all about hypocrites, traitors, murderers, and disasters that have nothing to do with war but simply displays the dark side of reality, there is hardly any light coming into the temple: “The northren lyght in at the dores shoon, / For wyndowe on the wal ne was ther noon / Thurgh which men myghten any light discerne.”[143] The creepy look of the inside forms a great contrast with the view of the outside, which is painted with the most vivid color of red and sustained by huge pillars “of iren bright and shine.”[144] Such an unique design of the temple of Mars possibly reflects the very basic truth of wars that, while benefiting a certain group — i.e. the knights — with reputable fame and power, wars in general are ruthless and bring a negative impact on humanity. Venus and Mars are both represented as forces that cause catastrophe and suffering, rather than glory and happiness, in human life. Accordingly, the interaction of Fortune in the “Knight’s Tale” implies a criticism on the “perfection” of historical romance, which is set out from a modern point of view, values love as undoubtedly ideal and above everything, and celebrates it through the classic figure of knight while altering the traditional meaning of knighthood to a more realistic concept.

Therefore, the “Knight’s Tale” might be considered as an allegory, in which each protagonist displays certain distinct qualities in their treatment of the romance’s ideals and accordingly raises a commentary on the anachronistic convention of historical romance, showing

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[142] Chaucer, “KT,” ll. 1979-80.
[143] Ibid. ll. 1987-89.
[144] Ibid. l. 1994.

how far the ideals are from being normative in the "modern," i.e. 14th-century, society. Theseus, as a well-known character with an authoritative background of epic, likely represents an imitative archetype of a noble knight in both romance, whose unchangeable qualities like chivalry and honor is actually far idealized by the cult of knighthood. Palamon can be seen as a romantic knight caught by reality yet trying to stay with the old-fashioned belief of knighthood. Arcita, on the other hand, serves more fully as a courtly lover who performs the literary ideals of love and chivalry based on the 14th-century ideology yet cannot fit into the ancient setting that emphasizes legends, divine forces, and Fortune.

Conclusion

As the Father of English Literature and a significant figure who brought the tradition of romance into the Middle English vernacular, Chaucer developed a remarkable refinement and precision of use of his language in fully taking the tradition of romance from the French courtly literature into his own way of demonstration as well as adapting and transforming the innovative form of historical romance, or romanticized epic, from the Italians into his originality. This project is concerned with how Chaucer's language works in order to transmit to a new generation of readers the literary competence of romance.

In *Anelida and Arcita*, *Troilus and Criseyde*, and the "Knight's Tale," of which Chaucer shows his unique insights of romance while adapting the materials from the works of Boccaccio, Chaucer reconsider and criticize the literary ideals by offering an unique approach to the characters, showing the more realistic side of the plot as opposed to the state of "perfection" where the performance of romance's convention usually lies on. By twisting the reader's expectation between classic authority and romantic belief. Those three tales of Chaucer's romance are all, in some way, centrally concerned with the connections between "the law of form" and "the law of natures." Each of the three poems traces an itinerary that runs at least to a vision of the human natures of men and women but begins with a consideration of kinds of poems — epic and romance, which ensures a fantasy yet automatically imposed the convention and code of conduct to each character as its subjectivity instead of individual self. Chaucer realizes the fact and disenchantes the so-called literary ideals through his narrative structure.

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