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The Knight's Tale and the Teseide

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THE KNIGHT'S TALE AND THE TESEIDE

A Thesis
Presented to
the Faculty of the Department of English
Loyola University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

by
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The Age of Chaucer, 1340-1400, so-called from the dominating influence of Geoffrey Chaucer on English literature, spans a most important period in English history. It is included in that hundred years' conflict between England and France which, though it had its inception in 1066 when William of Normandy defeated the English king at Hastings and became himself the King of England, actually became a century's struggle in 1346 when the battle of Crecy plunged England and France into a war for commercial and political supremacy. The conflict was continued with only an occasional respite down to 1453.

Important social, religious, and political upheavals dotted the period. The Black Death which ravaged Europe in the middle of the fourteenth century provoked a life and death struggle between capital and labor. This crisis culminated in the Peasants' Revolt of 1381, and resulted in the emancipation of the serfs, which was the beginning

of a new era in the history of labor. The Lollard movement, led by John Wyclif, was a protest of the down-trodden poor against the oppressive rich, both in church and state. Richard II's misrule brought about his deposition in 1399, and the accession of Henry of Bolingbroke to the throne in that same year began an era of constitutional monarchy in England.

The middle classes were growing rich and prosperous; the deputies of the people were increasing in strength; the feudal relation was becoming outgrown. Two notions of the time were responsible for elevating the Middle Ages above the chaos of barbarism: one, religious, which had fashioned the gigantic cathedrals, and like a magnet, had attracted thousands to the rescue of the Holy Land; the other, secular, which had built feudal fortresses and set men of courage armed upon their feet within their own domain. The religious spirit had formed the monk, the believer in an all-mighty, all-powerful, Being, -- God; the secular notion had produced the adventurous hero who believed only in himself. Both of these notions or attitudes dominated to the extent of degeneration, through excessive expenditure of force. Insensibly, the serious element declined in manners, books and art. The

literature of the time was a result of a fusion of the characteristics of the Angle, the Saxon, and the Norman.

Within a century after the Norman Conquest, the Anglo-Saxon nobility and landry gentry had been displaced by the Norman, while the English church had been filled with French priests and monks, so that all those classes which produced or read either polite or learned literature were Norman or French. Besides, during the following two or three hundred years, the constant and intimate contact of the Anglo-Norman nobility with France made them the medium through which England was thoroughly familiarized with French literary material and forms.

Taken as a whole, the literature composed or circulated in England during the two and a half centuries after the battle of Hastings was rich, varied, and extensive, but unfortunately, very little was in the English language. However by 1300, the English was again assuming a position of importance, and was beginning to take its place as the vernacular. In spite of the subsequent loss of many French words, strange spellings, and forms, the English of the fourteenth century is easily recognized as the language we speak today, and the medium in which appeared the

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artistic and cultivated literary work of that great and admirable writer Geoffrey Chaucer.

Chaucer is not merely the greatest English poet of medieval times, he is one of the greatest English poets of all time, and yet there are so many facts regarding his life which are unknown to even the most ambitious and able of Chaucerian scholars. Comparatively few details are known about him. There are no autographed manuscripts of any of his works; scholars possess no more than a conjectural knowledge of the order in which he wrote his poems, and it took many years of scholarly labor and research to ascertain what constitutes the genuine Chaucer canon. What we do know of Chaucer, in the words of George Sampson, is

. . . that he inherited the high courtly tradition of French poetry, and that, with all his Italian acquirements and his English spirit, he was French in the grace and skill of his technique. He led a useful public life, enduring personal and general misfortune with courage, and never lost faith in truth, beauty, and goodness. He took a large sagacious charitable view of mankind, and (like another poet) travelled on life's common way in cheerful godliness.¹

¹ George Sampson, Concise Cambridge History of English Literature (Cambridge, England: University Press, 1941), p. 78.

Geoffrey Chaucer was probably born about the year 1340 in his father's London dwelling. John Chaucer, the poet's father, who was a member of the Corporation of Vintners or wine-merchants. He owned a brew-house, shops, etc., without Aldgate. The family like others of the wine trade, may well have come originally from Gascony, but in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries it seems to have thriven mainly in London and East Anglia. Recent research has definitely traced the poet's immediate family to Ipswich.

We know very little of Chaucer's childhood for no direct record has ever been found, but we may well imagine him to be like any other ordinary boy of his time. Of his education, too, nothing definite is known. The first real findings that throw any light upon the poet's life were discovered quite accidentally. Coulton in his book Chaucer and England give us a fair picture of the event that led to a first glimpse into Chaucer's biography:

A manuscript of the British Museum containing poems by Chaucer's contemporaries, Lydgate and Hoccleve, needed rebinding; and the old binding was found, as often, to have been strengthened with two sheets of parchment pasted inside the covers. These sheets religiously preserved, in

accordance with the tradition of the Museum, were found to contain household accounts of the Countess of Ulster, wife to that Prince Lionel who had been born so near to the time of John Chaucer's continental journey and who was, therefore, two or three years older than the poet. Among the items were found records of clothes given to different members of the household for Easter 1347; and low down on the list comes Geoffrey Chaucer, who received a short cloak, a pair² of tight breeches in red and black, and shoes.

With this introduction into the courtly service of the Countess of Ulster, Chaucer without doubt took part in the many varied and attractive activities of the court and its busy life. In 1359-60 Chaucer fought in the campaign of the French invasion. He was taken captive and ransomed by the King. Six years later, a certain Philippa Chaucer, a damoiselle of the chamber, was granted a life pension by the Queen. On the face of this and other accurate documents it is obvious that Chaucer married Philippa in 1366. While still in the service of the Countess or Duke Lionel, Chaucer was a bearer of messages between the young commander at Calais and his father Edward III in London. His further promotion was probably due to his well-earned popularity.

² G. G. Coulton, Chaucer and His England (New York: C. P. Putnam's Sons, 1908), p. 21.

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In 1367 when Chaucer's name appears again, he is newly established in the king's own household; a promotion which was not uncommon in those days. His title at court was King's Squire, an office which might be compared to secretaries in our country. It was the duty of the squire to purchase supplies for the King, to manage the household, and to bear messages of importance. It is not surprising then to discover the poet traveling abroad on diplomatic missions after the second campaign in France in 1369 of which the following comprise the most notable:

In 1370 Chaucer was often the bearer of dispatches to France. Between the years 1372 and 1373 he made his first journey to Italy, to the cities of Florence and Genoa, with a view to agreeing upon some English port where Genoese merchants might form a commercial establishment. When Sir John de Burlee was Captain of Calais in 1376, Chaucer served under him as a secret servant. During the following year he went on missions for the King of Paris, Montreuil, and elsewhere. It is conjectured that he was sent to Montreuil as an English envoy to treat of peace between England and France and also to arrange a marriage between Prince Richard and a French

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Princess. In 1378 Richard II succeeded his grandfather Edward III in 1378, and the young King continued to use the services of Chaucer as an ambassador.

Chaucer spent almost his entire life in the service of the English royal court. Modern scholarship has proved that his service there was honest and sincere. His fidelity was amply rewarded by officially granted benefits of annuities, grants of office, and custody of lands belonging to heirs under age. To the end of his life Chaucer appears to have advanced steadily in purse and reputation, fortune and regard. He died a successful man. His career in the royal household was not unlike that of other men in similar positions. It is true that he had some political reverses, but to the time of his death he remained always in royal favor. Even the death of Edward III in 1377 did not interrupt Chaucer's prosperity, for it is evident that he enjoyed the confidence of Richard II and rose rapidly in his esteem. So much so, that in 1385 he became Justice of the Peace for the county of Kent and a year later sat in Parliament. After Richard's death in 1399 Chaucer found favor with Henry IV, who granted him forty franks a year in addition to the grants he had already received from Richard II. Chaucer

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was thus assured of ending his days in comfort. Within a few months after receiving the latest evidence of royal favor, he leased a property in the garden of St. Mary's Chapel, Westminster for as many of fifty-three years as he should live. He died however, on October 25, 1400, just ten months after he took possession of his new home. He was buried in Westminster Abbey, being the first of the many distinguished literary men who have been laid to rest in the now famous Poets' Corner of the Abbey.

Cowling states that posterity has been fortunate in knowing almost exactly what Chaucer looked like, which is more than can be said of Shakespeare. In his biography of the poet, Cowling tells us that Chaucer was not autocratic in appearance.

In our age he might have passed for a secretary or a business manager of some kind. Yet his appearance was unforbidding and his features were well chiselled. He looked pensive, worldly wise and rather tired, but despite these indications of lack of enthusiasm and love of decency, one can easily see in fancy, the grave eyes light up with a witty twinkle and the rather heavy and drooping mouth curl into a smile.³

³ George Cowling, Chaucer (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1927), p. 3.

That Chaucer was about five feet six inches in height was estimated when his bones were accidentally uncovered in digging the grave for Robert Browning in Westminster Abbey.⁴ That his legs were unduly short in proportion to his body as has sometimes been inferred from the picture in the Ellsmore manuscript, was not supported by his examination.⁵

From his portrait and from his own sentiments expressed in various passages of his poetry, Chaucer reveals himself as one fond of mirth. The most common portrait shows him to be a fair-haired, ruddy-faced man with a pointed beard and strong features. The known facts of his life as page, valet, squire, diplomat, government official, etc., tend to prove the full and varied life the poet led. He came into contact with all kinds and classes of people both at home and abroad. He must have been a man of scrupulous honesty and loyalty to have enjoyed so long favor at court and to have been entrusted with so many and such important offices and

⁴ John M. Manly, Canterbury Tales (New York: Henry Holt & Company, 1928), p. 37.

⁵ Ibid.

and missions. His good fortune was envied by Lydgate who marvelled at the "prudent" Chaucer, who not less favored than Virgil in Rome, or Petrarch in Florence, owed to the liberalities of the great "vertuous suffysance".⁶ In the dissolute courts he easily accommodated himself to the prevailing atmosphere of gallantry. The subjects and tone of his verse often manifested a clever adaptation to the reigning taste. "He was quick to sin", says Legouis, "and quick to repent. His aim was to please and not to edify."⁷ This, of course, accounts for his illicit love affairs, Legouis goes on to say that Chaucer never sought or claimed a more exalted role, and never harbored the least trace of hypocrisy. He was an easy going man, the recipient of many pensions and lucrative posts, although for a long time he lived a varied and somewhat improvident life. He was ever willing to admit his own faults and could turn his wit against himself. He

6 "Fall of Princes", quoted in Five Hundred Years of Chaucer Criticism and Allusion by Caroline Spurgeon (New York: Humphrey Milford, 1914), p. 41.

7 Emile Legouis, Geoffrey Chaucer (New York: E. P. Dutton Co., 1928), p. 21.

was modest in his pretensions and so given to self-effacement that no one could take umbrage at him.

Legouis at length of his various traits:

It requires some penetration to see through his modesty and to realize the subtle mockery at work behind it, aimed sometimes at the person he is speaking to, and sometimes at human conceit in general. Those who do not see beyond his humility, praise him for it and are inclined to patronize this naive and inoffensive being. ⁸

With the excellent opportunities afforded him by the life at court, his travels abroad, and his contact with men of the highest class and reputation, there can be no doubt that Chaucer became acquainted with men of various positions and renown, men of different nationality and rank. He most certainly had a very wide acquaintance with the members of the royal households, both men and women. His works give evidence of these many acquaintances since Chaucer dedicated his poems to various friends. For example "Troilus and Cressida" was dedicated to John Gower, author of "Confessio Amantis", and to Ralph Strode, Fellow of Merton College, Oxford, and

⁸ Emile Legouis, Geoffrey Chaucer (New York: E. P. Dutton Co., 1928), p. 21.

an opponent of Wyclif. Henry Scogan, to whom Chaucer addressed an "Envoy" was tutor to King Henry IV's sons and had previously served Richard II. His "Compleynt of Venus" Chaucer translated from the French verses of Otes de Graunson, a knight of Savoy in the service of John of Gaunt, Robert de Bukton, to whom he addressed a poem, was a squire in the service of Queen Anne, in Richard II's court. Eustace Deschamps, a contemporary poet of France, who also served at the King's court sent Chaucer a copy of his poems at one time with a ballade addressed to the "Grant translateur, noble Geoffrey Chaucier." 9

His acquaintance with Deschamps brought contact with the French poet's friend Lewis Clifford, who acted as letter-bearer from Deschamps to the English poet. Other prominent men of the times with whom Chaucer's diplomatic career brought him into contact with Sir William Beauchampe, brother of the Earl of Warwick; Sir William Neville, kinsman of Clifford and Beauchampe;

9 H. MacCracken, The College Chaucer (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1929), p. 596.

Sir John Clanvowe, a distinguished soldier and diplomat and a member of the council. On his foreign embassies he had much to do with Sir Guihard d'Angle, military tutor to King Richard; Sir John Burlee, also Richard's tutor; the Earl of Salisbury, who fought at Crecy and Poitiers; Walter Skirlowe, Bishop of Durham, one of the greatest ecclesiastics and builders of the affairs of church and state, and many other men famous in their day as leaders of the time.¹⁰

As a literary figure it is not difficult to conceive Chaucer's position as leader of all poets and writers. Ranged beside Chaucer, who towered high above all the other writers of his time, only three deserve any consideration - Barbour, the first Scottish poet of merit; John Gower, also belonging to the court circle, a poet of note and to some extent Chaucer's rival, who gave to his works the stamp of "correctness" of prosody; and Wyclif, who superintended the first complete English translation of the Bible. In his travels and diplomatic missions he no doubt made the

¹⁰ Manly, op. cit., p. 42.

acquaintance of many French and Italian nobles, poets and rulers. With such wide and varied experiences it is no wonder that Chaucer was a man of great knowledge and learning. No one knows just where Chaucer received his education, but we do know that he was proficient in all the sciences of his time. Lounsbury says that Chaucer was one of the most learned men that ever lived, and biographers all agree with him. According to the statements of these biographers, Lounsbury testifies that very few if any subjects that were known in his time were unknown to him. He not only knew everything, but he knew it well. He was proficient in all kinds of doctrines and sciences. Leland tells us that he left the university "an acute logician, a delightful orator, an elegant poet, a profound philosopher, and an able mathematician." ¹¹ Not many poets have deserved such high praise. He was also considered a devout theologian by men of repute. All these assertions were repeated by Bale and Pits, though the latter seemed to have had some scruples about certifying Chaucer's knowledge of

¹¹ Thos. Lounsbury, Studies in Chaucer (New York: Harper & Bros. 1891), Vol. 2, p. 169.

divinity.¹² According to Lounsbury, however, credit must be given where it is due. To attain eminence in any particular one of the departments of study is itself sufficient to confer immortality upon most men; but according to the earliest biographers, Chaucer attained eminence in all of them.

Manly, tells that Chaucer was not only able to read four languages - English, French, Italian and Latin; but he had in his possession a library of sixty books, a number rarely found in the possession of any private individual of the fourteenth century.¹³

He was familiar with a considerable number of Latin classics and with the writings of several Fathers of the Church. He had more than a casual acquaintance with the great theological controversies regarding predestination and grace which was carried on in a preceding generation by Thomas Bradwardine and in his own day by Wyclif and Ralph Strode. He possessed more

12 "Theologus non contemnendus Pitseus", De Illustribus Angliae Scriptoribus, p. 572; quoted in Lounsbury, op. cit., p. 170.

13 Manly, op. cit., p. 5.

than a superficial knowledge of the science of his times as represented by the real sciences of physics and astronomy and the pseudosciences of astrology and alchemy.¹⁴ Even making the greatest deductions from his learning, enough remains to raise a question as to how he obtained it.

Chaucer's sixty years or so of life in the fourteenth century were remarkable for more reasons than one. When we consider him as he was, the real Chaucer, living among real people with problems and troubles of every description, mingling with the best and the worst, the wealthy as well as the poor, the noble as well as the peasant, we become fully aware that his was a life in which every phase of English living played a conspicuous part. His was an age of intense activity, for every kind of problem seemed to have risen to vex the inhabitants of the country. There were labor problems then as there are in the world today. The Black Death was in a large measure responsible for the calamity which befell England in

14 Manly, op. cit., p. 13.

regard to farm-hands throughout the land. Those who survived, those unfit and inefficient, strove to assert themselves as the ruling class with disorder as a consequent result. Disorder and exactions reached such a point that formidable uprisings similar to the French Jacquerie occurred. There was revolt against unjust taxation and tyrannical landowners, an upheaval of the peasantry so forceful as to threaten the government, imperil all property and even endanger this very civilization and life of England. Even the very war that was going on between England and France brought about changes in the art of fighting. At the same time the revolt against the papacy was taking hold; religious schism divided the country with John Wyclif in England and John Huss in Bohemia as leaders. It is well known that Chaucer associated with and deemed as intimate acquaintances the political leaders of the Lollard movement, but there has never been any evidence that he at any time and in any way had ever considered or adopted any part of their heresies. 15

15 G. L. Kittredge, Chaucer and His Poetry (Cambridge: University Press, 1939), p. 4.

Another vital and important event took place during the poet's lifetime - the Revival of Learning. His contemporaries to whom he was indebted for a great deal of his work, were Petrarch and Boccaccio, but of these we shall speak at length later. Suffice it to say that these few events indicate that Chaucer lived verily in an age of fearful religious, political, social, and literary activity. It was as overwhelmed with the problems of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness even as our own modern civilization is threatened with national and international social unrest. Chaucer was wholly and unmistakably a man of his time. He was an active participator, an eyewitness, a living, active, interested being who keenly observed and wholeheartedly plunged himself into each succeeding series of problems, victories, patriotic or political events. His entire life was bound with that of his country and his associates who directed its destiny. To him all that concerned his fellow-man was a source of profound interest and consideration. His works are a testimony of his attitude towards the period in which he lived. They are a manifestation of his efficiency as chronicler of his age, though at times he might even be considered some-

thing of an historian. That he was a man of great learning and intellect, loyal and upright, there is no shadow of a doubt.

Although rare documents reveal Chaucer's intimate association with the interests of England, he himself does not make this known in his writings. Legouis states that Chaucer makes no reference to the events in which he took part either in his romantic verse or in that which is most strikingly realistic. He wonders at the fact that there is not even a single patriotic line in the poet's work because at that particular time in the master poet's life, patriotic sentiment was beginning to rise with some force in the hearts of Englishmen.¹⁶

As a writer of the court Chaucer's verse was no doubt widely read, and if he had so willed, the poet might have sought to make good his favor in the eyes of the King and the royal house by singing the praises of the victories of the English over the French in the great war. He could have lauded the King himself as the

16 Legouis, op. cit., p. 31.

hero of great and dangerous fighting on the battlefield. But Chaucer very modestly refrains from any such thing. As Legouis further points out, there is only one allusion to the battles of the great national war contained in one line in which Chaucer describes the young pilgrim squire who

had been sometyne in chivachye,
In Flaunders, in Artoys, and Picardye,
And born him wel, as of so litel space,
In hope to stonden in his lady grace.

Prologue to Canterbury Tales, II, 85-88 17

The details of Chaucer's life confirm the fact that he was first and foremost a man of keen intellect and broad learning, a man of dynamic character with God-given talents and a power of commanding genius.

17 Legouis, op. cit., p. 31.

CHAPTER II

CHAUCER AND THE RENAISSANCE

The one great event in Chaucer's life which may be regarded as producing the most influential and profoundest effect on his literary career was his first visit to Italy in the year 1372. At that particular period Italy was at the utmost height of artistic splendor. She was enjoying to the full the cup of intellectual and cultural energy -- the new birth or the Renaissance. Everywhere, through the length and breadth of the land, there arose masterpieces from marvellous and unknown minds and hands. The City-States, in particular, basked in the light of beauty produced by masters of painting, sculpture, and architecture. De Sanctis speaks of this era with enthusiasm and lauds the greatness of the Italy of his time, which still today stands with its rich culture as a beacon to the rest of the world. At bottom, the Renaissance was an awakening of the human intellect to wider fields

of activity, and a recovery of the freedom of individual thought and action which had been lost in the Middle Ages. As De Sanctis points out, there arose a purified and invigorated knowledge of Greek and Latin. There was a quickening movement of the human spirit, and Dante who wrote his soul-stirring Divina Commedia in Italian instead of in Latin, was the "glimmer of the dawn" of this rebirth. At the time when Chaucer came to Italy, Dante had already been dead for at least fifty years. His poetry, however, was beginning to establish itself in the hearts and minds of the people as a world-force in the realm of imagination. Petrarch was spending his days at his villa at Arquà near Padua. He was the real initiator of the Renaissance in the field of literature and learning. He not only wrote many exquisite sonnets in Italian, but he aroused classical antiquity from its long winter sleep. Boccaccio a contemporary and friend of Petrarch, was spending his life at Fiesole near Florence. Small wonder is it then, that this new vista which met Chaucer on his arrival from England, took hold of him with a fascination hitherto unknown to him, and stimulated him to the highest degree.

Chaucer's visit to Italy may indeed be regarded as providential. Fortunately, he knew enough about the Italian language to be able to read and speak it. It is conjectured that the wondrous spectacle of the Italian Renaissance impressed Chaucer even before he had had any association with the Italian writers from whom the new splendor and richness of thought came to him. Legouis explicitly states that Chaucer attained the heights of his greatness only after having been impelled to greater efforts by the brilliance and warmth of Italy.

Some biographers doubt that Chaucer had ever any knowledge of Italian, but most of the more authoritative scholars agree that he certainly knew the language. Lounsbury relates that Chaucer's natural studiousness led him to become acquainted with French, Latin, and Italian besides his own English. Most of the worthwhile literature of the time was written in either French or Latin, and in order to explore the realms of the knowledge of the world one had to at least know the Latin. Without it, access to nearly every branch of learning was closed. Latin was essential to every educated man. French took its place in some things, but it could not fill it.

French and Italian were during this period, the common possession of all those who deemed themselves or who aimed to become men of letters in any degree. Lounsbury says, "In knowing them Chaucer would have no distinction over the rest of his contemporaries. With Italian it was different. A knowledge of that language was not common."¹ Both Lounsbury and Legouis base their testimony that Chaucer did know Italian upon the fact that it was for this reason more than any other that he was delegated not once, but twice, to Italy on important affairs. It seems a bit cruel that Nicolas, who claims avid interest in and knowledge of Chaucer, should as his biographer, deny the fact of Chaucer's knowledge of Italian. He claims that the poet uses French quotations in his work and that the lack of any Italian quotations in his works is sufficient proof that Chaucer knew nothing of that tongue. On the contrary, what would all these or any quotations avail the English readers? They did not know Italian and consequently would not and could not understand them. They knew French. They knew

¹ T. Lounsbury, Studies in Chaucer (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1895), vol. 2, p. 202.

Latin. They did not know Italian. As far as Nicholas was concerned he could discover no proof of any kind that Chaucer knew Italian. We know that as far back as the sixteenth century, Thynne had pointed out this accomplishment in Chaucer, when he related that Chaucer's Knight's Tale was either a translation or an adaptation of Boccaccio's Teseide. In later years Warton and Tyrwhitt revived the knowledge of it and published the evidence of it two centuries later.²

Some biographers claim that Chaucer knew absolutely nothing about the Italian language until he made his first journey to Italy. That seems somewhat incredible. In the short space of time that Chaucer spent in Italy he could not possibly have mastered the language. The opposite opinion is more generally accepted. Professor Manly strongly objects to the opinion that Chaucer did not know the Italian language while he was in England, but that his first visit to Florence marked the beginning of his knowledge of the Italian language and acquaintance with Italian

2 Lounsbury, op. cit., p. 202.

literature. He says:

This may be true, but it should be born in mind that there were many Italians in London at this time, that a number of them lived in Chaucer's immediate neighborhood, and that the connections of Chaucer's family with the mint, where many Italians were employed in responsible positions, would have furnished an easy means of his obtaining some knowledge of both the language and the literature of Italy before he made the journey. It is indeed possible that one reason for choosing him as a member of this commission may have been that he had some knowledge of Italian. It seems also worth suggesting that the home of Jacopo de Provano was not more than twenty miles from Saluzzo, the scene of the Clerke's Tale.³

In his study of Geoffrey Chaucer, Emile Legouis has often repeated the fact that Chaucer could never have attained certain heights of inspiration and beauty had he not been impelled by the radiance of the illustrious Italian poets who, after the French poets, became his masters and a marvel of revelation to him. Of course, all -- Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio influenced him greatly, but not all to the same degree.

As was mentioned before, Dante had already been

³ J. M. Manly, Chaucer's Canterbury Tales (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1928), p. 16.

dead for fifty years or more when Chaucer first came to Italy. His Divine Comedy was awakening the whole of Italy to admiration and to intense religious feeling. But since Boccaccio at that time was preparing to write a commentary upon it, Chaucer in all probability was aware of the greatness of Dante. He gives us sufficient proof of this in line 470 of the Monk's Tale where in his story of Ugolino he tells the reader that if he wants to hear more of it, he should read "the grete poete of Itaille" called Dante, who would relate the story from point to point without lacking one word. Thus, it is obvious that Chaucer was not only familiar with Dante, but that he admired him for what he was. This admiration led Chaucer to include in his various works frequent references to the noble Italian laureate, as for example:

1. In the Legend of Good Women the short extract taken from his poems is accompanied with specific mention of his name.

Out of the hous of Cesar, thus scythe Dante;
Whoso that goth, alwey sche note not wante.
(Ll. 336 - 337)

2. In line 1125-26 of Wife of Bath's Tale, he is termed "wise poete of Florence."

Wal kan the wise poete of Florence;
That highte Dante, speken in this sentence.

3. In Friar's Tale he is mentioned again with Virgil as a revealer of the secrets of the infernal world:

Konne in a chayer ride of this sentence
Bet than Virgile while he was on lyre,
Or Dant also - - - -

(Canterbury Tales; LL.1518-19)

4. In House of Fame Chaucer says that Aeneas went down into hell to see his father and there he witnessed every torment of that place and to the reader who may wish to learn the details he recommends Virgil or Claudian or Dante.

5. In Monk's Tale he says:

Whoso wal here it in a lenger wise,
Redeth the grete poete of Ytaille
That highte Dant, for he kan al devyse
Fro point to point, nat a word wal he faille.

(Canterbury Tales, Lines 1349-53)

Chaucer's indebtedness to Dante is a question that has been much disputed among Chaucerian scholars. Many studies in both authors have been made to discover all vague and illusory resemblances in order to ascertain with reasonable determination or precision what the direct obligations to the Italian poet really are. Fortunately for Chaucer and English literature, not many lines or ideas can be traced to Dante. "This would infer that Dante's influence on Chaucer was

neither profound nor permanent." ⁴ But Legouis in reference to this says, "It was only on rare occasions, and then not for long, that Chaucer was able to touch the same key as Dante;" ⁵ And further on, "The difference was too great between the impassioned and merciless Florentine, the fierce politician, the mystic visionary, and the English story-teller, enamoured of life and all things living, whose slight lyrical vein was ever held in check by his sense of humor. And Chaucer felt this himself for we have seen him describing in an allegory his vain efforts to follow the great poet in his upward career, when the golden eagle bears him away to the highest heaven, and he, bewildered, wants to return to solid earth, thus asserting in this curious way his material nature. He is not the spirit to descent into hell, nor to rise up into heaven."⁶

It is evident from Lounsbury as well as from other Chaucerians that there are only three very distinct instances of indebtedness in the Canterbury Tales.

4 Lounsbury, op. cit., p. 236

5 E. Legouis, Chaucer (New York; E. P. Dutton & Co., 1928), p. 115.

6 Ibid.

They are as follows:

1. An invocation to the Virgin Mary beginning with line 29 of the Seconda Nonnes Tale to line 49. These owe their originality to a passage in the thirty third canto of the Paradiso.
2. The story of Ugolino, Count of Pisa, in the Monk's Tale. The author himself here refers us to Dante in words which have been cited above.
3. In the Legend of Good Women the following lines show Chaucer's obligations to Dante:

Envy - I preie to god yeve hire myschance! ---
 Is lavender in the grete court alwey,
 For she ne parthth, neythir nyght ne day
 Out of the hous of Cesar, thus seyth Dante:
 (ll. 333-336 and 358-361)

It is also assumed that Dante's famous words to be the effect that the greatest sorrows, while in misery, is the remembrance of happier times, are the source of a passage of similar meaning in the story of Troilus and Cressida.⁷ Professor Ten-Brink suggests that the comparison in the lines at the beginning of the second book of Troilus and Cressida is probably due to the opening lines of the Purgatorio. According to Lounsbury, there is only one more extract of two lines which refer

⁷ Lounsbury, op. cit., p. 236.

directly to Dante, since no others are pointed out. Rossetti, in his comparison of Troilus and Cressida with the Filostrato could find no others and scholars who have dedicated their time and labors to thorough and intimate studies of both Chaucer and Dante, record no further obligations of the English poet to the Italian master. The more frequent use of Dante is made in the Parlement of Fowls.

French states that no poem of Chaucer's shows more striking evidence of Dante's Divine Comedy than the House of Fame. "Passages translated or imitated from Dante are scattered through the poem, and an attempt has been made to show that certain features of the work, such as the eagle, the desert, and the steep rock, have their source in the Divine Comedy. Some critics are of the opinion that the House of Fame is the poem that Lydgate had in mind when he said that Chaucer wrote a work which he called "Dante in Inglissh".⁸ French says in regard to this, that one conclusion which can be definitely accepted out of the

8 Prologue to the "Fall of Princes", p. 303.

theories which have been put forth about the relation between the House of Fame and the Divine Comedy, is that Chaucer must have been reading Dante with unusually close attention at the time when he wrote this poem.⁹

Lounsbury's opinion of Dante's influence coincides perfectly with that of Legouis. His opinion is worthy of particular attention.

While Chaucer's admiration and appreciation of Dante was deep and genuine, there was too much difference both in the intellectual and spiritual nature of the two men for one to fall profoundly under the influence of the other. Their literary characteristics were too distinct for Chaucer to reproduce much either of the manner or material of the other. His imitation of him and adaptation from him are accordingly far less than those which took place in the case of several inferior authors with whom he was no more familiar. The lines of Chaucer which can be traced to the Italian are not many ----- they cannot be made to exceed a hundred lines. Indebtedness on this scale when placed side by side with the obligations the poet is under to Boccaccio or "Roman de La Rose" ---- shrinks fairly in significance. ¹⁰

A vital question which arises in connection with Chaucer's visit to Italy is whether on this first

⁹ French, R. D., A Chaucer Handbook (New York: F. S. Crofts & Co., 1939), p. 125.

¹⁰ Lounsbury, op. cit., p. 248.

journey he made the acquaintance of Petrarch and Boccaccio who were beyond dispute the two great living men of letters in Europe besides the English poet. Most biographers are of the opinion that he did meet Petrarch and that he spent some time with him. Godwin states in his life of the poet, that after the business of his embassy was concluded, Chaucer "made a tour of the northern states of Italy." Most biographers, among whom are Godwin, Coulton, Lounsbury and Legouis, are of the opinion that Chaucer did meet Petrarch. Manly is not certain that he met either Petrarch or Boccaccio since Chaucer never mentions them by name, and "the only hint that he knew Petrarch comes from the fact that he mentions him by name and speaks with regret of his death." ¹¹ His own words in the prologue of the Clerke's Tale would seem to testify to personal contact with the former; and most biographers have assumed that it is not only the fictitious Clerk, but Chaucer himself who confesses to have learned the story of Griselda straight from Petrarch

¹¹ Manly; Chaucer's Canterbury Tales (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1932), p. 44.

I wal yow telle a tale, which that I
 Learned at Padwe of a worthy Clerk,
 As preved by his wordes and his werk,
 He is now deed and nayled in his cheste
 I prey to God so yere his soule reste!
 Fraunceys Petrak, the lauriat poete,
 Highte this clerk, whos rethorik sweete
 Enlumyned al Ytaille of poetrie,
 As a lynyan dide of philosophie
 Or lawe or oother art particular.
 But deeth that wol nat suffre us dwellin heer
 But as it were a twynklyng of an eye,
 Hem both hath slayn; and alle shul we dye.

(Prologue to Clerk's Tale.
 ll. 25-38)

Here we have the poet's own words in testimony of his attitude toward and admiration for Petrarch. As far as has been discovered, though Chaucer speaks highly of Petrarch when he mentions him, there are no more than merely two references to him cited in his works -- one, the passage in the prologue to the tale of the "Clerk of Oxford" quoted above, and another; in the Monk's Tale he speaks of the Italian poet as "my master Petrarch".

"Let hym unto my maister Petrak go,
 That writ ynough of this I undertake."
 (L. 3515-16)

There are no records apart from these two incidents to prove that Chaucer really and truly knew Petrarch, had

met him personally, or had studied his Italian works. Chaucer did however, dilute into three seven lined stanzas Petrarch's 88th sonnet beginning

If Love is not, ah God! what feel I so?
 And if love is, what manner of thing is he?
 If Love be good, from whence then comes my woe?
 If he be ill, wondrous it seems to me
 That every torment and adversity
 Which comes of him I can so joyous think
 For ever I thirst, the more from him I drink.

And if this in mine own delight I burn,
 From whence then comes my wailing and complaint?
 Rejoicing, why to tears do I return?
 I wot not, nor, unweary, why I faint.
 Oh living death, oh sweet harm strange and quaint!
 How can this harm and death so rage in me,
 Unless I do consent that it be so?

And if I do consent wrongfully
 Bewail my case: thus rolled and shaken sore
 All rudderless within a boat am I
 Amid the sea and out of sight of shore,
 Betwixt two winds contrary evermore.
 Alas, what is this wondrous malady?
 For heat of cold, for cold of heat, I die.

The Clerk's Tale or the story of Griselda is taken directly from Petrarch's Latin translation of Boccaccio's tenth novel of the tenth day which concludes the Decameron. There is no question in regard to Petrarch's handling of this tale since we have his own testimony in the form of a letter written to Boccaccio and dated June 8, 1373 which read as follows:

"Your work of Decameron fell for the first time into my hands in an excursion I made to Arqua a few weeks ago. Not having had time to peruse the whole, I did as ordinary readers are accustomed to do, fixed my attention principally upon the commencement and the conclusion. The description with which you set out, of the condition of our common country under the visitation of the plague, appeared to me equally just in the conception and pathetic in the execution. The narrative with which your work concludes (the tale of Grisildis) particularly struck me. When I considered that this story had affected me deeply in the hearing many years ago, and that you had regarded it with so much approbation as to be induced to translate it into Italian, and even to place it as the crown of your performance, where we are taught by the simplest rules of rhetoric to put whatever we regard as strongest and most persuasive. I was confirmed in the inclination I felt to confide in my present feelings. I therefore readily yielded to the propensity which impelled me to translate it into Latin, with such variations as my fancy suggested; and I now send the translation to you, in the hope that you will not entirely disapprove of what I have done."¹²

Godwin in his biography of Chaucer, manifests a deep interest in the English poet's relations with his Italian contemporary. He states that Chaucer was familiarly acquainted with the Decameron and knew full well that Petrarch had confessedly translated the tale

¹² William Godwin, Life of Chaucer, Vol. 2, (London: T. Davison, 1804), p. 464.

from that volume. Yet Chaucer preferred to credit Petrarch and not Boccaccio with the story. Why was this? Godwin declares that the English poet, anxious to commemorate his meeting with the Italian literary patriarch, chose this method of recording the pleasure he had reaped from his visit with Petrarch. However this may be, and whatever degree of familiarity our poet may have had with the Italian or his works, however deep and ardent his admiration for Him, there is very little to prove that he was influenced to a very high degree of emulation. Lounsbury is heartily in accord with such an opinion, as are also other critics of note. Godwin alone persists in crediting Chaucer with a long and intimate interview with Petrarch. He assumes that in all probability Chaucer travelled across northern Italy principally to visit the great poet laureate of that country whose fame was widely acclaimed, or to become acquainted with the great maritime state of Venice which was only twenty-two miles from the residence of Petrarca. He goes into an elaborate production of his own surmising, describing the interview between the two *littérateurs*, voicing their mutual potential feelings, the possible subject of their

conversation, etc. Here too, he narrates Chaucer's introduction to the Patient Grisildis story and also his enlightenment in regard to the author and his greater work, the Decameron.

It is very true that if Chaucer learned the history of the Grisildis from Petrarch at Padua, "he most certainly must have carried home with him from this tour the Decameron, and perhaps the other works of Boccaccio." 13

Tyrwhit has objected to the credibility of the interview with Petrarch since this visit has not been mentioned either by Petrarch or by his biographers. He "cannot help thinking that a reverential visit from a Minister of the King of England would have been so flattering to the old man, that either he himself or some of his biographers must have recorded it." 14

Sedgwich relates that although Petrarch was most intimately connected with his disciple Boccaccio for nearly thirty years, he had not seen the Decameron

13 Godwin, op. cit., p. 173.

14 Godwin, op. cit., Introductory Discourse, Vol. I - note 20.

until shortly before his death. And this, he thinks, happened only by chance while the elder poet was living in retirement at Arque in 1374. The Tale of Griselda so impressed him that he learned it related it to his friends at Padua. When he discovered how popular it was, he decided to translate it into Latin for the benefit of those who did not understand Italian and to facilitate its circulation. Sedgwick is of the opinion that Chaucer did not take the tale from the Latin version, but that he was among the friends to whom Petrarch related the story at Padua.¹⁵

Praz also discusses the matter of Chaucer's probable visit with Petrarch and his acquaintance with Boccaccio. Chaucer went to Italy and visited in Florence in the autumn of which Boccaccio was to take up the very honorable appointment of commentator on the Divine Comedy. Boccaccio was very likely living in retirement at Certaldo then, but Praz thinks it extremely improbable that Chaucer should not have heard of the great poet's renown: ¹⁶ and furthermore

¹⁵ H. D. Sedgwick, Remarks on Life and Writings of Boccaccio (London, 1804), Decameron Vol. 1, p. 30.

¹⁶ Mario Praz, "Chaucer and the Great Writers of the Trecento" in Monthly Criterion, VI, 1927, p. 140.

that the question of Chaucer's possibility of having met Petrarch is all a divagation.¹⁷ Praz further describes a battle royal on the subject which was fought in the columns of the Athenaeum in 1898 between Charles H. Bromby and St. Clair Baddeley. Both had well adapted, pertinent arguments which would have been carried on indefinitely had not the Editor of the review put an end to the controversy.

Be that as it may, our chief interest does not lie in the versification of whether Chaucer did or did not personally meet Petrarch. That is of little consequence, indeed, We must rely on Chaucer's testimony when he states in the words of the Clerk that he learned the tale of Griselda from Petrarch. That made the latter the intermediary between Chaucer and Boccaccio. It was Boccaccio, more than Dante or Petrarch, who influenced Chaucer most forcibly. He it was who supplied for the great English writer a wealth of resources, rich in pattern and replete

¹⁷ Mario Praz, "Chaucer and the Great Writers of the Trecento" in Monthly Criterion, VI, 1927, p. 140.

with a variety of fresh ideas and events.

Among the individual authors of the Italian period from whom Chaucer drew his material, Boccaccio stands out pre-eminently. This fact is in no wise surprising if we consider that the literature of modern Europe as distinguished from that of the Middle Ages, owes its origin to three Italian poets, all Florentines by birth -- Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio. De Sanctis goes into a long and detailed study of the poets and hails them as founders of the "letteratura moderna". The common characteristics, as set forth by Symonds, which makes these three men modern in every sense and severs them from medieval ties, is that three main types of imaginative writing assumed with them the quality permanent monumental art. ¹⁸ To comprehend the theological, political, allegorical, and mental temper of those medieval years, we must go to the Divine Comedy. For the attainment of the ultimate perfection of the love-mysticism and the lyrics of Provence, we must go to "il Canzoniere" - Petrarch.

¹⁸ J. A. Symonds, Giovanni Boccaccio As Man and Author (London: John C. Nimmo 1895), p. 2.

In Boccaccio we discover the means with which ancient legends, are elevated to the pedestal of vivid self-conscious art, and the imagination of a form of prose narrative which in the novel has superseded epic poetry. All three poets possessed the same characteristics in so far as their works were concerned. Each adopted some definite form or shape into which vague and scattered materials were wrought permanent and immutable. Each writer was the keen mergence of his personality as a man, that penetration of the art-work with the artist's self which was conspicuously absent in the writings of their predecessors. A third trait is the vivacity of their sensations, the awakened life, the resuscitated realism, the fine analysis of motives, the nice discrimination of physical and moral qualities; all of which transports us from a world of dreams and abstractions into the world of fact and nature.¹⁹

"Dante takes for his province the drama of the human soul in its widest scope. Petrarch takes the heart of an individual man, himself; Boccaccio takes the complexities of daily life, the 'quicquid agunt homines' of common experience."²⁰

19 Symonds, op. cit., p. 2.

20 Ibid., p. 3.

Each was interested in a different phase, though all were concerned with the one all important being -- man. Thus Dante created the epic, Petrarch the lyric, and Boccaccio the novel.

De Sanctis points out that all three Italians were responsible for the modern literary development of their time and the years that followed, but he intimates that Boccaccio's influence dominated the realm of Italian literary taste for three hundred years or more. Symonds agrees with De Sanctis and upholds his own view with the argument that while the three poets were held in great measure by the past, Boccaccio's temperament and forms of art alone anticipated the future. Symonds says "He alone grew with the growing age, in his substitution of sensual and concrete for mystical and abstract ideals, in his joyous acceptance of nature and the world, in his frank abandonment of theological, scholastic, and political preoccupations." 21

21 Symonds, op. cit., p. 7.

Symonds further gives his reasons why Boccaccio eclipsed Dante and even Petrarch. He asserts that the people felt more at home with Boccaccio than with his predecessors. First of all, Boccaccio knew life as the people knew it; he wanted what they wanted; and he painted things and people as they actually were. In other words he was realistic in every sense of the word. His insincerity, humor, and appetites were theirs, and he amused them by satisfying their every impassioned whim and fancy. And if the Italians of that period were highly fascinated and powerfully impressed, can any one imagine for a moment that Chaucer was not filled with the same human emotions as these people, with the same tastes and desires? Was not he, also, a great observer of men and their affairs? Did they not form his chief interest in life? Precisely because this is so, we find Chaucer keenly alert on his visit to Italy, his intellect seeking new vistas until Petrarch opened the realm of Boccaccio's literary achievements.

There has been much discussion among scholars in regard to the question of whether Chaucer did or did

not meet Boccaccio. Since there are no written records of such an event most critics agree that it is not probable that the two ever met. Professor Hales, in his article on Chaucer in the Dictionary of National Biography, after discussing the possibility of Chaucer's having met Petrarch and Boccaccio on his first visit to Italy in 1372-73, offers the suggestion that Chaucer may have been present at Boccaccio's first lecture on the Commedia on August 3, 1373. Professor Toynbee, however, is heartily opposed to this opinion. He states that Professor Hales is wrong; that the petition of the Florentines for the establishment of the chair of Dante was not taken into consideration by the signoria until August 9, 1373 and the inaugural lecture was not delivered till two months later - October 23, 1373. This we know for certain from the diary of a fellow citizen of Boccaccio named Guido Monaldi, who among the events of the year 1373 records:

"Domenica a di ventitre di Ottobre comincio a leggere il Dante M. Giovanni Boccaccio." ²²

22 Athenaeum "Chaucer and Boccaccio", vol. 1905, p. 210.

Records prove that on November 22, 1373, Chaucer was back in England and on that day received a pension in person. Toynbee remarks that the possibility of his attendance at Boccaccio's first lecture on Dante in Florence a month previously is somewhat slender.

"If it took Horace Walpole's letters from ten to twelve days to reach Florence from London in the eighteenth century, it does not appear probable that Chaucer four hundred years earlier could have covered the distance with the short space of thirty days." 23

It is natural to hope, and reasonable to believe that the two great persons met, but as scholars will have it, there is no recording of such an event and they refuse to take anything for granted. Moreover, although Chaucer speaks admiringly of Dante and Petrarch, he does not once, name the man to whom he owed more than to both of these together.

"It is impossible," says Lounsbury, "even to know the cause of Chaucer's failure to mention Boccaccio's name." Where Boccaccio's name ought to stand in Chaucer's pages, we find the name 'Lollius' ". 24

"Lollius" is the name given as "myn autour" of

23 Toynbee, Athanaeum, op. cit.

24 Lounsbury, op. cit., p. 234.

the Filostrato" which the English poet translated and transformed into one of his loveliest poems Troilus and Cressida. To "Lollius" also Chaucer ascribes certain incidents of the Trojan story which are found nowhere of the Filostrato, and taken to be Boccaccio's own inventions. Yet he never mentions him anywhere. While he knew well certain of Boccaccio's writings, he knew nothing whatever of the author not even his name. "The Italian biographer, Landan, has followers when he suggest that Chaucer, knowing what he was about, declined to name an author whom many condemned as immoral." ²⁵ "And yet", says Legouis, "it was Boccaccio who, towards the middle of Chaucer's career, influenced him most strongly." ²⁶

It was he who supplied him with some of his most remarkable stories, and almost without exception, with the pattern for those verses of the English poet which are most decorative or passionate. It is obvious that although "some of Chaucer's tales are similar to

²⁵ Catherine Carswell, The Tranquil Heart, Portrait of Giovanni Boccaccio. (New York: Haricourt Brace & Co., 1937), p. 322.

²⁶ Legouis, op. cit., p. 116.

Boccaccio's novelle, the English poet does not seem to have any knowledge of the Decameron. Some scholars are of the opinion that Chaucer planned his Canterbury Tales on the Decameron, but it is not likely that Chaucer ever saw a copy of it. It must be borne in mind that books in those days were rare and circulated only at a very slow rate. Their multiplication was indeed a problem of no little consequence so that it is not surprising to find Chaucer ignorant of its existence. Lounsbury states that the collected Decameron could not have come into Chaucer's hands. The Decameron made its appearance in 1353, about twenty years before Petrarch came across it. We have seen from Petrarch's letter to Boccaccio quoted above, that he had read the work as a whole in late 1373, after which he translated the Griselda story. "How then, asks Lounsbury, "could a foreigner have come across it?" 27

Legouis is in harmony with other critics in upholding the assumption that Chaucer was not acquainted

27 Lounsbury, op. cit., p. 229.

with Boccaccio's major work. If he were, critics argue, why did he not use the Italian original for his source instead of Petrarch's Latin translation of it? Legouis very wisely and with keen insight declares that "the influence of Boccaccio is so apparent, whenever Chaucer had some definite works of his before him, that the English writer, had he known the stories of the Decameron, never could have used any of them without betraying their origin."²⁸ Whatever the facts may have been, this we know for a certainty -- that Chaucer did unquestionably know the Latin works of the Italian Humanist and poet for his indebtedness can be definitely traced. From the De Casibus Vivorum et Feminarum Illustrium Chaucer borrowed the idea of the "tragedies" which compose his Monk's Tale. Boccaccio's work includes accounts of Adam, Samson, Balthasar, Zenobia, Nero, and Croesus, and it is evident that they furnished Chaucer with suggestions for his own stories of the same personages and used the form of short poems of eight

Legouis, op. cit., p. 117.

line stanzas. However, Chaucer added other unfortunate lives, such as Lucifer, Hercules, Nebuchadnezzar, King of Spain, King of Cyprus, Holofernes, and others.

From De Casibus and De Claris Mulieribus; Chaucer derived some of the incidents and passages found not only in the Monk's Tale but also in the Legend of Good Women. This was probably inspired by the De Claris Mulieribus, where Boccaccio related in brief the affairs or adventures of 105 famous women.

Legouis does not credit him with regard to the matter for Chaucer borrowed that chiefly from Ovid.

"He simply used Boccaccio as a model for the plan of the book, the prologue, and the successive lives."²⁹

The fullest and most direct obligation Chaucer is under to either of these treatises is in the story of Zenobia in the Monk's Tale. R. K. Root³⁰ makes a statement to the effect that if Boccaccio's De Casibus Mulieribus suggested to Chaucer a general idea of a series of exemplary tragedies, it contributed little to the substance of his poem. "For not one single one

²⁹ Legouis, op. cit., p. 119.

³⁰ R. K. Root, "The Monk's Tale" in Chaucer's Canterbury Tales, Bryan & Dempster (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1941), p. 165.

of the monk's biographies is it the primary source." ³¹
 All critics agree that it is the unmistakable source
 of Zenobia, but all other probabilities they discard.

One Latin work of the Italian poet Chaucer had
 consulted frequently if not fully mastered -- the De
Genealogia Deorum Gentilium et Herorum. This,
 Lounsbury explains was essentially a dictionary of
 ancient mythology prepared on a somewhat extensive
 scale. "It became a storehouse from which men, of the
 time drew forth knowledge of the details of classic
 fable. Chaucer was one among the number of men
 indebted to it." ³² Hypermetestis in the Legend of
Good Women owes certain particulars to this work.
 "It is probably the authority for representing Phyllis
 as daughter of Lycurgus, King of Thrace instead of
 Sithon, who usually appears as her father in classical
 story. Lycurgus occupies so prominent a place in this
 mythological dictionary that it seems reasonable to

³¹ R. K. Root, "The Monk's Tale" in Chaucer's
Canterbury Tales, Bryan & Dempster (Chicago: University
 of Chicago Press, 1941), p. 615.

³² Lounsbury, op. cit., p. 232.

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suppose that it was the source from which he was introduced into the Knight's Tale.³³

Cummings points out that in his study of the comparative literature of the two authors, nothing in the minor works of Boccaccio points to the influence of any one of them over any one of Chaucer's works. He refutes the claims of Koepfel and Child in their Chaucerian study of sources in which they assert that Boccaccio's Amorose Visione was used by Chaucer in his Hous of Fame. Of them he says, "-- -- both have gone astray. They furnished us with no really satisfactory evidence, that Chaucer knew the Amorose Visione or that it had an influence on the Parliament of Fowls or Hous of Fame.³⁴ He also states that Tatlock is wrong in his tentative evidence of Chaucer's possible knowledge of the Ameto and that Professor Young's theory concerning the Filocolo and Troilus and Cressida is incorrect. Professor Young developed his study by seven parallels showing the similarities

33 Lounsbury, op. cit., p. 233.

34 Cummings, op. cit., p. 12

in thought and idea. Legouis and Tatlock are in accord with Young's theory. Cummings declares, "We have no reasonable ground for the assumption that the Filocolo in any way influenced the writing of Troilus and Cressida, or even for the belief that Chaucer was at all acquainted with the Italian work when he wrote his poem."³⁵ It is Cummings' opinion also that there is no relation whatsoever between the Wife of Bath and Vedova of the Corbaccio, as Professor Rajna would have us believe, and he emphatically holds to the assertion that the only works of Boccaccio recognized as Chaucerian sources are the Filostrato and the Teseida. Of the Teseida we shall speak at length in the forthcoming chapter. We shall here discuss briefly the Filostrato and the influence it had upon Chaucer. Of this literary marvel Chaucer has made the fullest use. The poem Troilus and Cressida is partly translated and partly adapted from Boccaccio. "He preserved, almost with alterations, all the passionate descriptions, which means that he introduced hardly any alterations

35 Cummings, op. cit., p. 12.

in the character of Troilus - - - - - " ³⁶ Of the 713 stanzas of the Italian poem, there are less than two hundred which find no verbal echo in the Troilus." According to French, some of Boccaccio's stanzas are translated very closely, some are paraphrased freely and some furnish a suggestion which Chaucer elaborates at great length and in his own way.

In the translation, the poem inevitably expands and it is not surprising to discover that one stanza of the Filostrato grows into two stanzas in the Troilus. In a comparison made by Rossetti the exact degree of indebtedness on the part of the English poet is pointed out. The Filostrato is divided into nine books and has 5704 lines. Troilus and Cressida is divided into five books and contains 8329 lines. "Although a detailed study shows that not more than one third of the lines in the Troilus are translated from the Italian original, the debt which Chaucer owes to Boccaccio is much greater than the actual figures would indicate." ³⁷

36 Legouis, op. cit., p. 125.

37 French, op. cit., p. 179.

CHAPTER III

VARIOUS ASPECTS OF THE ITALIAN POET'S LIFE

Since we are vitally concerned with Chaucer's relations to Boccaccio as a source of literary influence, it is well to consider briefly, various aspects of the Italian poet's life, his nature, his ideals, and the development of his literary powers. Like Chaucer, Boccaccio has left no records of his early life, so that all the facts pertaining to his boyhood and early youth are obscure. Whatever knowledge scholars have gathered is mere conjecture. He is believed to have been born in the year 1313, eight years before the death of the illustrious author of the Divine Comedy, and nine years after the birth of his great contemporary and master, Francis Petrarch. The year in which Boccaccio was born is established by a letter written to him by Petrarch on his sixty-second birthday, in which the letter states "if you do not lie, and if following the custom of the young

you do not rob yourself of several years, in order of birth I precede you by nine of them." ¹ Laura's poet, the very same letter tells us, was born on July 20, 1304. It then follows, that Boccaccio's birth took place in 1313.

His actual birthplace was not Florence, the great city of Renaissance culture as is so often taken for granted. Although he himself says he was "of Certaldo", a small village in the Valdelsa, about twenty miles to the south of the Florentine Contada, where he possessed some property and where he came in his last years to die, there is reason to believe that he was not born there. The opinion most generally professed by Italian scholars is that he was born in Paris of a French mother. It is difficult to assert this as a fact because Boccaccio himself never speaks of his mother; but very strong evidence from within his work and from outside events very definitely support this belief.

¹ Edward Hutton, Giovanni Boccaccio (London: John Lane Co., 1910), p. 13.

We do know for certain that the family of Boccaccio was originally from Certaldo in Valdelsa. His father was the Florentine banker and money-changer Boccaccio di Chellino da Certaldo, commonly called Boccaccio. Not much is known about him. Biographers tell us that he was of very humble condition of considerable importance. Hutton tells us, as do also Baldelli and Salerti, that in 1318 he was in business in Florence, the name of his firm being Simon Joannis Orlandini, Conte de Certaldo. In the first half of 1324 he was among the "aggiunti deputati" of the "Arte del Cambio" for the election of the Consiglieri; in the latter part of 1327 he represented the Societa di Bardi in Naples, and was very well known to King Robert. In 1332 he was one of the "Fattori" for the same Societa in Paris, a post of least equivalent to that of a director of a bank in our day. These offices were important and reveal the fact that the person who held them was someone of importance. Of him Domenico Bandino says, "He was a man shrewd and extremely skilled in affairs." ²

² Thomas C. Chubb, Life of Giovanni Boccaccio (New York: Albert & Charles Boni, 1930), p. 13.

As a young man in 1310, he was in business in Paris, for we know that on May 12, in that year, fifty-four Knights Templars were put to death there, and this Boccaccio tells us his father saw. It is further certain that there was a considerable Florentine business in France at that time, despite the disaster of the times, for Henry VII had just entered Italy.³ Boccaccio di Chellino seems to have remained in Paris on business. That he was still there in 1313 we know, for in that year, on March 11, Jacques de Molay, Master of the Templars, was executed and Giovanni tells us that his father was present. Bandino, speaking of the poet's father says that while he dwelt in Paris for the purpose of trade, he "loved vehemently" a young woman of that city "and her, as the admirers of Boccaccio state, although far more common is another opinion, he later made his wife. She bore him Giovanni."⁴ This would lead us to believe then that Boccaccio must almost certainly have been born in Paris (an illegitimate child according to some scholars).

3 Hutton, op. cit., p. 5.

4 Chubb, op. cit., p. 13.

Boccaccio was probably a tiny babe when his father returned to Florence in 1314 and almost immediately the elder Boccaccio married a Florentine woman, Margherita di Gian Donato di Martoli. Whether the child was brought to Florence at this time is not definitely known. It is presumed that he was not, for Boccaccio tells us that the Arno was the first river he saw with conscious eyes, and (in the "Ameto") that he was merely an infant -- "Fanciullo, cercai i regni Etrurci".

Of these early years we have very little knowledge. As early as seven years, he himself says, he was set to read and write. Young as he was his application to learning exhibited proofs of a genius that presaged the most felicitous success. His father tendered him to the care of Giovanni di Domenico Mazzuoli da Strada to begin the study of "grammatica". With Mazzuoli he began Latin, but his father being a commercial man, and having designed his son for trade and the counting-house, took him from the study of grammar and attempted to interest him in arithmetic. With this in view he placed him with a Florentine

Merchant who took him into his business and taught him the fundamentals of bookkeeping, accounts, banking, and money-lending. Young Boccaccio came to hate the work. For six years he endeavored to apply himself with good will to the weary work chosen by his ambitious parent. However, the attempt was not successful. Impatient and tired of this occupation, he obtained permission to abandon it, only to discover that he must divert all his energy to the study of Canon Law. This was no better than his previous work. He dislike it heartily. His ambition, his only interest was poetry. "His father's commands, the reproofs and exhortations of his friends", says Dubois, "were sufficient to check his natural tendency to poetry and philosophy." ⁵ He himself has described this ideal, this tendency, in book 15 of the De Genealogia Deorum, stating that it was not a new inclination that turned his thoughts wholly to poetry, that it was a disposition of long standing; "for I very well remember that before seven years of age, when as yet I had seen no fictions,

⁵ H. Dubois, Remarks On The Life And Writers of Boccaccio, (London: Wright, 1804), p. 5.

had applied to no masters, and scarcely knew my letters, I had a natural talent for fiction and produced some trifling tales".

His aversion to law was so fixed as not to be removed by any threat or entreaty of his father. He soon threw off all restraint and gave himself up to the study of the poets. He became the disciple of Petrarch, who became his true friend and master. By his keen interest in Boccaccio, he fostered the younger man's precocious tendencies. He supplied him with money and books, and aided him with advice and sympathy. Though principally known and deservedly celebrated as a writer or inventor of tales, he was usually placed in the third rank after Dante and Petrarch.

The advantage of the intimate friendship between Boccaccio and Petrarch was chiefly on the side of the former, who without such assistance might easily have deserted the Muses and sunk into trade drudgery or legal chicanery. Dubois relates that when Boccaccio saw the Platonic Sonnet of his master Petrarch, in a fit of despair, he committed all his poetry to the flames except a single poem of which his own good taste

had long taught him to entertain a more favorable opinion.

In consequence of his devotion to learning, he procured a translation of Homer into Latin for his own use. He succeeded in obtaining a professorship at Florence for a Grecian, Leontius Pylatus of Thessalonica to interpret and explain the Maeonian Bard. The Republic of Florence honored him with the freedom of a citizen and in 1351 he was commissioned to negotiate the return of Petrarch. The lover of Laura, however, could not be induced to settle once more in the fair city of raging factions. On the contrary, he induced Boccaccio to leave it also, and we find the poet visiting several places in Italy until he stopped at the court of Naples where he was well received. It was here that he met his great love.

Just as Dante had his Beatrice and Petrarch his Laura, so Boccaccio had his Fiammetta. He first met Maria D'Acquino, in the Church of San Lorenzo in Naples in the year 1338. She was the natural daughter of Robert of Anjou, King of Naples. Boccaccio bestowed upon her the poetical name of Fiammetta.

What his actual relations and intimacies with Fiammetta were, was unknown. He says that on the occasion of their second meeting, she requested him to rehandle the old French romance of Florie et Blanceflor, and in answer to her wish he produced the prose-tale of Filocopo. Beyond this we have no definite record of their intercourse. Fiammetta was a young wife but "if we were to trust the autobiographical passages of the Ameto and Amorosa Visione, and to accept the novel of Fiammetta as anything approaching to real history," declares Symonds, "we should have to infer that she fully returned the passion." ⁶ However, this may be, we know definitely that she exercised a profound influence which inspired him to compose the Italian works of his early manhood. He wrote the Filocopo to please her; he dedicated his Teseide and Filostrato to her; she is the heroine of Fiammetta and Ameto. She reappears in the Amorosa Visione and may be traced in La Caccia di Diana and the Ninfale Fiesolano.

⁶ J. A. Symonds, Boccaccio as Man and Author (London: John C. Nimmo, 1895), p. 26.

Biographers declare that Boccaccio was of an amorous nature yet for some reason he would never marry.

Filippo de Matteo Villoni gives us a portrait of the author:

The poet was rather inclined to corpulence, but his stature was portly, his face round, with a nose little depressed above the nostrils, his lips somewhat full, but nevertheless handsome and well-formed, his chin dimpled and beautiful when he smiled, his aspect jocund and gay, and his discourse agreeable and polished. He delighted in conversation and gained many friends, but no one that succoured and assisted him in his need.⁷

While in Naples, busily writing for Fiammetta Boccaccio was recalled by his father to Florence. Arrived there, he would seem to have forgotten his former love, for he paid court to a wealthy Florentine widow who repelled him with contempt. He, therefore, indulged his vengeance in a spiteful satire entitled Il Corbaccio. Through vindictive slander and satire he attacked not only the widow who had spurned him but all women in general.

7 Villoni, quoted by Chubb, op. cit., p. 234.

A second visit to Naples in about 1345 brought him in contact with Queen Joanna who paid him marked attention. Tradition has it, that at her command, the poet began the work of the Decameron which was presumably completed in 1353.

An important event in Boccaccio's life was his acquaintance with the monk, Pietro di Petroni who assumed a kind of direct spiritual inspiration. Boccaccio was thrown into a panic of fear for his salvation. He repented of the things he had written, He even warned people against reading his Decameron, which might, he thought, do harm, especially to women. "At this period of his life he presented the spectacle of a man with an ever widening popularity and a deepening inward remorse." ⁸

When political troubles were in a measure appeased, he returned to Florence, but not approving life there he went to Certaldo. In his last years he enjoyed one great delight. He paid a long visit to Petrarch who was then residing in Venice, on the Riva

⁸ Anonymous, "Boccaccio as a Quarry" Quarterly Review Vol. 188, 1898, p. 475.

degli Schiavoni. In 1373 a professorship was founded in Florence for the elucidation of Dante's Divina Commedia and Boccaccio was appointed as the first lecturer. He no doubt greatly increased the popularity of the great Florentine poet, whose mystic song needed explanation and criticism. He wrote La Vita di Dante.

In 1374 Petrarch died and Boccaccio probably felt a grief as profound as his nature was capable of. Petrarch had been a true friend. Boccaccio lived only a short time in grieving this loss for he himself died on December 21, 1375 at Certaldo and was there buried.

The works which have immortalized the Italian poet's name are, both learned, serious, and of varied vein. He composed an abridgement of the Roman History, from Romulus to the year of Rome 724, with a parallel of the seven kings of Rome, and of the emperors till Nero, inclusive; De Claris Mulieribus; De Genealogiis Deorum Gentilium, A Treatise of Mountains, Seas, Rivers, etc; De Casibus Virorum Illustrium which was translated into Italian, English, Spanish, and French. All his Latin writings are considered hasty, crude, and uninforming. In Italian he wrote Il Filocolo; La

Fiammetta; L'Ameto; Amorose Visione; Il Comento Di Dante; La Vita di Dante; and Il Decamerone; of his poetical compositions he left the Teseide.

D'Ancona and Bacci⁹ give the following chronology of the Italian poets work:

Il Filocolo was begun in 1338 but was probably finished at a later date in Florence.

Il Filostrato was composed during the absence of his loved Fiammetta about 1338.

La Teseide was composed during Fiammetta's abandonment in Florence about 1341.

Ninfale Fiesolano was written about the same time as La Teseide.

Ameto was written in 1341 or 1342.

Amorose Visione was written soon after.

Latin Biography of Petrarch was probably written in 1348 or 1349.

Eclogues the earliest were written in 1351; the latest in 1367.

Il Decamerone is known to have been finished in 1353.

De Genealogiis Deorum Gentilium was written between 1351 and 1360.

9 A. Ancona & O. Bacci, Manuale della Letteratura Italiana (Firenze: 1932-34), 3 vol., p. 578.

De Claris Mulieribus was composed between 1356-1364.

De Casibus Virorum Illustrium was finished about 1359.

Vita di Dante was written about 1364.

Comento alla Divina Commedia was written in 1373.

The Teseide is his third work in point of time. It has the advantage of a more dignified and heroic story known to English readers not only from Chaucer, but from Dryden's imitation of the latter in his Palamon and Arcite. It also gave the plot of Fletcher's Two Noble Kinsmen. The poem was written, to some extent, under the influence of Virgil as we should suppose, since it was begun, as biographers assume in the shadow of the poet's tomb when Boccaccio had left the city of Naples. Baldelli tells the incident: 10

Un giorno infatti nell'andare a diporto, pervenne alla tomba del Mantovano; fisso rimirandola nel rimembrare quanto fulgore spandevasi da poca cenere, deploro la sua sorte, che fatto dalla natura per seguirne le tracce, per emularne la fama fosse mal suo grado costretto ad occuparsi di mercatura.

Amore

10 G. B. Baldelli - Boni, Vita di Giovanni Boccaccio (Firenze: C. Ciradetti e Comp., 1806), p. 14.

Di virtu sempre altro accese,
 Purche la fiamma sua paresse fuore,
 E desideroso di servire le sole
 Muse, da indi in poi die bando per sempre
 alle occupazioni mercantile.

Boccaccio's source for the story is uncertain, but it is believed to have been some Greek romance written under the later Roman Empire. If so, he can only have been acquainted with it in a Latin translation now lost, as is also the original. The poet himself tells us in his own words in his dedicatory letter to Fiammetta that he is speaking of "an old story so hidden and concealed in the past, that no Latin author for what I know, seems to mention it in any book."

- - - - - una storia antica
 Tanto negli anni riposta e naseosa
 Che latino autor non par mi dica
 Per quel ch'io sento, in libro alcuna cosa.

Of this original story, if it even existed no trace has been discovered; neither does Boccaccio give any other clue to it. Scholars assume that the Teseide was written in 1339-40 in Naples when his liaison with Maria D'Aquino - his Fiammetta, seemed to have reached an almost hopeless conclusion. It might seem, as Hutton says, that the last thing Boccaccio thought of in this poem was the creation of an impersonal work of

art. "His intention was rather to express his own sufferings. In Palemone and Arcita, he wished Fiammetta to see his own misery and it may be that in the protection of Venus by which Palemon got at last what he most desired, he wished to tell Fiammetta that he too expected to triumph even then, by virtue of his passion, the ^{singleness} ~~singleness~~ of his love."

As for the sources from which Boccaccio took his tale, we know that he certainly knew the Thebaid of Statius well. In a letter which he wrote four days before the "Calende" of July 1338 or 1339 he turns to a friend to ask the loan of the Thebaid with marginal notes. This request has led some to believe that it was then that the Teseide was written because it was obviously based on that Latin poem. But this does not follow for in asking his friend to send him the same he stated simply that in his own manuscript he could not quite understand the notes.¹¹ This, of course, implies that he already possessed his own copy and studied it. But it was not only from Statius that

¹¹ Corazzini, Le Lettere Edite e Inedite di M. Giovanni Boccaccio (Firenze: 1877), p. 457.

he borrowed. He used also the Roman de Thebes as Crescini has proved, especially towards the end of his poem. The influence of the Aeneid is also evident at times. In it Boccaccio found not only the form, but also the substance of his work. In fact, the Teseide is written in twelve books and has precisely the same number of lines as the Aeneid - 9896.

In attempting to discover the sources of the Teseide it is well to remember what the author himself expresses in his dedicatory letter to Fiammetta.

E accioche l'opera sia verissimo testimonio alle parole, ricordandomi che gia ne di piu felici che lunghi io vi sentii vaga d'udire, e talvolta di leggere e una e altra ardeva nel fuoco nel quale io ardo; - - - come volonteroso servidore, il quale non solamente il comandamento aspetto del suo maggiore, ma quello operando quelle cose che piacciono, previene; trovata una antichissima storia, e al piu delle genti no manifesta bella si per la materia della quale parla, che e d'amore, e si per coloro di quali furono e di reale sangue discesi, in latino volgare e in rime accioche piu dilettaesse, e massimamente a voi, che gia non sommo titolo le mie rime esaltaste, con quella sollecitudine che conceduta mi fu dell'altre piu gravi, desiderando di piacervi, ho ridotta."

From this we see that something of the matter indicated, was in the poet's mind.

The sources of the Teseide have never been fully determined. Robinson asserts that according to an early theory now generally abandoned, Boccaccio followed a lost Greek romance. In the opinion of recent scholars and authorities, he made an independent compilation from various sources. He certainly used Statius freely and perhaps also some version of the Roman de Thebes. But neither of these works supplied him with the central plot of the rival lovers. However this may be, we know that Boccaccio's version of the love story was the fount from which flowed the literary genius of Chaucer in his adaptation.

The first edition of the Teseide full of faults, was published in Ferrara in 1475 by Pietro Andrea Bassi; as for translations, there have been many, the first being a Greek version issued in Venice in 1529. There followed an Italian prose paraphrase published in Lucca in 1579; while in 1597 a French version appeared in Paris. The most famous translation was made by our English poet Chaucer to whom we shall now turn.

Chaucer's treatment of the Teseide in the Knight's Tale has been the subject of intense and numerous

studies by Chaucerian scholars; so that it becomes peculiarly interesting to discover to what extent and in what spirit the English poet has departed from his highly artistic and original model. In his Development and Chronology of Chaucer's Works Tatlock simplified the problem for all scholars by disposing of the widely accepted theory of a stanzaic Palamon and Arcite, so that this poem and the Knight's Tale are now considered one and the same. Tatlock also finds reason to believe that Chaucer's treatment of his material is satirical and light in tone. More of this shall follow later.

In order the more effectively to point out what material Chaucer borrowed from Boccaccio and how it differs from its original source, it is here fitting to reproduce a brief analysis of the Teseide.

Book I contains the war of Teseo with the Amazons, his attempt to treat with Ipolita, Queen of Sythia; her refusal and preparation to oppose him; his landing with the Greeks behind him; the fighting, Teseo victory, the submission of the women; his marriage with Ipolita; the attraction to Emilia's beauty; Teseo's desire to wed her to his kinsman Acate.

Book II. After having spent two years in Scythia, Teseo had a vision in which Peritoo reproached him, and immediately he set sail for Athens with Ipolita and Emilia. He entered the city in triumph but found at his arrival, that all the Greek women, clad in mourning were awaiting him in the temple of Clemenzia to beseech him to avenge the injury inflicted on them and their slaughtered husbands. Teseo marched to Thebes. He challenged Creonte and the two armies came together in a field. Creonte was killed. The Thebans fled to the mountains. The women collected the bodies of their husbands and burned them. While the Greeks ransacked the field, they found two wounded youths of royal distinction who were not quite dead. They were found to be kinsmen, Palemone and Arcita by name. Teseo returned to Athens with his men bearing the two youths who were cured and condemned to "eterna presone" -- eternal imprisonment.

Book III. A new occasion for fighting rose up between the two cousins when at dawn, one day during the season of love, they were attracted by the singing of the young maiden. Emilia who was enjoying herself

in the garden. Arcita saw her first and called Palemone to gaze upon her. Palemone thought she must be one of the goddesses. Both youths fell in love with her at once, but without any rivalry or jealousy. Emilia noticed them, too, and came into the garden more often, sang more heartily, because she was vain, and attracted them more and more each day. Both men were desperately in love with her. Peritoo, Teseo's friend, who knew Arcita, begged the king to release Arcita. Teseo did so with the understanding that Arcita should never return to the kingdom under pain of losing his head. Arcita took his leave of Athens with many sighs and longings because now he would no longer be able in the spring to feast his eyes upon Emilia. He had already said farewell to Palemone, with tears and embraces. Emilia appeared on a balcony as he rode away.

Book IV. Arcita was unhappy in his freedom. He changed his name to Penteo and entered the service of Manelao at Messania, at later of Pelleo at Aegina. His hardships and languishing for love disguised his features so that he was no longer recognizable. He decided to return to Athens. Clad as a servant, he was

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received into the service of Teseo. At a feast given in her honor, Emilia alone recognized Arcita, but she pretended she did not know him. Penteo served well and became a favorite with the whole court. In order to give vent to his feelings he was wont to go alone into a grove several miles from the city and complain lividly to Fortune and the gods. One morning as he lamented his lot, he was overheard by Panfilo, one of Palemone's servants who chanced to be passing. Panfilo was shocked at what he had heard and went to tell Palemone.

Book V. Upon the report of Panfilo, Palemon refused to believe. Together they planned Palemone's escape from prison in order to win Emilia, by force, though it cost the life of his kinsman. This was accomplished with the assistance of Panfilo by changing clothes with Alimeto, a Theban physician, wise and trustworthy. Palemone went armed to the wood in quest of Arcita whom he found sleeping. Palemone recognized Arcita and asked him to renounce his pretensions to Emilia, or to fight with him. After many long expostulations by Arcita they began to fight. They fought long and hard until they were discovered by Emilia who

was with a hunting party. She at once summoned Teseo and rode up to them and asked an explanation of their conduct. When he learned the cause of their rivalry, he was deeply touched and forgave them. He informed them that he would be glad to give either one of them Emilia to wed if they would do what he proposed. They agreed to decide their claim to Emilia by arms, each with a hundred chosen companions, in the Theban theater. The victor in the combat was to be proclaimed Emilia's husband. The time given for the preparation of the tournament was one year.

Book VI. Both Palemone and Arcita lived a life of splendor and extravagant luxury and entertainment. They sent out messengers to summon their friends and make preparations. Chief among the numerous guests and friends were many kings and nobles, viz. Licurgo, Pelleo, Niso, Agamenone, Menelao, Castore, Palluce, Cronis, Ippodomo, Nestore, Evando, Peritor, Ulisse, Diomede, Pigmaleone, Sicceo, Minos Radamente, Sarpedone, Anchelado, Ida, Ameto, and many others with a great display of ancient history and mythology.

Book VII. The appointed day arrived Teseo

announced the purpose and reward, the laws of the combat. The day before the tournament, Palemone, Arcita and Emilia went to the temples and prayed to the gods - Arcita having visited the temples of all the gods made a formal prayer to Mars. The prayer "Being personified" was to go and find Mars in the cold Thracian fields, and Mars, upon understanding the message, caused favorable signs to be given to Arcita. In the same manner Palemone performed his religious observances with a prayer to Venus, begging not for victory, but for Emilia. His prayer "being also personified" went to the temple of Venus on Mount Citheraeron where she found Venus lying nude on a bed. The petition was granted, and hence gave rise to a new strife between Venus and Mars, but they finally came to an agreement.

The sacrifice of Emilia to Diane is described, She offered up a heartfelt prayer to the goddess who appeared to her and made known to her the worthiness of her prayer by the two fires, one of which went out and relighted itself, and the other look like blood and went out.

In the morning crowds peopled the palace. The

two Thebans proceeded to the theatre with their respective groups, Teseo appeared in all magnificence. The theatre, a mile around, is described. The Thebans harangue their troops. Ipolita and Emilia follow all the people. Arcita and Palemone entered from opposite sides. Arcita looked up at Emilia and breathed a prayer. Palemone did the same. The call of battle sounded. Teseo arose and announced that the victor would have Emilia.

Book VIII. The whole battle is herein described. At the third call the two hands came together and blow upon blow reigned in the tumult. The nobles fought one another. Many of the valiant leaders were taken. Some were so bruised and wounded that they had to be carried from the scene. Arcita fought bravely and well. When he was exhausted he looked up at Emilia and his strength was restored. He fought marvelously as did also Palemone. Teseo watched with intense curiosity. Ipolita and Emilia watched also. Emilia bewailed her misfortune of being loved. As Arcita began to be tired Mars appeared to him disguised as Teseo and reproached him for his weakness. He at once rose up vehemently against his enemies.

Palemone's arm was bitten by Cromis so that he felt and was disarmed by Arcita. Emilia's sympathy and love transferred from Palemone to Arcita, whereas before they had seemed equal to her. Palemone was taken and Arcita was the victor.

Book IX. Benus and Mars consulted among themselves and Venus caused a great Fury to be sent from hell directly before Arcita's horse. The beast became so frightened that he reared and fell backward crushing Arcita beneath him. However, Arcita was carried to Athens in a Triumphal chariot with Emilia by his side. Teseo had doctors to care for Arcita for he was dangerously ill. He wished only to die in the arms of his loved Emilia. Palemone was declared Emilia's prisoner and freed by her. Arcita and Emilia were wed.

Book X. The slain were burned and the ashes taken to the temple of Mars. Arcita, having been given over by his physician made his will in discourse with Teseo and bequeathed all his possessions, as well as his wife Emilia, to Palemone. All present lamented the young man's lot. Arcita ordered a sacrifice to Mercury which Palemone performed for him. He asked

Emilia to kiss him, bewailed his grief without her, and died.

Book XI. Arcita's soul went toward the concavity of the eighth heaven. Emilia and Palemone wept over him when they saw that his soul had left the body. Teseo and Egeo were inconsolable. A forest near the grove was filled for a funeral pyre. Everyone wept. The pyre was elaborate, the summit being covered with a cloth of Tyrian purple tinged with gold. Emilia swooned from grief. After the funeral ceremony Teseo collected the ashes and placed them in a golden urn which was put in the temple of Mars. Palemone had a temple to Juno built over the place of the pyre for Arcita's ashes in which his life adventures were portrayed. In the center of the temple was a column of marble holding a golden urn on which were inscribed the words: "I hold the ashes of Arcita."

Book XII. Teseo called Palemone to Emilia and proposed to execute Arcita's desire in their regard. Both declined at first. Palemone regarded the great love he had borne Arcita and felt it villainy now to take Emilia to wife, while the poor Emilia felt it

would be better for her to serve Diane. Teseo persuaded them to obey his wishes. The marriage day arrived and all others rejoiced and for fifteen days there was great rejoicing. The Kings, nobles and other guests took their leave and Palemone remarked with his beloved lady "in givin".

Chaucer's treatment of the Teseide in the Knight's Tale has been a matter of interest and intense study to many scholars. Tatlock's work in the Development and Chronology of Chaucer's works regarding the Knight's Tale has already been mentioned. Both Tatlock and Fairchild point out that in the Teseide Palamon and Arcita are hardly distinguished and show how Chaucer differentiates between them. Fairchild concludes that Arcita represents a type of the active and Palamone a type of the contemplative life.¹² His analysis of the two characters is more readily accepted than his conclusion. On the other hand J. R. Hulbert is of the opinion that there is no individuality at all between Palamon and Arcite and that

12 H. N. Fairchild, "Active Arcite, Contemplative Palamon", Journal of English and Germanic Philology, 24:285-293, July, 1927.

Chaucer in this story was concerned first and foremost with the question of love regarding the two rival cousins.¹³ In his study Indebtedness of Chaucer's Works to the Italian Works of Boccaccio. Cummings goes into a somewhat lengthy discussion of Chaucer's additions, omissions, and changes and shows how in the process of condensation, Chaucer inserted many concrete elements of feudal realism of his own in place of the pseudo-classical elements used by Boccaccio. By so doing the tale acquired a totally new and English atmosphere. Clerke¹⁴ has done an interesting work conceived mainly with the genius of Chaucer and Boccaccio, evaluating the power and merit of each writer, one in regard to originality, the other in regard to imitation which outdoes its aspiration to imitate and produces a new transformation. Clerke has also translated twenty-seven significant stanzas of the Teseide.

13 J. R. Hulbert, "What Was Chaucer's Aim In the Knight's Tale", Studies in Philology, 26:375-385, August, 1927.

14 E. M. Clerke, "Boccaccio and Chaucer", National Review 1886: Vol. 8, p. 379.

Curry ¹⁵ shows how in paraphrasing the Teseide Chaucer discarded ancient mythological machinery and substituted Boethian destiny and the planetary influences of medieval astrology as motivating forces. Robertson ¹⁶ favors the belief that most of Chaucer's important changes are in the direction of realism. Torraca ¹⁷ feels that Chaucer has not done very well. He judges the Teseide to be far superior to the tale of Chaucer. These are only a few of the scholarly studies showing the relationship between the Italian poem and the English imitation. Others of equal interest have been carried on, though not without some lack of directness and conclusiveness.

Several scholars have prepared tables of correspondence between the two works which will aid greatly in the study of their similar yet different

¹⁵ W. C. Curry, Chaucer and The Medieval Sciences (London and New York: 1926), p. 215.

¹⁶ Stuart Robinson, "Elements of Realism in the Knight's Tale", Journal of English and Germanic Philology, 14:226-255, 1915.

¹⁷ F. Torraca, "La Novella Del Cavaliere e La Teseide", Revista D'Italia, vol. 30, 1927.

methods of development. Mr. Henry Ward in his presentation of marginal references to the "Knight's Tale" indicates that of Chaucer's 2250 lines, 272 lines were actually translated from the Teseide, 379 show a general likeness, and 131 show a slight likeness to passage in the Italian poem. Thus, only one third of the entire work is due to the Teseide.

The most general correspondence are shown by the following table of Robinson which is based upon one drawn by Skeat. The Arabic numerals in the case of the Teseide refer to the stanzas. 18

KNIGHT'S TALE

TESEIDE

865 - 883	I and II
893 - 1027	II, 2-5, 25-95
1030 - 1274	III, 1-11, 14-20, 47, 51-54, 85
1361 - 1448	IV, 26-29, 59
1451 - 1479	V, 1-3, 24-27, 33
1545 - 1565	VI, 13, 14, 31, 85, 84, 17, 82
1638 - 1641	VII, 106, 119
1668 - 1739	V, 77-91
1812 - 1860	V, 92-98

18 Robinson, op. cit., p. 771.

KNIGHT'S TALETESEIDE

1887 - 2002	VII, 108-10, 50-64, 29-37
2102 - 2206	VI, 71, 14-22, 65-70, 8
2222 - 2593	VII, 43-49, 68-93, 23-41, 67, 95, 99, 7-13, 131, 132, 14, 100-102, 113-18, 19
2275 - 2360	VII, 71-92
2600 - 2683	VIII, 2-131
2684 - 2734	IX, 4-61
2735 - 2739	XII, 80, 83
2743 - 2808	X, 12-112
2809 - 2963	XI, 1-67
2967 - 3102	XII, 3-19, 69-83

Cummings went a little farther even than did Ward, Skeat and Robinson. He has further listed borrowings and episodes which prove that Chaucer used more of Boccaccio's material than evidenced by the above mentioned scholars. His findings increase the borrowings from the Teseide in from 700 to 800 more lines. As the following table here indicates:

KNIGHT'S TALETESEIDE

1060 - 74	III 10-26
1077 - 78	
1088 - 95	
1098 - 1128	
1177 - 90	
1216 - 23	III 53-59
	69
	74-79
	82
	85
1380 - 1436	IV 1-60
1441 - 50	
1480 - 1544	V 33-76
1556 - 1661	
1664 - 67	V 77-82
1670 - 72	
1674 - 77	
1680 - 85	
1687 - 96	
1697 - 1703	V 82-91
1705 - 09	

KNIGHT'S TALETESEIDE

1711 - 24	
1727 - 34	
1736 - 38	
1740 - 84	
1818 - 25	V 92-93
1832 - 34	V 96-98
1860 - 80	VI 11
1881 - 86	V 97
	VII 108-10
1903 - 12	VII 23 line 1, 42, 5-8, 72
1914 - 21	VII 36-38
1922 - 38	50
1955 - 66	54 55-56
2001	VII 34 LLs 1-2
2008	
2011	35, 1. 3, 1, 4-8
2013 - 17	
2018 - 23	36, 1 4-5
2089 - 92	VII, 108-110
2093 - 2188	VI 13-65

KNIGHT'S TALETESEIDE

2483 - 90	VI 69-70 VI 1
2491 - 2512	VII 14 95 97-99 101
2517 - 22	VII 98, l. 3-8
2526 - 32	VII, 96
2533 - 36	VII 2-13 130-132
2593 - 2600	VII 131
2601 - 2675	VIII 10-131
2707 - 2717	IX 23 61
2718 - 2734	IX 51-62
2815 - 21	XI 4 lines, 5-9
3003 - 3016	IX 52-56 XI 10-11
3069 - 3108	Bk. XII

Chaucer's Sources

More than once in his narration of the Knight's Tale, Chaucer informs his readers of his sources. The most important of these was without doubt Boccaccio's Teseide. The next in importance was the Thebaid of Statius. Chaucer himself tells us in the words of the Knight that he was acquainted with the old writers. In lines 603-605 of the Knight's Tale he says:

It fel that in the seventhe yer,
 in May,
The thridde nyght, as olde bookes seyn,
That al this storie tellen moore pleyñ,

Further on in the story as the Knight proceeds to describe Emily's visit to the temple of Diane, he says:

Two fyres on the outer gan she beete,
And did hi thynges, as men say biholde
In stace of Thebes and these books olde.
 (11. 1435-38

In line twenty one of Anelida and Arcite Chaucer says, "First follow I Stace, and after him Corinne". He may also have used the Roman de Thebes. Pratt informs us that in addition to these, he drew upon such other writings as the poetry of Ovid, the De Consolatione Philosophia of Boethius the Speculum Majus of Vincent de Beauvais, The Roman de la Rose of Guillaume de Lorris

and Jean de Meun, and English romances. 19

After the success of the Filocolo and the Filosttrato Boccaccio's mind turned from these to higher things. He thought of Virgil and his Aeneid and forthwith wrote the Teseide. The Aeneid was, of course, an epic poem. Nothing could have been more alien to Boccaccio's nature, nothing farther removed from his times than the heroic genre or the sound of the trumpet. Yet the Italian poet's story is replete with attacks and battles; of gods and men; pompous descriptions, artificial discourses, all the external appearances of an epic poem, but it does not wholly bear any similarity to true greatness or grandeur. There is really nothing heroic about Teseo, Arcita, Palemone, Emilia, or Ipolita. They wear but the mantles of the heroic. The author, seeks out all the details of their actions, but in sifting out the details and particulars, he gradually becomes so immersed in them that he loses sight of the main objective. The two armies of Arcita and Palemone

19 R. A. Pratt, "The Knight's Tale", Sources and Analogues of Chaucer's Canterbury Tales. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1941, p. 82.

are described in detail as is also the manner of combatting, the various fights, the prayers and sacrifices in the temples of Mars, Venus, and Diane; the guests who filled the theatre, the theatre itself in all its impressiveness, the feastings, every detail of external splendor; all were portrayed with the diligence and care of scholarly tactfulness. Yet something is lacking; something which savors of emptiness. The force of character which we expect to find is not there. The great personages burdened with emblems and ancient medals are lost sight of. There is only a field of battle, apparently presenting many interesting phenomena, but in reality deprived of all imaginative power. The image is there though it is wanting in action. The true heroic element is superficial.

It was certainly no small task for Chaucer to condense and enliven the story as Boccaccio left it. When we consider that the Teseide was almost 2,000 lines long, we marvel that our English master could have told the same story in one fifth as many lines. Chaucer may be termed a master artist for his skill in rehandling this story, omitting the irrelevant and tedious parts

while still preserving the narrative in its essential points.

Boccaccio's narrative is of course a work of great merit.

Manly considers the Teseide a fine example of the courtly epic and rightly so. From beginning to end it is full of brilliant and elaborate descriptions of sieges and battles of social functions, and of long and eloquent speeches. Every book contributes its own share to the story, thus enhancing it and rendering it more impressive in its rich elaborations. For example, the entire first book is occupied with the war of Teseo against the Amazons. The second book is concerned with the Athenian hero's further wars with the Thebans, the festivities of his homecoming, the supplications of the throng of weeping women, etc. All the books in like manner manifest the epic element. This is certainly not found in Chaucer, and many critics say that Chaucer did well to omit all of this, since it did not directly promote the plot of the love affair. The English poet attempted to confine the story strictly to the rivalry between Palemone and Arcite and omitted

all irrelevant incidents or episodes. In book one, for example, Chaucer is matter of fact. He tells us in sixteen lines what Boccaccio tells in a book and a half:

Whilom as olde stories tellen us,
 Ther was a duc that highte Theseus,
 Of Atthenes he was lard and governour,
 And in his time swich a conqueror
 That gretter was ther noon under the soone.
 Ful many a rich contree hadde he wonne;
 What with his wysdom and his chivalrie,
 He conquered ol the rigue of Femenye;
 That whilom was ycleped Scithia;
 And wedded the Queen Ypolita,
 And broghte hir hoom with hym in his contree
 With muchel glorie and greet solempnytee,
 And eek hir faire suster Emelye,
 And thus with victoric and with melodye
 Lete I this noble due to Atthenes ryde,
 And al his hoost in armes hym bisyde.
 (C T 859 - 874)

A good example of Boccaccio's epic vein is afforded by the prayer of Emilia to Diane in the 7th Book of the Teseide, stanzas 79 - 83.

She thus in broken vows 'mid sighs began;
 "Chaste Goddess, who dost purify the glades,
 And of a maiden train, dost lead the van,
 And him chastises who thy law evades,
 As lost actacan learned in briefest span,
 Who, young and hapless, smit 'mid sylvan shades,
 Not by scourge whip, but by thy wratch celestial,
 Fled as a stag in transformation bestial.

Hear then my voice, if worthy of thy care,
While I implore by thy divinity,
In triple form, accept my lowly prayer,
And if it be an easy task to thee
To perfect it -- I prithee strive, if e'er
Soft pity filled thy heart so cold and free
For maiden client who in prayer addrest thee,
And who for grace or favour did request thee.

For I, a maiden of thy maiden train,
Am fitter, far with quiver and with bow
To roam the forest, than neath loves soft reign
To do a husband's will, and if thou go
In memory back, thou must in mind retain
How harder face than granite did we show
'Gainst headlong Venus' law, based not on reason,
But headlong passion, to its promptings treason.

And if it be my better fate to stay
A little maid amid thy vestal throng,
The fierce and burning fumes do thou allay
Sprung from desires so passionate and strong
Of both the enamoured youths my love who pray,
And bothy for joy of love from me do long,
Let peace supplant between them war's contention,
Since grief to me, thou know'st, is their dissension.

And if it be reserved for me by fate
To juno's low subjected now to be,
Ah, pardon thou my lapse from maiden state,
Nor therefore be my prayer refused by thee;
On others' will, thou seest, condemned to wait,
My actions must conform to their decree.
Then help me Goddess, hear my prayer thus lowly,
Who still deserve thy favour high and holy."

(Translated by Ellen Clerke)

Scholars have termed the Teseide "pseudo-classic"
and deservedly so, It abounds with great statliness
of movement and a profusion of wealth and color. From

beginning to end one is constantly conscious of royal presence and majestic bearings. Stateliness accompanies every action from Teseo's encounter with the women of Scythia to the wedding feast of Palemone and Emilia.

One of the things that Chaucer aptly accomplished was the transformation of the pseudo-epic poem into a lighter form - the medieval romance. To do this properly he was obliged to change the tempo of the narrative. The slow moving events of the Teseide became rapid, closer, less elaborate, more enlivened and compact. Cummings assures us that "both the stately dignity of the Italian work and the occasionally more rapid narrative quality of Chaucer's poem are elements good in their kind." ²⁰ Let us follow through the poem closely to see how Chaucer's adaptation differs from its source. The Italian work is written in the ottava rima or eight line stanza rhyming ab a b a b c c while Chaucer's version is written in the decasyllabic or eambic pentameter open couplet. It was Boccaccio's aim to compose an epic poem, to sing of war, of the troubles of Mars

20 Cummings, op. cit., p. 125.

as no one had ever done before him, and to offer his work to one particular person to read -- to Fiammetta. Chaucer composed a tale to be narrated by word of mouth, orally, to a group of people representing all the classes of the English society of his period, a large number with whom the circumstances of his social and official life had brought him into personal contact.

We know from a passage in the Prologue of the "Legend of Good Women" referring to the story of Palamon and Arcite, that Chaucer had written some version of the Teseide before the Canterbury Tales and not later than 1386. The exact relation of this to the Knight's Tale is unknown. Robinson says in this regard that "the opinion supported by Ten Brink, Kock, and Skeat, that the Palamon was in seven-line stanzas has been quite questioned by several recent critics and was opposed in a detailed argument by Professor Tatlock in Development and Chronology, p. 45 ff. The stanzaic hypothesis is, to say the least, unnecessary, and there is no strong reason for holding that the Knight's Tale is essentially different in form or substance from Chaucer's first version. Some revision was doubt-

less necessary to fit the Palamon for its place in the Canterbury collection." ²¹ Robinson goes on to say that the stanzaic Palamon has usually been dated early in Chaucer's Italian period by those who believed in it. But if the first reaction of the poem was practically identical with the Knight's Tale, a later date is more probable. Root is of the same opinion.

In line 884 there is, according to Robinson, a complimentary allusion to the landing in England of Anne of Bohemia, and several passages in the account of the marriage of Palamon and Emelye have been plausibly interpreted as referring to the marriage of Richard and Anne and the Bohemian Alliance. It is even possible that the poem was written or adapted to celebrate the royal wedding.

Critics have praised the English poet for condensing the Teseide, stating that he manifested a sane artistic wisdom and good taste. Chiarini's opinion in regard to this does not seem to bear too much convic-

²¹ F. N. Robinson, op. cit., p. 770.

tion since it is generally known that the Knight's Tale was written before the scheme of the Canterbury Tales was conceived. He says, "If the Knight who was chosen to begin the series of tales, instead of narrating a tale, had presumed to recite a poem in twelve books or cantos, as the Teseide, it would so happen that many of his companions would have had to renounce their part in the story telling."²² Hutton maintains that the whole of the Teseide was inspired by the Italian's love affair with Fiammetta; that his state of mind is visible in his work, which is so extraordinarily personal. One single thought seems to fill his mind - he had loved a princess and had been loved by her in return; she had forsaken him, but she had remained the lode-star of his life in spite of all things else. Hutton believes that Boccaccio writes of nothing but this. Full of his lady-love, he sets himself to enchant her with stories to glorify her, and to tell her repeatedly the story of himself and his love. "If we had any doubt as to Boccaccio's state of mind," asserts Hutton, "his

22 Chiarini, op. cit., p. 161.

Teseide would make it clear to us. It is full of the agonies of his jealousy." ²³ We know from his letter to Fiammetta, which prefaced the story, that he wrote the poem to please her "thinking of past joy in present misery". It is not difficult then to understand how the heat of his passion, would naturally lead Boccaccio to a never ending narrative, involving all his feelings; each new episode in the story is a new attempt to impress his fair and lovely lady. Chaucer had no such personal grievance to motivate his story. He merely found in the Teseide a wealth of material from whence he might draw forth freely a fine plot for a new creation, - one in which he could exercise his artistic and creative powers of imagination.

Boccaccio's attempt to write an epic on the pattern of the Aeneid was without doubt a marvelous and sincere one, and critics feel that he did not do too badly. But in his enthusiasm he did not realize that his material was insufficient to produce a classic

²³ E. Hutton, Some Aspects of the Genius of Boccaccio. In: British Academy Annual Italian Lecture (London: Milford, 1922), p. 76.

in twelve books. All the epic conventions which he includes in the story detract from rather than enhance the narrative. Chaucer was undoubtedly intellectually alert in his perusal of the Italian text, evaluated the material therein, and saw at once that here was a gold mine which, if the ore were properly removed, would leave him the richer for having discovered it. The English poet certainly deserves credit for rendering the story of the Teseide accessible to English readers. He dealt with the material which he discovered in Boccaccio both independently and enrichingly. "He makes additions in some places, omits irrelevances in others, substitutes one motivation for another, modifies or completely transforms a character and interweaves new strands of his own choosing." ²⁴ In a word, "he follows the procedure of all the great imaginative writers. He reconceives his story, and shapes it in accordance with his new and individual conception." ²⁵

²⁴ J. Lowes, "The Franklin's Tale, The Teseide, and the Filocolo" in Modern Philology, XV, 12, 1918. p. 724.

²⁵ Ibid.

Boccaccio would probably be more widely read in modern literature were it not for his complete lack of dramatic power and expression; his vague diffuseness of language and his lengthy dilution of thought, which smothers the interest of the main plot or theme under a powerful current of wearisome verbosity.²⁶ Fortunately for English literature, Chaucer's ingenuity was so keen as to render him skillful in remodeling the story. It is true that he showed great independence of spirit in his handling of the original, but is that not a sign of intelligent and genuine creative art?

Let us proceed to examine a few of the details of the English poet's version and note the points of difference between him and Boccaccio.

a. Boccaccio has Emily appear beneath the window on several mornings. When she discovers that she was seen and heard, her vanity was flattered and she came and sang the more, not out of love, but merely to be heard.

²⁶ E. M. Clerke, "Boccaccio and Chaucer" in National Review, Vol. 8, 1886, p. 379.

Chaucer has Emily appear but once.

b. In Boccaccio's story, Emily is first seen by Arcite. In Chaucer Palamon sees her first. According to critics, this change gives the successful lover a prior claim to Emily in the mind of the readers.

c. In Boccaccio, Arcite enters into the service of Theseus under the assumed name of Panteo. He sees Emily and is recognized by her. Later he is overheard making his complaint in a wood by Panfilo, a servant of Palamon, who brings word to his master in prison.

In Chaucer, Arcite assumes the name of Philostrate, which means "army lover", but intended by Chaucer to mean "vanquished by love". There is no servant.

d. In Boccaccio, Palamon escapes from prison clothed in the suit of a doctor. He begins to become jealous only after Panfilo's report of Arcite.

In Chaucer, Palamon escapes by giving his jailer a drink of cordial made of a certain wine with narcotics and fine opium of Thebes.

e. In Boccaccio, the meeting in the woods is drawn out. Both kinsmen are distressed and arrange reluctantly to fight. In Chaucer the challenge is made and accepted without any hesitation or debate.

f. In Boccaccio, there is no mention of Palamon's jealous revenge or self-assertion. In Chaucer, Palamon confesses that he deserves death at the hands of Theseus, but then he very naturally insists that Arcite be punished likewise. This is Chaucer's own addition.

g. The oratory of Diane is not mentioned at all in Boccaccio. In Chaucer, the oratory of Diane is described with a profusion of details. Critics surmise that this was either invented by Chaucer himself or derived from some unknown source.

h. Boccaccio describes the whole retinue of Palamon and Arcite. Chaucer describes ~~on~~ Lycurgus, the king of Thrace with Palamon, and the great Emetrius, king of Ind with Arcite.

i. In Boccaccio, the prayers of Palamon and Arcite are personified and find the respective gods in their temples. In Chaucer, the personification of the prayers is totally rejected, but the content of the prayer is faithfully kept, even to translating the greater part of them.

j. Boccaccio describes the combat in detail, with lengthy narrations of the various fights between individuals, their falls and victories. Chaucer gives a

general summary of the combat, describing the general confusion of the melee.

k. Boccaccio describes the victory of Arcite over Palamon and his marriage to Emily. Chaucer omits the final triumph and does not even mention the marriage of Arcite and Emilia. Arcite, when he realizes death is at hand, calls Emily and Palamon to his side. He begs Emily to take him in her arms and tells her that "if ever she wed, not to forget the noble Palamon."

l. Boccaccio gives a long account of the passage of Arcite's soul and the funeral ceremony. Chaucer leaves Arcite's soul to the care of Mars and proceeds to relate in brief the funeral event.

m. In Boccaccio, only a few days elapse between the funeral of Arcite and the wedding of Emily and Palamon. In Chaucer, the wedding took place "in process of certain years."

n. Boccaccio opens and closes the Teseide with an invocation to the Muse. Chaucer uses no invocation but starts his story directly.

o. In Boccaccio, the speech of Theseus is brief and to the point. In Chaucer, Theseus goes into a long discourse "said to be taken from Boethius"; further

descriptive passages of the feasting are omitted and the story ends abruptly with the words "And God save all this faire compaignye!"

Besides these points of difference there are also certain beauties in the context of the pseudo-epic which unfortunately had to be suppressed or discarded in Chaucer's work. Among these are the following: ²⁷

1. The attraction of Arcite to the window of his prison by the sound of Emilia's voice singing in the garden below.

(Book III, st. 11)

Un bel mattin ch'ella si fu levata
 e biondi crin ravolti alla sua testa,
 discesa nel giardin, com' era usata:
 quivi cantando e faccendosi festa,
 con molti fior, su l'erbetta assettata,
 faceva sua ghirlanda, lieta e presta,
 sempre cantando be versi d'amore
 con angelica voce e lieto core.

Al suon di quella voce grazioso
 Arcite si levo, ch'era in prigione
 allato, allato al giardino amoroso,
 senza niente dire a Palamone,
 e una finestretta disioso
 Apri per meglio udir quella canzone;
 e per vedere ancor chi la cantasse,
 tra ferri il capo fuori alquanto trasse.
 (Teseide, III, 10-11)

27 Cummings, op. cit., p. 135.

2. The unspoken prayer of Arcite that he might see the delicate face of Emilia before he parted from Athens.

Sol tanto fosse a Dio cara mia vita
 Ch' io solo un poco il viso delicato
 d'Emilia vedessi anzi 'l partire,
 poi men dolente me ne potrei gire.
 (Bk. III, st. 82)

3. The Vision of Emily in the balcony looking compassionately after the figure of Arcite as he departs into exile, and the last sweet glimpse which he has of her before he begins his journey.

(Bk. III, st. 83-84)

4. The disconsolate figure of Arcite wandering during his banishment from city to city in Greece.

(Bk. IV, st. 1-32)

5. The news of Emily, which Arcite learns of sailors and which determines him to return to Athens at all costs and endeavor to win her.

(Bk. IV, st. 33-37)

6. Panfilo's discovery of the identity of Arcite, who under the name of Penteo, has returned to Athens in disguise and succeeded in procuring royal favor as a servant to Teseo and is now descanting among the trees upon the ills of fortuna followed by Panfilo's revelation of the exile's secret to his rival Palamon.

(Bk. IV, st. 89)

7. Palamon's astonishment at the revelation and determination to break prison and win Emily "per arma".

(Bk. V, st. 6-15)

Amico, ora sappi per verro
 che troppo qui l'adimorar mi grava,
 e pero fa che il mio, dire intorno,
 vegna, se puoi, sicch' io di questa prava
 prigion mi porta e possa conquistare
 per arme Emilia, se e si puo fare.

8. The fidelity of the servant, Panfilo, who exchanges his clothes with Palamon and enables him to escape.

(Bk. V, st. 25-27)

9. Palamon is provided with armor and aided out of the city by Alimento.

(Bk. V, st. 27-28)

10. Palamon's discovery of Arcite asleep in the woods outside of Athens, and his waiting for his rival to awaken.

(Bk. V, st. 35-37)

11. Details in the subsequent discussion and duel of the two cousins.

(Bk. V, st. 38-80)

12. The discovery of the combat of Arcite and Palamon by Emily, who forthwith calls Teseo and the rest of the hunting party to come to witness it. (Bk. V, st. 78-80) Emily is deeply astonished and impressed as she watched the two fighters, who on noticing her fought the more:

Ella si stava quasi che stordita,
 ne' giva avanti ne' indietro tornava;
 e si per meraviglia era invilita,
 ch' ella non si movea ne' non parlava;
 ma poi ch' alquanto fu in se reddita,
 della sua gente a se' quivi chiamava,
 e similmente ancor chiamar vi feo
 a veder la battaglia il gran Teseo.

(Teseide, V, 81.)

13. The festivities which follow Teseo's pardon of his two prisoners and the assembling of the one hundred of each youth, not as a result of their travels through Greece in search of champions, but as a consequence of the brilliant opportunities afforded to knights of prowess by the proposed tournament.

(Bk. VI, st. 1-71)

14. The entertainments and processions preliminary to the final opening of the tournament. The descriptions of the temples, the prayers of Emily to Diane. The theatre and entrance of the Thebans; Teseo's declaration regarding the conditions pertaining to the battle.

(Bk. VII, st. 1-32)

15. The solemn exhortations of the chivalric and magnanimous Teseo to the knights as they address themselves to battle. Arcite exhorts his men to fight for victory.

(Bk. VII, st. 133-143)

16. The prayers of Emilia as she sits among the spectators viewing the combat of the two lovers, not knowing which of the two she prefers, or whether she can even love at all; and the blushes that flit intermittently over the damsels cheeks.

(Bk. VIII, st. 94-110)

17. The vicissitudes of the tournament.

(Bk. VIII, st. 1-111)

18. The apparition of Mars disguised as Teseo to Arcite, enjoining him to redouble his efforts in the combat.

(Bk. VIII, st. 112-113)

19. The sad mischance of Palamon who is bitten through the arm by the vicious horse of Cromis and dragged from his saddle by the animal's firmly implanted teeth, only to be disarmed by Arcite to whom then the winning of the tournament is immediately adjudged.

(Bk. VIII, st. 120-122)

When we consider the number of lines which all these omitted spots contain, it is small wonder that the English version of the story is only about one fifth as long as its source, less pedantic, as coherent

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and unified, and less artistic and beautiful. Many of the critics, among whom are Cummings, Chiarini, Torraca, and Legouis, maintain that the value of the Knight's Tale lies in the breadth and richness of a certain number of scenes in which Chaucer very wisely copied or imitated the Italian poet. "There is no doubt for one who reads the Knight's Tale that these imitations by far excel the rest of the poem; as a matter of fact they are the close transcriptions of the corresponding passages in Boccaccio." 28

One of the most important elements responsible for the success of the Knight's Tale is its realism, an element depending upon life itself for its effects. Now the theme of the Knight's Tale is honor among friends. Its subject is the rivalry of Palamon and Arcite for Emily and how it ended. Its climax is the generous renunciation of Emily by Arcite; but is this not too lofty for real life? A living rival would have preferred to see his lady-love dead rather than married to his enemy. Cowling does not favor placing the Knight's Tale first and foremost because of its realism.

28 Legouis, op. cit., p. 121.

He would rather think it ideal. He calls the story an idealistic romance.²⁹ Of course there are many details that cannot be considered as realistic, yet Chaucer did endeavor to make them so. According to Cummings and Robertson the whole atmosphere of the Knight's Tale is demonstrably one of realism. For example we cannot doubt that the tale is the knight's very own because it fits the teller so perfectly. It is a change from ancient to modern times, and hence, a romance of Chaucer's own day. "There are characteristic modes of genuine medieval battle, court ceremonial; tournament, every-day speech and clamour, thought and philosophy. Before our eyes it humanizes the day of feudalism. We comprehend it alike with the yeoman and knight, as convention recedes before reality in the poem."³⁰ "Whether we are to conceive of the knight as changing from ancient to modern times consciously or unconsciously makes no difference; the realism is there," says Robertson. "In this aspect the Knight's Tale becomes a realistic picture of a certain definite

29 G. Cowling, Chaucer. (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co.), p. 155.

30 Cummings, op. cit., p. 146.

section of the society of Chaucer's England." 31

Most of the critics agree that Chaucer copied Boccaccio in the non-realistic portion of the latter's work. His own realism stands out in the description of the temple of Mars. Speaking of the walls he says:

Yet saugh I woodnesse, laughynge in his rage;
Armed compleint, Out-hees, and fiers outrage;
The careyne in the busk, with throte yoorve;
A thousand slayn, and nat of qualm ystorve;
The tiraunt with the pray by force yraft;
The toun destroyed - ther was no thyng laft.
Yet saugh I brent the shipperes hoppesteres;
The hunte, strangled with the wilde beres;
The sowe freten the child right in the cradel;
The cook yscalded, for al his long ladel.
Noght was foryeten by the infortune of Marte -
The cartere over-ryden with his carte,
Under the wheel, ful lowe, he lay adoun.
There were also, of Martes divisioun,
The laborer, and the bocher, and the symth,
That fogeth sharpe swerdes on his styth.

(LL. 2013 - 2036)

And again in the description of the armor of Palamon's knights:

And right so ferden they with Palamon;
With hym ther wenten knightes many on.
Some wal ben armed in an haubergeon
And in bristplate and in a light gypon;
And somme woln have a paire plates large;

And somme woln have a Puce sheeld or a targe;
 Somme woln ben armed on hir legges weel,
 And, have an ax; and somme a mace of steel -
 There is no new gyse that it has old,
 Armed were they, as I have yow told,
 Everych after his opinion.

(Ll. 2117 - 2127)

The assembling of the people at the tournament is vividly realistic. One can easily imagine the noise and bustle, the clamoring, the excitement and intense activity:

And on the morwe, whan that day gan sprynge,
 Of hors and harneys noyse and claterynge
 Ther was in the hostelryes al aboute.
 And to the paleys road ther many route
 Of lordes upon steedes and palfreys.
 Ther mystow seen divisynge of harneys,
 So unkouth, and so riche, and wroght so weel,
 Of goldsmythrye, of browdyng, and of steel;
 The sheeldes brighte, tseteres, and trappures,
 Gold hewen helmes, hauberkes, cote-armures;
 Lordes in paramentz on hir courseres;
 Knyghtes of retenue; and eek squieres
 Nailynge the speres, and helmes bokelynge,
 Giggyng of sheeldes, with layneres lacyng -
 There as nede is they weren no thyng ydel;
 The fomy steedes on the golden brydel
 Gnawynge; and faste the armourers also
 With fyle and hamer prikyng to and fro;
 Yemen on foote, and ommunes many oon,
 With short staves, thikke as they may goon;
 Pypes, trompes, makerers, clariounes,
 That in the bataille blowen bloody sounes;
 The paleys ful of peples up and down,
 Heere thre, ther ten, holdyng hir question -
 Dyvynyng of thise Thebane knyghtes two.
 Somme sayden thus; somme seyde, "It shal be so".

Somme helden with hym with the blake berd;
 Somme with the balled; somme with the thikke-herd -
 Somme seyde, "He looked grymme"; and "He wolde fighte;"
 "He hath a sparth of twenty pound of wighte."

The picture of the herold is a vivid one:

An heraud on a scaffold made an "OO!"
 Til al the noyse of peple was ydo.
 And when he saugh the noyse of people stille,
 Tho shewed he the myghty dukes wille.
 (Ll. 2533 - 2536)

A little farther on we find

The trompes, with the loude mynstralcie,
 The heraudes, that ful loude yolle and crie,
 Been in hire wele for joye of Daun Arcite.
 (Ll. 2671 - 2673)

The scene of wounded Arcite lying in his bed of pain
 after having been thrown from his horse on the field
 of battle is proof again of Chaucer's creative art
 and power of making things appear life-like.

Swellethe the breste of Arcite, and the soore
 Encreeseth at his herte moore and moore,
 The clothered blood, for any leche-craft,
 Corrupteth and is in bouk ylaft.
 That neither veyne blood, ne ventusyng,
 Ne drynke of herbes may ben his helpyng.
 The vertu expulsif, or animal,
 For thilke vertu cleped natural
 Ne may the venym voyden ne expelle.
 The pipes of his longes gonne to swelle
 And every lacerte in his brest adoun
 Is shent with venym and corrupcion.
 Hym gayneth neither for to gete his lif,
 Vomyt upward ne dounward laxatif.

Al is tobrosten thilke regioun;
 Nature hath now no domincioun,
 And certainly, ther Nature wol nat wirche,
 "Farewel, Phisik! go her the man to chirche!"
 (Ll. 2743 - 2760)

One more example of the element of realism is evident in the event following the funeral ceremonies after a period of years had elapsed.

Thanne semed me, ther was a parlement
 At Atthenes upon certein poyntz and caas;
 Among the whiche poyntz yspoken was,
 To have with certein contrees alliance,
 And have fully of Thebans obeissance.
 (Ll. 2970 - 2974)

Most of the realism in the story is concerned with minor details, such as the description of the battle between Theseus and Creon, the feeling of caste, (1016-8); and the character of Theseus regarding Palamon and Arcite:

And finally at requeste and preyere
 Of Perotheus, withouten any rason,
 Duc Theseus hym leet out of prison.
 (Ll. 1204-6)

We note the realistic coloring in the armed conflict between Palamon and Arcite; the elaborate tournament, the informal character of the dual; the details of the fighting. Robertson has added a large number of

other such details which are not found in Boccaccio. It is these very little colorings which bring out the true beauty and effectiveness of Chaucer's art. They are dispersed throughout the story so that there is no sense of monotony. They help the story retain its initial vigor.

It must be noted that Chaucer in transforming the story of the Teseide, and in freely creating his own adaptation, gave to the literary world a thoroughly English poem. He adapted it to the knight of portraying life as it appeared to a medieval hero of chivalry. "At every juncture it is filled with dramatic utterance. The constant talk of concrete phenomena in the system of feudal war and tournament, ransoms, fetters, massacres, herlds, armourers, - makes it "Par excellence" the one tale of all others that Chaucer's knight should tell." ³² Where Boccaccio employed imagination and abstract ideas, Chaucer endeavored to introduce the concrete. It is this realism, this concreteness that is Chaucer's greatest contribution to the Palamon and Arcite. Doubt-

32 H. Cummings, op. cit., p. 146.

less, we are obliged to admit many anachronisms in the English version. Theseus, like a medieval knight, swears to avenge the wrongs of the Theban ladies. Palamon and Arcite are recognized as relatives because they have the same coat of arms, but we know that at the time of the story coats of arms were unknown. Holding prisoners for ransom was a common custom in the Middle Ages. Emily, like the typical medieval heroine, has golden hair, which she wears in a braid to show she is unmarried. Another anachronism is the fact that brotherhood by oath was considered in the Middle Ages more sacred than brotherhood by birth. The story also abounds in references to Christian philosophy. The very tournament itself is typically medieval.

In speaking of the amphitheatre it is well perhaps to mention that a few critics do not commend Chaucer's version as realistic. Torraca, in his study, maintains that nothing shows the lack of realism more than this part of the story. In Boccaccio's version the theatre for combat was without Athens. It already existed, as did also the temples of Venus, Mars, and

Diane to which Palamon, Arcite and Emily betook themselves. Chaucer obliges Theseus to have a theatre built on the model of Boccaccio's, and three oratories at three different points. All preparations are to be made within "this day fifty wykes, fer ne ner," less than one year's time. Torraca argues that fifty weeks was an insufficient period in which to build a theatre one mile in circumference, all in stone, full of steps, surrounded by ditches; that three oratories could hardly have had time to dry their walls and have painted on them the numerous figures, groups, and scenes that are represented. In the oratory of Venus alone besides the interrupted dreams, to the sighs, tears, laments, excesses of desire and promise which the painters could hardly have known how to delineate and color, there are depicted not less than forty allegorical, historical, and mythological figures. Could the walls possibly hold so much? Can all this be termed realism? There may be something in Torraca's point of view . . . and then again, he may be looking for the flaws.

One of the weakest elements in the Knight's Tale is the characterization. Chaucer has spoiled us to

some extent when he gave us the Prologue to the Canterbury Tales. There he introduced his pilgrims and described each individual with such vividness and art that they became real living persons. The characters in the Knight's Tale are very different. Emily, though she is the strongest motivating force in the relations of Palamon and Arcite, is a mere wooden doll. We remember her against the background of a lovely May morning; she watches the combat, but she manifests no feelings; no sentiments, although Arcite had served in her palace for two years. She is conscious of the two lovers motive for fighting, and she prays the gods to give her the man she loves for a husband, but she herself is totally unconscious of loving either one. "Her absolute stupidity," says Hutton, "angers us."³³ In Boccaccio Emily is individualized to a great degree. She has feelings and emotions not found in Chaucer. She was awed at the marvelous fight between the two cousins and was so overwhelmed that she could neither speak nor call when she first discovered them. We know

³³ Hutton, op. cit., p. 82.

that Emily was present at the tournament and watched the combat, but she is completely forgotten in the excitement of the battle, and when Arcite looked up at her she looks upon him with friendship. When Arcite dies, she screams and faints. Queen Hippolita is only slightly sketched as the "faire hardy Queene of Scithia (882) whose petition wins pity for the knights.

The Queene anon, for verray womanhede,
 Gan for to wepe; and so did Emelye.
 (Ll. 1748-9)

"Palamon and Arcite as well as Emily are lay figures. We have no real acquaintance with them, no impression of individuality." They have much in common. They are sister's sons, they bear identical armor; their lives have been spent in closest fellowship; both have sworn a knightly vow of perpetual brotherhood. Root maintains that Palamon and Arcite are more than lay figures because of this. Both Root and Fairchild agree that Chaucer differentiates the two; that the fair ideal of friendship is shattered by the stern reality of love. Their subsequent actions

manifest Arcite to be a man of action and Palamon the weakling who dreams and hopes and wishes. "It is Palamon who insists on the inviolability of their vow of friendship, and Arcite who, after an attempt at unworthy quibbling, comes out with the plain statement that "Love is a greater lawe, by my pan, than may be yeve to any erthly man," and who recognizes that, since they are both condemned to prison perpetually, the question of prior claim to Emily is one of purely academic interest. Partly as a result of character, partly as a result of opportunity, it is Arcite who determines the destiny of the two." ³⁵ We can distinguish the two characters in their prayers to the gods as well. When Arcite prays to Mars, he begs for victory in arms, feeling confident that that is the surest means of obtaining the prize coveted. Inactive Palamon, the dreamer, prays for victory in love. He is not concerned about the means; he merely places his trust in Venus. However, it is very difficult for a reader to choose between the two lovers he who is the

35 Root, op. cit., p. 170.

more deserving of Emily, and one is neither happy nor when Arcite dies and Palamon makes "faire Emelye" his bride.

One other character deserves comment, and that is the duke, Theseus. Chaucer portrays him as a brave warrior, a man of anger, yet noble, proud, "with herte pitous" for those who sought his aid. He is the motivating power behind the plot. His actions from the very beginning play an important part in the story for it is he who is responsible for the appearance of Emily. His decisions regarding the two prisoners, when they were first taken, when Arcite was released, when the tournament was suggested and planned, when the battle raged, and when Arcite's soul had left his body, determined the whole narrative.

Perotheus is a mere accidental character mentioned as the friend of Theseus and Arcite. (1191-2) Lycurgus and Emetreus likewise have no bearing or influence in the story.

Thus we have seen that characterization, as Chaucer employed it here, was indeed very faint and

weak. If we wish to enjoy to the full, the plenitude of character portrayal, we must turn to the Canterbury Tales with its whole "campaigne". There we may bask in the good humor, genuine pathos, and rich imagery of a great genius.

CHAPTER IV

EVALUATION OF THE KNIGHT'S TALE

All the critics are of one accord in the matter of the literary value of the Knight's Tale. All admit that the chief charm of the tale is not in the characterization; nor is the plot in any way the striking thing about it. Its attraction and its marvelous appeal lie in its highly wrought beauty of imaginative tapestry and its thoroughly romantic tone. As we have seen in the preceding chapter, the tale begins with the bright pageant of Theseus's triumphant home-coming thrown into sharp contrast by a "compaignye of ladyes clad in clothes blake", who awaited his coming to plead for his mercy and aid. A very lovely picture is that of "faire Emelye" doing honor to May, walking about in the garden, gathering flowers, weaving a garland of red and white to crown her golden head and singing sweetly the while Palamon and Arcite gaze upon her from behind prison bars. One does not need to use too much imagina-

tion to see the two cousins in their unhappy state quarreling over the fair vision. Palamon's complaint that he had seen Emily first; the duke's ride into the woods with his hunting party; the encounter of the two cousins in the woods; the great pictures of chivalry; the great oratories; the vivid portraits of kings Emetrius and Lycurgus; all the varied hustle and bustle and noise of preparation; the single combat and the tournament itself are the making of the Knight's Tale. All these vivid pictures are far more important than are character portrayal or plot structure. "All these with occasional passages of noble reflection, form the flesh and blood of the poem, of which the characters and the action are merely the skeleton framework," says R. K. Root. "The Knight's Tale is pre-eminently a web of splendidly pictured tapestry in which the eye may take delight, and on which the memory may fondly linger. In the dying words of Arcite:

What is this worlde? What asketh men to have?
 Now with his love, now in his colde grave,
 Allone, withouten any compaignye, -

the terrible reality of the mystery of life, its tragedy and its pathos are vividly suggested; but it is only suggested as a great painting may touch on what is most

sacred and most deep." 1

Once having studied the Knight's Tale minutely, it is not easy to forget the astounding variety and richness of Chaucer's genius. We regard him as the greatest of English narrative poets and we appreciate having a sufficient understanding of the sheer beauty of his verse. There is in Chaucer that blend of realistic sense and sheer vitality which make him one of the greatest spokesman of an age. Yet if we value Dante as the voice of the medieval soul, aflame with spiritual love and religious fervor, and Spenser as the interpreter of a ripe Renaissance already tinged with adolescent puritanism, then we must go to Chaucer for the most complete and realistic picture of the age of chivalry which exists in prose or verse. "In Chaucer are indelibly written all the simple beauty of the fourteenth century, sometimes delicately tender, sometimes hold and bright, its ruthlessness and boyish love of strife, its songful coarseness and buffoonery, its firm code of honor, its medley of accomplishment and disorder, and its consoling

1 R. K. Root, The Poetry of Chaucer. (New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1922), p. 172.

faith." 2

Apart from being one of the longest and best stories in the Canterbury Tales, the Knight's Tale has not, as an individual poem, reached the rank and classification of being one of our great well known English poems. It is not as well known as Tennyson's Idylls for example, or Arnold's Sohrab and Rostum, or even Shakespeare's Venus and Adonis. Yet, all Chaucerian scholars agree and maintain that it is one of the most successful narratives ever written in English verse, and that it is peculiarly notable for its sustained sparkling life, a life which they declare, persists even through full descriptive and philosophical passages. The plot may seem at times little more than a charming formality, yet the story achieves by turn, beauty, drama and sublimity. The glory of chivalry blazes from the few lines which depict Theseus marching toward Thebes. Shakespeare most certainly must have known that singing description of the may woods as Arcite, entering them to perform his lover's

2 F. E. Hill, Canterbury Tales (New York: Longmans Green and Company, 1930), p. XIV.

rites, hears them ringing with the lark and sees them shining with the new sun. And where could Spenser find a model more sensuously rich yet pertinently restrained than Chaucer as he tells about the lists where Palamon and Arcite are to fight for Emelye?" ³

In the Knight's Tale there are the temples wrought of iron or alabaster. Chaucer leads us to each one and halts before them so that we may feast our eyes upon the walls decked with fair paintings of Venus or dark portraitures of Mars, the doors of the eternal adamant, the fearsome allegories of life past and future. In such passages as these Chaucer is verily a master:

The statue of Venus, glorious for to se,
 Was naked, fletyng in the large see;
 And fro the navele doun al covered was
 With wawes grene, and brighte as any glas
 A citole in her right hand hadde she;
 And on hir heed, ful semely for to se,
 A rose garland, fressh and wel smellynge;
 Above hir heed hir dowves flikerynge.
 Biforn hir stood hir sone, Cupido.
 Upon his shuldres wynges hadde he two,
 And blynd he was, as it was often seen;
 A bow he bar, and arwes brighte and kene.

(Ll. 1955- 1966)

And in the great temple of Mars in Thrace:

³ Hill, op. cit., p. 15.

Ther sough I, first, the dirke ymaginyng
 Of felonye, and al the compassyng;
 The cruel Ire, reed as any gleede;
 The phykepurs, and eek the pale Drede;
 The smyllere with the knyfe under the cloke;
 The shepne, brennyng, with the blake smoke;
 The treson of the mordryng on the bedde;
 The open werre, with wounds al bibledde;
 Contek with blody knyf and sharpe manace.
 Al ful of chirkyng was that sory place!

In passages such as these and particularly in the one
 describing the funeral rites of Arcite, Chaucer is the
 master of poets to come,

Heigh labour and ful greet apparaillyng
 Was at the service and the fyr makyng,
 That with his grene tope the heven raughte,
 And twenty fadme of brede the armes straughte -
 This is to seyn, the bowes weren so brode.
 Of stree first ther was leyd ful many a lode;
 But how the fyr was naked upon highte,
 And eek the names that the trees highte -
 As ook, firre, birch, aspe, alder, holm, popeler,
 Wylugh, elm, plane assh, box, chasteyn, lynde, laurer,
 Mapul, thorn, bich, hasel, ew, whippeltre -
 How they weren feld, shal not be told for me;
 Ne how the goddes ronnen up and down,
 Disinherited of hire habitacioun,
 In which they woneden in reste and pees -
 Nymphes, fawns, and amadriades -
 Ne hou the beestes and the briddes alle
 Fleden for fere, whan the wode was falle;
 Ne how the ground agast was of the light,
 That was not wont to seen the sonne bright;
 Ne how the fyr was couched first with stree,
 And thanne with grene wode and spicerye,
 And thaune with clooth of gold and with perrye,
 And gerlandes hangyng, with ful many a flour;
 The mirre, thencens, with al so greet adour;
 Ne how Arcite lay among al this;

Ne what richesse about his body is;
 Ne how that Emelye, as was the gyse,
 Putte in the fyr of funeral servyse;
 Ne how she swowned whan men made fyr;
 Ne what she spak, ne what was hir desire;
 Ne what jewels men in the fyre tho caste,
 When that the fyr was greet and brente faste,
 Ne now somme caste hir sheeld, and somme hir spere,
 And of hir vestimentz whiche that they were,
 And coppes full of wyn, and milk, and blood,
 What that the fyr was greet and brente faste,
 Ne how somme caste hir sheeld, and some hir spere,
 And of hir vestimentz whiche that they were,
 And coppes full of wyn, and milk, and blood,
 Into the fyr, that brente as it were wood;
 Ne how the Grekes, with an huge route,
 Thries riden al the place aboute,
 Upon the left hand, with a loud shoutynge,
 And thries with hir speres claterynge;
 And thries how the ladyes gonne crye;
 And how that lad was homward Emelye;
 Ne how Arcite is brent to asshen colde;
 Ne how that lyche-wake was yholde.
 Al thilke night; ne how the Grekes pleye
 The wak pleyes

(Ll. 2913 - 2960)

"No one," says Hill, "can understand the growth of beauty in English poetry without knowing the beauty of the Knight's Tale. Other scholars voice the same opinion in praise of Chaucer, but they do not readily favor Boccaccio with the same laudable remarks. Hutton speaks of the Teseide with little admiration. He does not consider it one of Boccaccio's most successful pieces of writing. He claims that the Italian writer failed

dismally; so much so, that even those who know Italian would become better acquainted with the story if they read the first narrative of the Canterbury Tales. "For the moment at least, Boccaccio's ambition appears to have outstripped his ability. In spite of some excellent bursts of poetry, here and there, it is about the poorest thing he ever did." ⁴ There may be a certain degree of truth in the statement. Garnett ⁵ tells us that Boccaccio thought little of his own poetry, particularly after having become acquainted with the work of Petrarch. We know, too, that on more than one occasion the genius of Certaldo would have destroyed his poetry. His great master was many times obliged to remonstrate with him. "Even the incitement of Fiammetta was unavailing to spur him on to the temple of fame." However, his own poetic accomplishments are proof sufficient to denote that he really and truly directed his energy and all his powers in order to achieve the height of poetic fame. In one particular place where he is speaking of himself he says:

⁴ E. Hutton, Giovanni Boccaccio (London: John Lane, 1910), p. 89.

⁵ R. Garnett, A History of Italian Literature (London: 1918), p. 94.

"Study I have not spared, or scanted time,
 Now rest unto my labor I permit,
 Lamenting this so little could avail
 To raise me to that eminence sublime."

To some critics this judgment was unreasonably severe, Most of them seem to think that Boccaccio would have won a greater renown and reputation as poet if the taste of his time had permitted him, like Chaucer, to seek inspiration among the people for his verses as he did for his stories. To Chaucer the greatest inspiration came from knowing his fellow being in all the intricacies of life. Rossetti declares that Boccaccio could be quite exquisite at times and points out this merit by a translation of one of the former's sonnets. ⁶

Love steered my course while yet the sun rode high,
 On Scylla's waters to a myrtle-grove;
 The heaven was still and the sea did not move;
 Yet now and then a little breeze went by,
 Stirring the tops of trees against the sky;
 And then I heard a song as glad as love,
 So sweet that never yet the like thereof
 Was heard in any mortal company,
 "A nymph, a goddess, or an angel sings
 Unto herself, within this chosen place
 Of ancient loves," so said I at that sound.
 And there my lady, mid the shadowings
 Of myrtle trees, 'mid flowers and grassy space,
 Singing I saw, with others who sat around.

6 Garnett, op. cit., p. 95.

"It would be possible to overestimate the enthusiasm which Chaucer must have felt for the art of Boccaccio, but it is easier to disparage the influence which, the writings of the latter had upon Chaucer, and this has been done by French critics anxious to prove that Chaucer was merely a successor of the Trouveres and by Anglo-Saxon scholars who with linguistic loyalty have hesitated to admit that the works on which Chaucer's claims to greatness largely depends (Troilus and Criseyde and the Canterbury Tales) owed anything but a slight and trivial debt to Boccaccio." ⁷ This question of Chaucer and Boccaccio is complicated by the fact that Chaucer never alludes to Boccaccio by name, not even when he is using the plot of his stories. Chiarini maintains that Chaucer's neglect to mention Boccaccio is a mystery, because at the very points when he draws from the Italian poet more directly and more largely, as in the Knight's Tale and the Troilus, Chaucer strives to hide the true source from his readers with false and enigmatic citations. "Gli autori che egli cita, quando dovrebbe citare il

⁷ G. H. Cowling, Chaucer (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co.), p. 101.

Boccaccio, che e' la fonte vera, so Lollius, Stazio, e Petrarca." 8

The reason for Chaucer's manner of citing his sources may be, as Praz suggests, that he followed the principle held by many writers that the older an authority, the more venerable and more worthy of quotation it is.

"The same principle which leads Chaucer to replace Boccaccio's lines by Dante's when he recognizes the ultimate source, prompt him in the Knight's Tale to attribute to Statius rather than to Boccaccio." 9 Lowes 10 gives us a very good example of this:

No sooner had he (Chaucer) begun upon Boccaccio's graceful stanzas than they call up to him the loveliest description of a garden that he, if any one, ever read - the account of the Earthly Paradise through which, in the twenty-eighth canto of the Purgatorio, Matilda walks gathering flowers, recalling to Dante in her beauty where and what Proserpine was when her mother lost her and she the spring. And through links of association on which I dare not dwell, there is woven through three stanzas a fabric of blended imagery to which Chaucer and Boccaccio and the Apocalypse and Dante

8 C. Chiarini, "Intorno alle Novelle di Canterbury di Geoffredo Chaucer" In Nuova Antologia vol. V, 32, 1897, p. 157.

9 M. Praz, "Chaucer and the Great Writers of the Trecento" in Monthly Criterion, VI, 1927, p. 133.

10 L. J. Lowes, "The Franklin's Tale, the Teseide and The Filocolo" in Modern Philology, XV, 12, 1918, p.149.

are joint contributors. And the lines as Chaucer wrote them, were bathed for him in an atmosphere of recollected loveliness which they still have power to evoke.

Even a little later on he does the same thing. By a phrase in Boccaccio which Dante also used, he is at once directed to new vistas. "His mind flashes, by way of the phrase from the Teseide to another of Dante's supreme passages, that fifth canto of the Inferno which tells the story of Paolo and Francesca, and he into Boccaccio's list of the world's great lovers every name in Dante's headroll of great lovers as well." 11

Cowling remarks that however unlikely Chaucer may have recognized and acknowledged the man whom he called Lollius, one thing is certain - Boccaccio's works did influence Chaucer in many ways. Boccaccio must have been a master after Chaucer's own heart since he was a worldly man in every sense, he was well read, well acquainted with life at court, he knew all the details of human living, he loved nature and found an intense delight in it. Furthermore he was a great story teller. Did he

11 Lowes, op. cit., p. 149.

not write those one hundred tales of the Decameron? "He taught Chaucer what to write about," says Cowling. "He taught Chaucer the art of narrative. If Chaucer's earliest ambition was to become an English Froissart or a De Machaut, his later desire was to become the English Boccaccio." 12

From what we know of the lives of these two illustrious writers, we must admit that they had a great deal in common. Chaucer was much closer to Boccaccio than he was to Dante or to Petrarch. Both authors Lowes tells us "had a large and urbane tolerance of life, as contrasted with the saeva indignation of Dante; both had also in Rabelais' praise - an invincible gaiety of spirit, both were men of wide and intimate acquaintance with the world, both were consummate masters of narrative. Dante's influence was the deeper, Boccaccio's the broader in its scope. But between them they awoke Chaucer to consciousness of a power that was his own." 13

All the critics have attested to the fact that

12 Cowling, op. cit., p. 102.

13 Lowes, op. cit., p. 148.

Boccaccio was highly responsible for having stirred Chaucer to emulation of him. Nowhere before had Chaucer found such rich treasures of new and congenial things - things unlike any of the great masterpieces he had pored over, but having the appearance of everyday common affairs and events he found in them material at which he too might try his pen. He hoped not only to imitate what he discovered in the Teseide and the Filostrato but to surpass their every merit. So it is that we find Chaucer carrying out his aspiration, studying the Teseide in its every phase, and striving earnestly to surpass it.

Torraca declares that he does not credit Chaucer with having been so successful in this attempt. He says, "I respect and esteem the father of English literature; I admire him where he deserves to be admired, in his portraits of the Prologue, in his clearly humorous and realistic tales, even in that of "Chanticleer and Pertelote" but in that of the Knight I believe that very few times does he manifest his geniality." 14

14 Torraca, "La Novella del Cavaliere e La Teseide" in Revista D'Italia, V. 30, 1927, p. 212.

His transformation of the Teseide is undeniably a fascinating accomplishment. So appealing was the story to Chaucer that "In Ariadne, in Anelida, In Troilus, in the Franklin's Tale, in the Knight's Tale, where he re-tells the story, he comes back and back again to it, as if its appeal had been so irresistible that he could not keep his hands off whatever he began." ¹⁵ If we desire to evaluate Chaucer's merit as a copyist, as some would call him, or imitator, it is well to consider the opinion of Clerke who frankly admits that "while mediocrity strives vainly after originality, genius fails to imitate even when imitation is its aim. Full of delightful surprises it outdoes its aspiration, creates in seeking to copy, and transforms in striving to reproduce; asserts its individuality in its despite and reshapes in its own images the mould that was to have suppressed it." ¹⁶

Let us now consider Chaucer and Boccaccio in relation to their respective countries and to the literature of their times. Many of our critics and scholars

¹⁵ Lowes, op. cit., p. 148.

¹⁶ E. Clerke, "Boccaccio and Chaucer" in National Review, vol. 8, 1886, p. 167.

hail them as great geniuses, and rightly so. Boccaccio was not only a great creative artist, author of the Decameron, he was also a great and heroic soldier offering himself up to the Revival of Learning, spending most of his life writing. "His place as a poet must be determined less by the intrinsic value of his work than by his function of precursor, essaying a new development of his art and forecasting its course in future." ¹⁷ Although he is considered third in the great triad of the early Renaissance, he was in a wider and truer sense, the pioneer of subsequent Italian song. Dante, because of his lofty themes, was unapproachable and inimitable. The narrow limitation of Petrarch condemned to it inane reiteration. Boccaccio was the one responsible for giving the metrical romance an established place in literature. It was he, too, who supplied the poetry of the future with an outlet of expression and opened up to it a new and inexhaustible field of subjects in harmony with modern taste. We cannot say that the heroic, the pastoral, and the familiar romance owed their actual birth to him. His activity in the field of narrative

17 Clerke, op. cit., p. 121.

poetry was most certainly important. Boccaccio may not have invented the octava stanza, but he considered it the best adaption for versified narrative and by using it proved its supreme fitness for narrative. Thus, being the first to adapt it, he marked out the channel in which the epic genius of Italy flowed ever since. Through his use of octava stanza "was introduced to a high sphere of cultivated letters where it later came to occupy so large a place." 18

The Teseide forms a landmark in Italian literature as the earliest attempt to set a heroic subject to that plebeian phrase of melody destined to form the structural basis of all verse-music of the Renaissance. It has all the elaborate awkwardness of a first struggle for utterance in an unfamiliar form of diction, while ideas are still clogged by mechanical difficulties of expression. It could not be expected that Boccaccio's attempt should display at first all the perfection his meter is capable of receiving; he is lax and diffuse. Because of its peculiar grace of language and its affluence of rhymes

18 Clerke, op. cit., p.121.

adapt it especially to this elegant form of versification, it is far superior for narrative purposes to the digressive terza rima or to Italian counterfeits of the majestic blank verse of England. Some of Boccaccio's difficulties in writing the Teseide were due to the fact that he was making an attempt to reproduce classical models, such as the Aeneid, while using in the Italian vernacular an idiom which had never as yet been tried in such subjects. For Boccaccio, Garnett tells us, though a diligent and ardent student of the newly recovered literature of antiquity, was a much more servile copyist of its forms than than were his successors. Ker states that in the history of poetry, the Teseide has a higher eminence.¹⁹ Its author has the reputation of being the first of the modern writers to attempt the form and spirit of classical literature.

"The works of Boccaccio other than the Decameron are full of all kinds of faults, from pompous rhetoric to the opposite extreme of mere flatness and negligence, but nothing impairs his skill in discovering the lines on which he is going to proceed, the ease and security with which he takes up his point of view, decides on his method, and sets to work. The execution

¹⁹ W. P. Ker, Essays on Medieval Lit. (London: MacMillan Co., 1905), p. 67.

may be scamped, may be trivial in one place and emphatic in another, without good reason, but it seldom does much to spoil the good effect of the first design. This intuition of the right lines of a story was what Chaucer learned from Boccaccio. There is nothing more exhilarating in literary history than the way in which Chaucer caught the secret of Boccaccio's work, and used it for his own purposes. ²⁰

A few critics, among whom Cummings ranks as the most authoritative, feel that except in Troilus and Criseyde and the Knight's Tale, Chaucer's narrative art remains unaffected by the art of Boccaccio. Cummings says that there is no ground for any inference that under Boccaccio's influence Chaucer learned to tell a story better. It is very true that in his use of the Teseide as a source, Chaucer employed different methods. Both poets use opposite or varying methods in impressing the readers.²¹ Cummings claims that the two poets are as different in their management of narrative art as are the Florentine ladies and gentlemen of the Decameron from the pilgrims of the Canterbury Tales.

²⁰ Ker, op. cit., p. 68.

²¹ H. M. Cummings, Indebtedness of Chaucer's Works to Italian Works of Boccaccio (Cincinnati: University of Cincinnati Studies, 1916), p. 198.

Boccaccio is primarily a teller of fascinating diverting stories. Chaucer is primarily and always an interpreter of life. And that fact is true despite the fidelity of life and to the laws of psychology that one seldom loses sight of in the characters of *Trailo* and *Griseida* and *Pandaro* as one reads the Filostrato.²²

Praz and Ker do not agree with Cummings. Both insist that Chaucer is deeply indebted to the Italian poet, that he discovered the secret of poetic supremacy. Legouis asserts that Chaucer was especially attracted to Boccaccio's youthful poems and that this attraction evoked the first passionate verse in a literature as yet unknown, but which was to become one of the most illustrious in Europe.²³ He states that it was by translating and reshaping the Teseide and the Filostrato that Chaucer first introduced into English poetry a richness and passion hitherto unknown in fourteenth century England but which in the future would be leavened by the spirit of the South.

It is very true as Ker so aptly expresses, that Boccaccio was not troubled about rhetorical principles

²² Cummings, op. cit., 198.

²³ E. Legouis, Geoffrey Chaucer (London: J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd., New York: E. P. Dutton ' Co., 1913), p. 119.

and says nothing much about his art beyond his explanation of the allegorical theory characteristic in Virgil. But while he neglected the theory of poetical composition, he was making discoveries and inventions in literary forms and establishing literary principles in a poetical way. Chaucer, equally without any explicit reflection on the principles of construction, shows how he had made out for himself what Boccaccio was driving at. The Knight's Tale is proof enough that Chaucer had all the medieval tastes, the taste for exorbitant digressions and irrelevancies, the love of useful information, the want of proportion and design. Nevertheless, he delved wholeheartedly into the writings of Boccaccio and there discovered his secret. The result was the Knight's Tale with certain modifications. Chaucer's principal merit, therefore, was to have taken this poem of the Italian and to have transformed and adopted it for the benefit of his English readers. "He was thus accomplishing," says Legouis, the first and by no means the easiest part of his task. He enabled the untrained English heroic verse to vie with the brilliant and supple "endeca-syllabo" of the European language, which had outstripped all others in poetic accomplishments." 24

24 Legouis, op. cit., p. 121.

The value of the Knight's Tale lies in the breadth and richness of the various scenes in which Chaucer adhered strictly to the original story. "Whenever Chaucer sets himself to do strong work", says Ker, "There is the influence of Boccaccio."²⁵ It was due to this fidelity that Chaucer not only wrote the finest lines of his tale, but also gave English literature some graceful or rich paintings, the equivalent of which, scholars attest, are not to be found again until Spenser.

The Italian critics are of a different opinion in their evaluation of the two poets' works. Torraca expresses his views as follows:

La Novella del Cavaliere non mi pare il miglior documento dell'originalità e dell'arte del poeta inglese. Certo, nemmeno l'opera giovanile del Boccaccio è un capolavoro; però lasciando da parte che, senza di essa, la novella non sarebbe nata, e meglio disposta, più organica, spesso più verosimili; nell'insieme, più ricca di scene e di episodi, che già annunziano il grande artista. Dei due, ha tutta l'aria del principiante proprio colui, che venne dopo, pur avendo trovato, bell'e pronta la materia e il modello.²⁶

²⁵ Ker, op. cit., p. 71.

²⁶ Torraca, op. cit., p. 213.

From this we are to understand that Torraca is not willing to acknowledge Chaucer as the master artist. We also find a little of Torraca's attitude in Trigonía. He sorely laments the fact that in the works of Chaucer there is nothing that savors of agitation or passion as flows through the writings of the Italian poet; and that Chaucer never took love seriously, therefore, he treated this love with the usual conventions in his early poems of youth. It may be that the Italian critics are being misguided by their own sentimentality. Much can be said about the Italian literary influence on Chaucer, but we must credit Chaucer with being more than a mere student of literature. He certainly not only read all he could get hold of; he observed keenly every detail of life about him. Praz gives a fine account of Chaucer's visit to Italy. He declares emphatically that the poet's first journey was responsible for the new spirit that breathed in his production and that his acquaintance with Italian authors was likewise a source of new thoughts and ideals. Besides that, Chaucer was quite overwhelmed by the spectacle of Italy, all alive with the dawn of the Renaissance. Jusserand attempts to portray this influence but to no avail.

"It was hardly the sight of the paintings of Giotto and Orcagna or of sculptures of Andrea Pisano, or even the discovery of the ancient world which was likely to impress the English Envoy. We are too inclined to think of those first steps of the Renaissance as a pageant apt to strike our focussing historical outlook. We see that distant age through the magnifying glass of posterity." 27

In a way, Chaucer, with his keen intuition, must have felt the identity of his aims with those of Italian forerunners of the Renaissance. Just as Boccaccio made the attempt to give permanent form to a class of fable extensively circulated among the unlettered vulgar by oral tradition, so Chaucer was trying to raise the vernacular up to the splendor of a literary language. He speaks of having seen Venus "naked fletings in a sea," her head crowned with a "rose garland whyte and reed." Yet, Praz, reminds us that it was not literature alone which influenced Chaucer. He describes the intense dramatic character of Italian life; a life replete with warmth, and action and feeling, giving outward expression to all shades of feeling, "now wildly gesticulating, now resuming a whole philosophy in the twinkling of an eye." 28

27 Praz, op. cit., p. 156.

28 Ibid.

Chaucer was not the only one who was affected by what he saw. We find that the dramatists of the Elizabethan period two centuries later discovered the same things. Praz further informs us that Stendahl and Browning admired these same things in more recent times, and that Alfieri was quite correct and well expressed the identical idea when he said that "la pianta uomo" (the plant man) grows more vigorous in Italy than anywhere else. As Praz says:

"The spectacle of everyday Italian life no doubt sharpened still more in Chaucer the feeling for drama both innate in him and furthered by the perusal of Jean de Meun's masterpiece, so that coming back to his native country, the poet was able to see life around him in the light of his newly acquired experience, and to express that life in words which were "cosin to the Dede." 29

Hutton seems quite certain that Boccaccio was well known in England, at least by name, in the fourteenth century. Sacchetti in the praemio to his *Novelle* confirms this:

. . . "and taking into consideration the excellent Florentine poet Messer Giovanni Boccaccio, who wrote the book of the

29 Praz, op. cit., p. 157.

Hundred Tales in one effort of his great intellect that is so generally published and sought after, that even in France and England they have translated it into their language, and I, Franco Sacchetti, though only a rude and unrefined man, have made up my mind to write the present work." 30

The traces of this translation if it were ever made, has been lost. In fact, Hutton's opinion is that the only man in England who might have ably carried out such a task worthily was Geoffrey Chaucer, who adapted and translated the Teseide.

Apart from the merits of his writings says Garnett, Boccaccio might rest a claim to no ordinary renown as creator of classic Italian prose; and even if he had found this instrument ready to his hand, his work with it alone might have assured him immortality. As a great originator, he has perhaps a still higher title to fame. We do know that he was the first effective exemplar of heroic and pastoral romance and of epic in the octava stanza, and also the principal popularizer of classical lore, and as such, his influence will undoubtedly be felt to the end of time.

30 Hutton, op. cit., p. 313.

Chaucer's ideal as a poet was, we are told, to make the English language share in the literary revival of the Italian of Petrarch and the French of Alain Chartier. But we must remember that in attempting to carry out this ideal Chaucer looked upon Boccaccio as a source rather than a model. His versification is a testimony of this. He never employs Boccaccio's verse forms. Chaucer did appropriate to his own uses some of the common stock of early romance, borrowing from the pages of Boccaccio with a frank license which in those days was not considered plagiarism.

It is most fitting to include here a criticism of Cummings.

"Further, we cannot say the prosody of Boccaccio influenced Chaucer. In the main, Chaucer's debt to Boccaccio is that of a borrower. Chaucer never served apprenticeship to the Italian. He never became a literary disciple to him. He did not weakly imitate him as a master. He drew upon Boccaccio as from a storehouse and deftly fitted it into a great mosaic of his own. The two Italian poems merely furnished a few more strands of fiction and truth, of reality and phantasy, of comedy and tragedy for him to weave into the great pictorial tapestry of medieval life which Chaucer's complete portrayal will ever represent. Chaucer's debt is great. The fairest gardens, and temples in his tapestry, the most beautiful

ladies, the most chivalrous knights, the most pathetic youthful characters and the most human of his middle-aged ones, come many of them from Boccaccio, and from Boccaccio they bring the breath of old romance. But Boccaccio owes a great debt to Chaucer. It was Chaucer who made him in Troilus and Criseyde and the Knight's Tale part and parcel of English Literature. An admission to share in such a realm and through such a hand is no slight privilege." 31

31 Cummings, op. cit., p. 198

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APPROVAL SHEET

The thesis submitted by Sister Mary Felicita De Mato, O.S.M., has been read and approved by three members of the Department of English.

The final copies have been examined by the director of the thesis and the signature which appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated, and that the thesis is now given final approval with reference to content, form, and mechanical accuracy.

The thesis is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts.

February 2, 1947
Date

James J. Young
Signature of Adviser