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Papacy in Paganism: The Great Schism of Palamon and Arcite

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Papacy in Paganism:
The Great Schism of Palamon and Arcite

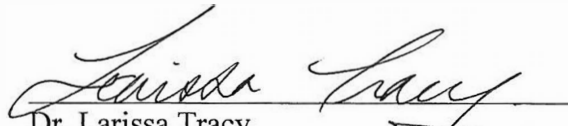
by
Samantha Kathleen Diaz

A Thesis in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirement for the Degree of
Master of Arts in English

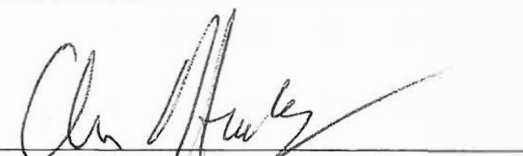
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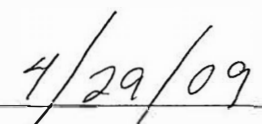
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Papacy in Paganism: The Great Schism of Palamon and Arcite

I. Introduction

Critics often hail Geoffrey Chaucer's Knight as an exemplar of Christian ideals and the *Knight's Tale* as a complementary praise for the ideals of chivalry, while largely interpreting the remainder of the *Canterbury Tales* as a critique on the many corruptions of the Church. Although Chaucer is unanimously praised as one of the most talented writers of his time, little attention has been given to how the *Knight's Tale*, outside of its narrator, aligns with the theme of the larger work into which it is incorporated. The *Knight's Tale* was originally composed in the early years of the Great Schism of the Catholic Church (1378-1417), when all of Christendom divided in allegiance to two simultaneous popes. Both spiritual and secular writers in the fourteenth century publicly condemned the affair as the ultimate evidence of ecclesiastical corruption, the inevitable outcome of a French-controlled Church saturated with desire for riches and total authority. Chaucer, whose works often address the condition of the Church, must have acknowledged an event that so defined the institution in his age. Indeed, this thesis will argue that Chaucer draws direct attention to the Great Schism in his adaptation of Giovanni Boccaccio's Italian work, the *Teseida delle Nozze d'Emilia* (c. 1339-41). Chaucer alters the characterization and sequence of events from the *Teseida* to create an allegorical representation of the competitive papacy as his audience knew the dilemma. The *Knight's Tale* centers on the question, commonly debated amongst contemporary theologians, of whether popes who employ secular, militaristic tactics in the pursuit of what appeared as temporal glory are capable of aiding Christian souls to salvation. Even though the poem offers allegiance to the Roman Pope Urban VI, it also acknowledges

that his recourse to violence against fellow Christians in the defense of his title against the Avignon Pope Clement VII damages his reputation for righteousness. When it appears that the two popes are incapable of settling their dispute through arms, and the imagined intervention of secular authority fails, Chaucer ultimately predicts that only God can and will determine the true claimant to the Holy See.¹

Scholars have argued various interpretations of the *Knight's Tale* almost since the poem's creation. While Judith C. Perryman may be correct in suggesting that the *Knight's Tale* "is too complex for any single-visioned allegorical interpretation to hold" (132), her proclamation does not prohibit the theory that, although there may be other contemporary issues addressed in the poem, Chaucer also includes a representation of the Great Schism and its effects on the Christian populace. Admittedly, Chaucer's division of the poem into four parts, which at times appear to contradict each other in characterization, would hinder an interpretation of the poem as representing only the actual events of the Schism. Outside the allegory, Chaucer's divisions may allude to his abbreviation of the twelve books of the *Teseida*, as well as emphasize the epic and romantic nature of the poem. If the plot is studied by the arc in Palamon and Arcite's pursuit of Emelye, however, there are only two sections of the poem — that in which they fight without realistic motivation for achieving their goal and that in which the audience is informed that one will marry Emelye as a result of his actions. This thesis separates the *Knight's Tale* into two parts, before and after the battle in the grove, because the allegory addresses the Schism in such a manner; Chaucer begins the poem with a summary of contemporary events and concludes it with his own prediction for the outcome of the Schism, which was not resolved until well after his death.²

Because historians have since declared that the Roman papacy was always the true authority over the Church, the implications of the Great Schism on late medieval society and literature may be easily overlooked. Yet the event was a lengthy and disastrous affair in Chaucer's Europe, with secular governments manipulating their subjects' knowledge of the events to provide only one side of the debate. As a member of the royal court, however, Chaucer would have known more than the average English citizen about the affairs of the Schism. Indeed, one of the key mercenaries fighting in the battles that ensued likely provided information about the dilemma that few would be privileged to know. However, because there is no record of what, exactly, was Chaucer's knowledge of the events, this discussion only includes events that Chaucer is likely to have known.³ To assist in the comprehension of how Chaucer transformed his source into such a representation, summaries of both Boccaccio's *Teseida* and Chaucer's poem are included to emphasize the disparities between the two works, as well as to better illustrate why Chaucer's changes are reflective of an allegorical meaning within the *Knight's Tale*.

It is generally accepted that the original version of the *Knight's Tale* was written c. 1383-84, and that its form in the *Canterbury Tales* is virtually identical to the earlier poem, save for references to the pilgrimage.⁴ Some form of the poem certainly existed in the early 1380s because Chaucer mentions his work, "al the love of Palamon and Arcite/ Of Thebes, thogh the storye ys knowen lyte" (F 420-21), in the Prologue to *The Legend of Good Women* (c. 1386-8). Because this original "Palamon and Arcite" poem has not survived, though, there can be no way of determining how closely the *Knight's Tale* resembles its predecessor. However, the possibility of extensive revision does not affect

Chaucer's allegory of the Great Schism because the ordeal continued well past the composition of the later work. Rather, Chaucer enhances his criticism of papal violence against Christians when assimilating his adaptation into the *Canterbury Tales* by assigning the poem to a Knight whom he implies has been a participant in these false crusades.

Until the publication of Terry Jones' study, *Chaucer's Knight: The Portrait of a Medieval Mercenary*, the majority of scholars took Chaucer at his word in the *General Prologue's* portrait of a "verray, parfit gentil knyght" (I [A] 72). Derek Brewer, among others⁵, believes "there is no reason to suspect irony" in Chaucer's description of the Knight because the soldier personifies the ideals of chivalry in the author's time ("Chivalry" 66). Admittedly, when taken at face value, the sheer quantity and variety of the Knight's battles appear to laud the history of crusades. Yet, there is evidence that the citizens of Chaucer's England did not universally praise the specific battles listed in the portrait, as Brewer would argue ("Chivalry" 60). Jones thoroughly explains how the secular motivation and often-disastrous outcomes of each of the Knight's crusades were the subject of criticism among Chaucer's peers. Most notably, he points out that the first battle listed in the Knight's repertoire, the 1365 siege of Alexandria led by Peter of Cyprus, was notorious among Chaucer's audience for having been a massacre of both heathens and Christians (42).⁶ Jones posits that once word spread that Peter's mercenary knights (many of whom were English) had abandoned him in the battlefield after pillaging, English citizens were ashamed of the failed crusade (45). Because Chaucer introduces the Knight's career in such a manner, Jones believes the author uses this highest-ranking pilgrim to criticize the corruption of ideal knighthood under the growing

rate of mercenary armies of the time. Not only does the Knight's portrait question chivalric ideology, but it also advances Chaucer's indictment on what should be the ultimate ideal — the Catholic Church — that employed such soldiers.

Jones, however, fails to discuss why such a mercenary soldier would be on a religious pilgrimage. Although Esther Quinn admits that pilgrimages of Chaucer's time were most often undertaken as opportunities for social bonding and entertainment (76), she has correctly pointed out that the *Canterbury Tales*' "continuous use of religious references serves as a reminder that the pilgrimage is not merely a social or literary venture" (83). As the Knight shows no ulterior motive throughout the work — and certainly is not on pilgrimage because of the pillaging that Jones posits as his motivation for battle — it can be reasonably assumed that the Knight sincerely seeks penance for sins he feels he has committed. While some, such as Celia Lewis, propose that the Knight is on pilgrimage for crimes against humanity in battle (374),⁷ they do not elucidate why, when it was widely condoned for men to fight against heathens in the name of God, the Knight would feel he had sinned in battle. H. Marshall Leicester's study of the *General Prologue* argues that it is not the portraits that define the characters of the pilgrims, but the tales that they subsequently tell (217). Indeed, the Knight's story quite literally creates his character. The inclusion of the *Knight's Tale* in the *Canterbury Tales* requires a narrator befitting its already-established theme, and as such, the Knight's motivation becomes explicit after his tale provides an allegorical indictment of the Great Schism. Because his tale concludes that the crusades of the Schism are unacceptable, the Knight's motivation for pilgrimage may very well be guilt for unnamed violence against fellow Christians, not infidels.

Although the present study focuses on Chaucer's condemnation of the Great Schism through the text of the *Knight's Tale* alone, the allegory of the poem extends to its *Canterbury Tales* narrator, as well. The Knight's battles, as well as his tale, establish him as a symbol of the mercenary class of soldiers who fought for one (or sometimes both⁸) of the popes of the Schism. However, the *Knight's Tale* is careful to criticize only the papacy and heads of Church, always emphasizing the continuing possibility for salvation among the victimized Christian populace. Therefore, while the poem admits that it may be difficult to forgive the rival popes for their violent pursuits of the Holy See, the Knight on pilgrimage personifies the implications of the *Knight's Tale*. Chaucer's allegory urges a termination of schismatic violence if the Church is ever to return to a state of purity. Hence, his Knight, repentant of implied participation in the battles of the Schism, fulfills what the *Knight's Tale* puts forth as the only way man can successfully participate in the cessation of the Schism — the refusal to allow further destruction of Christians.

Of course, this is not the typical interpretation of the *Knight's Tale*. Since the publication of Charles Muscatine's 1950 article, "Form, Texture, and Meaning in Chaucer's *Knight's Tale*," most scholarship has concurred with his proposal that the poem is Chaucer's celebration of the ability to maintain order, inherent to noble life⁹. Other critics accept that Chaucer praises this virtue, but claim that the poem further positions God's will as the supreme governor of human affairs while the nobility can only do its best to maintain a proper status quo.¹⁰ The two groups generally agree, though, that Palamon and Arcite's violent rivalry is a depiction of the chaos inherent to mankind if left in a state of uncontrolled passion. While these interpretations are valid and

thoroughly supported by the text, they do not designate a definite chaotic aspect of late medieval life with which Chaucer is concerned. Certainly, the poem does call for intervention to resolve a state of disorder, but it concerns more than just the abstract question of whether man is capable of governing himself. The *Knight's Tale* specifically addresses the state of the Church that, in the context of the Great Schism, had erupted into total chaos, while providing a proposed theory for resolution that encourages the noble audience to devise a means by which to return the Church and Christian populace to order.

II. The Great Schism

The great ordeal of the fourteenth-century Catholic Church began in March 1378 with the death of Pope Gregory XI. Gregory was convinced that the extravagance and luxury of the papacy during residence in Avignon had led to rebellion among the various papal states of Italy and corrupted the values of the heads of the Church, so he decided to return the papacy to Rome towards the end of 1377, only to die soon after. His death ignited a fiery debate over the righteousness, or lack thereof, in the Avignon papacy, leading to a split in the Church now referred to as the Great Schism.

Thomas Bokenkotter explains that the papacy had been based in Avignon since the French King Philip the Fair abducted Pope Boniface VIII in 1303 (167). For many years, popes had maintained the authority to denounce a secular ruler, proclaiming that one could not rule without the divine right from a Pope and, by extension, God. When Philip claimed that he did not need the consent of the Pope to rule France, Boniface responded with *Unam Sanctum*, declaring spiritual power superior to temporal power in all matters (Bokenkotter 175). Violent thirteenth-century battles over political authority between the Church and the German Empire had already left many questioning the concept of a united Christendom, so Philip's action solidified the contemporary political belief that the papacy should be subservient to secular rule in matters of state. When Boniface died in 1305, his successor, Pope Clement V, unsuccessfully attempted to return the papacy to Rome. Italy, in the meantime, had fragmented to turbulent states with heated, often violent, debates over papal authority that, according to M. Creighton, were instigated by Philip to ensure Clement V's return to Avignon for fear of his life (36).

While there is some discrepancy regarding his motivation,¹¹ Clement V's reign saw the papal residence officially moved to Avignon.

Over the next seventy years, the Avignon papacy developed a reputation for excess. Bokenkotter describes how, continuing the conflict over spiritual versus temporal power, the Church constructed luxurious palaces and courts at Avignon because its heads felt they needed to compete with the extravagance of contemporary secular leaders (178). By the reign of Pope John XXII (1316-1334), the papal reliance on riches had reached such a peak that, in response to the questioning of Franciscan friars, John declared vows of poverty to be heretical, as Creighton explains (39). These friars, in return, declared the Pope a heretic and lamented the “carnal Church, degraded by worldliness, wealth and wickedness, against which was set a spiritual Church adorned by simplicity, poverty, and godliness” (Creighton 40). While the Franciscans were among the earliest critics of the Church in Avignon, other theologians as well as political leaders began to address the growing chasm between the ideal Church and reality as the papacy remained outside Rome. With the Holy See firmly rooted in France and identified with luxury, it was not long before the secular world began taking advantage of the transition for its own benefit. Countries at war with France — most notably England — relied on the corrupted nature of the Avignon papacy as a justifiable reason to oppose the Church's demands whenever necessary.

England was among the first nations to resist the French papal authority. Creighton describes how, soon after King Edward III refused to pay papal taxes in 1343 (54), the Italian Papal States followed by rebelling against what they viewed as exorbitant taxes assumed to be fulfilling the extravagant needs of French popes (56). Led by the

Florentines, Italy became the fiercest, most violent opponent of papal authority, hindering the few attempts that various popes made over the course of the Avignon papacy to return to the still-loyal Rome. By his reign, Pope Gregory XI was employing mercenary armies to attack the rebellious states in an attempt to subdue dissent by force. When news spread that the papacy was using such tactics, educated peoples throughout England and Western Europe began to debate the morality of a papacy that would maintain its French allegiances while annihilating fellow Christians. Thus, when Gregory XI attempted to reconcile the papacy with the Florentines in 1377 by returning to Rome, only to die in the process, the Roman citizens demanded an Italian replacement.

The question remains as to how forceful such a demand was on the part of the Romans. This request, however adamant, would go down in history as the (possibly scapegoat) cause of the Great Schism. When the Sacred College arrived in Rome to elect a successor to the Holy See, the city was in a state of commotion. The death of a French pope on Roman soil provided the perfect opportunity for closure to the scandalous Avignon papacy, and the Roman citizens believed the only way to rejuvenate trust in the Church was to elect a Roman successor. The composition of the Sacred College could not have provided much hope for the fulfillment of this desire, though. Comprised of eleven French, one Spanish, and only four Italian cardinals (Creighton 62), it must have seemed to the observing Roman population that there was little to no chance of electing a non-French pope. As chroniclers of the time have described, the crowd outside the conclave began to shout demands of “a Roman pope, or an Italian!”¹² Beyond this fact, the events within Rome during the election become clouded by bias; it is impossible to rely on any one source because the documented levels of forcefulness and effectiveness

of the Roman populace depend on whether or not the chronicler supported the validity of Urban VI's election.

The most significant influence within the conclave during the election of Gregory XI's successor was a division between the French factions of the Sacred College. These cardinals were split between the Limousins and the Gallics. As Creighton explains, Gregory XI had been a Limousin, so the Gallicans blamed the citizens' complaints about the French papacy on their opponents and wanted to elect one of their own as Gregory's replacement (62). To counteract what would have otherwise been a majority Gallican vote, the Limousins allied themselves with the Italian cardinals (Creighton 62). This alliance effectively prevented the election of another French pope and the Sacred College began to debate over other possible candidates. As a compromise, the cardinals decided on an Italian outside the Sacred College, Bartolommeo Prignano the Archbishop of Bari, who had achieved his position under the patronage of a Limousin cardinal (Creighton 63). Prignano's Italian citizenship, which would satisfy the Roman citizens, coupled with French influence, made his election agreeable to the Limousins and the Archbishop of Bari, now Pope Urban VI, was anointed on Easter Sunday, April 9, 1378. After the Romans praised them for the decision, the cardinals immediately sent notification to Avignon that the election was made "freely and unanimously," as well as letters of announcement to the various secular rulers of Europe, as Creighton concludes (67).

While specifics of Urban VI's behavior once he was appointed to the papacy vary, all agree that he did not fulfill the expectations of the Sacred College. Urban immediately took it upon himself to reform, limiting the number of members allowed in a cardinal's household, the number of courses served per meal, and other aspects of the

luxurious daily life to which the Avignon cardinals had become accustomed.¹³ Walter Ullman explains that, within three months of the new Roman papacy, the cardinals claimed the heat of Rome in the summer was too overpowering and moved their residence to Anagni while Urban remained in Rome (52). Historians agree that, while in Anagni, the cardinals began having secret meetings with the French King Charles V about how to nullify their election of Urban. Charles' legal experts informed the cardinals that only a council could make such a decision, but that the council would have to be called by the Pope (Ullman 54). Because Urban would never call a council to depose himself, the cardinals' only way to achieve freedom required breaking canon law and nullifying the election without the consent of council. The Church had spent over a century codifying dogma to ensure continuing strength and to protect it from heresy, yet the cardinals in charge of enforcing such codes did not hesitate to ignore them when their own lifestyles were in jeopardy. Still, this was only the first of many actions on the cardinals' behalf that would incite criticism for obvious deviance from true Christian faith and practice.

Three months later, on August 9, 1378, the cardinals declared the election of the Archbishop of Bari to be invalid, claiming that their decision was coerced under fear of their lives from the threatening and riotous Roman citizens. In his book, *The Origins of the Great Schism*, Ullman translates the *Declaratio*, the statement issued by the cardinals, which describes the events surrounding Urban VI's election. In the document, the cardinals claim that they repeatedly warned the Roman officials who made demands for a Roman or Italian pope that such an election would be null (Ullman 70). As proof that they were pressured, the cardinals argue that the overwhelming majority of the Sacred

College was French, which would have guaranteed the election of a Frenchman if they had not felt compelled to do otherwise (Ullman 71). However, the question remained why the cardinals continued to treat Urban as Pope: requesting benefices, accepting communion, and announcing the validity of the election to secular rulers. The *Declaratio* claims that Urban monitored the composition of the announcement letters, and that the cardinals still in Rome only maintained the ruse out of continued fear (Ullman 75). Since they were unable to properly fulfill their duties while in Rome, the cardinals claim they were forced to flee to Anagni, where they immediately took action against Urban (Ullman 75). This statement, issued to the rulers of every nation in Western Europe, marked the official beginning of the Great Schism. Although the cardinals apparently expected Urban to relinquish his title, he retaliated with a defense that would lead to the use of weapons both spiritual and martial, edicts, counter-edicts, and political alliances by both parties, violently fragmenting the Christian nations of Western Europe.

In response to the *Declaratio*, Urban VI issued his own statement to Christendom's secular authorities about the events surrounding his election in the *Factum Urbani*. In it, Urban explains the situation between the Limousin and Gallic French cardinals, citing other nominations that were made during that debate (Ullman 15). Urban believes that he was chosen because the Sacred College "considered him a Frenchman who conformed to their way of life, because he had lived for a long time in Avignon and had always been in their company" (Ullman 16). Indeed, the cardinals had good reason to assume Urban VI would honor his predecessors' French allegiances; Ullman explains that the Archbishop of Bari belonged to the household of Cardinal Robert of Geneva's uncle in Avignon (27). This cardinal, in particular, must have

expected favorable treatment from the new Pope, as historians of the event cite a violent confrontation between the two men. According to Creighton, when Urban angrily demanded reform from his cardinals of their luxurious lifestyles, Robert replied: “You have not treated us Cardinals with the honour due to us, as your predecessors used to do, and you are lessening our dignity. I tell you truly that the Cardinals on their side will try to lessen your dignity also” (68).¹⁴ While no threat towards the Pope would be taken lightly, one from Robert of Geneva would have been particularly ominous, for he had already established himself as much a man of war as a man of the Church.

Before the Great Schism, Robert was notorious for his conduct during the campaign against Cessena, a rebellious Papal State, ordered by Pope Gregory XI in February 1377. Gregory had long been employing a band of mercenary soldiers, led by Sir John Hawkwood, and ordered Robert to ensure their success in Cessena. According to Creighton, Robert’s thirst for vengeance against the rebellious Christian citizens was so zealous that he ordered every man, woman, and child to be killed, urging Hawkwood on with the command of “blood, blood, and justice” (73). Ullman states that a conservative contemporary estimate put the Christian death toll at three thousand, but others claim as many as eight thousand deaths (163). Possibly in preparation for the impending Schism, by June of 1378 the cardinals had already retained this band of mercenaries (Creighton 70). When the Holy See was declared vacant, the cardinals had a replacement in mind who they knew could withstand what the *Factum Urbani* had proven would be an extended battle over the title. On September 20, 1378, Cardinal Robert of Geneva was named as the Avignon Pope Clement VII, in direct opposition to the sitting Roman Pope Urban VI.

With the appointment of Pope Clement VII, the political boundaries of the European Christian nations proved to be spiritual ones, as well. France, Naples, Scotland, Savoy, and Spain adhered to the Avignon papacy, while Italy, Germany, Hungary, and Flanders remained loyal to Pope Urban VI (Creighton 73-4). Because of its wars with France and no doubt relieved to be free of years of French authority over their Church, England wholly adhered to the Roman Pope. While it can only be speculated how much any common citizen of England could have known about the details of the Schism, Ullman states that King Richard II received a letter announcing Urban's election dated April 19, 1378, and sent a congratulatory response on June 26 of the same year (102). There is no remaining record of when the English were notified of Clement's election, but Ullman states that "Urban's Bull of 29 November, 1378, excommunicating Clement VII received the widest publicity in England," being read in every church (109). After nearly a century of determining papal authority through violence, neither side of the papacy hesitated to request financial support for crusades to defend his claim. According to Ullman, Richard II immediately pledged full English support for Urban's cause and declared that anyone supporting the Anti-Pope would be charged with treason (105). For their part, the English people would have needed no command to support the Roman Pope over one from their archrival France, as Ullman suggests (103), but the information regarding the Schism that was provided to them would have left little room for interpretation. Ullman explains that Urban was portrayed to the English as "a saintly pope deserted by wicked underlings" (136). The explanation of Clement's motivation as "greediness and avarice" (Ullman 136) would soon be

reinforced in the English mind by the Anti-Pope's immediate turn to violence to overthrow his unrelenting opponent.

As the former leader of numerous attacks in the name of the Church, Clement VII called on Hawkwood and his mercenary band that had been stationed outside Rome since July. Once the Schism was official, Clement employed these mercenaries to force Urban VI from his position. Urban was compelled to hire his own troops in self-defense, choosing the Italian general Alberigo da Barbiano as his commander (Creighton 75). Each pope declared the other the Antichrist, excommunicating each other and anyone who supported the opposition. With each side claiming itself to be fighting in the name of God and for the sake of the entire Christian populace, neither was likely to concede defeat to an opponent believed to be the doom of Christian souls. These battles, deemed crusades by both sides, continued for nearly forty years as the Church abandoned efforts to convert Muslims through force, turning all military efforts against other Christians. The threat to the Christian populace no longer appeared to be from an outside force, but from an impending one within their faith. The concept of a united Christendom, long troubled by the debates over papal authority, was destroyed from within.

Urban VI began offering indulgences in 1381 to anyone who would fund or participate in crusades against Clement VII. As papal taxes and the level of Christian versus Christian violence increased, many began to question the righteousness of a Church that would not only elect two popes, but also kill to determine the truth of the election. Although Urban publicly denounced the atrocious acts of Clement's mercenary armies in 1382, his later actions prove that the English, at least, were not unanimously supportive. As Ullman explains, by 1383, Urban felt compelled to issue a bull stating

that all Englishmen *must* give money to support the crusades if they did not fight, under penalty of excommunication (117). King Richard II embraced this demand because it enabled the English to pursue secularly motivated battles against their rival France under the guise of God's will and with the financial support of the Church.

The immediate result was the 1383 crusade in Flanders, led by the Bishop of Norwich, Henry Despencer. Norman Housley explains that the papal bull fulfilled Despencer's earlier request from Urban VI for permission to crusade against the French and, therefore, supporters of Clement VII (16). When the citizens of Ghent began to rebel against French authority, Despencer and the English parliament saw the perfect opportunity to seize Flanders — a financially important area of wool trade that had been denied them by their French opponents (Housley 16). Thus, in May 1383, Despencer received approval from parliament and set out for Flanders with nearly five thousand troops. Within weeks, the crusaders captured several towns along the coastline (Housley 19). However, as Ben Lowe has pointed out, Despencer ultimately pursued his crusade in the interest of English business affairs and contradicted his supposedly righteous pursuit (409). Housley describes in greater detail that, once Despencer was faced with the decision of whether to further pursue supporters of the Anti-Pope or those who proved the most difficult to the English trade routes, he chose the latter. He, therefore, turned his army toward the town of Ypres — staunch supporters of Urban (Housley 19). Yet, the decision proved to be strategically erroneous, as the French Duke Philip of Burgundy had anticipated this action. Philip successfully defended Ypres and quickly recaptured every town Despencer had previously taken, so that, by October, Despencer and his men retreated to England in defeat (Housley 20).

Upon return to England, Despencer was greeted with shame and disgust. Not only did the failure leave England's financial affairs and position against France in greater ruin than before, but word also quickly spread that Despencer's men had been exceptionally cruel in their pillages and raids. As Lee Patterson describes it, the English people saw the crusade as "an inconclusive if brutal *chevauchée* that ... brought discredit to everyone involved" (189). Housley states that Despencer and many of his men were convicted for their unjust actions; but this was no doubt done to appease critics of the crusade temporarily, because the men were soon after pardoned (20). The English people largely condemned the Despencer crusade, although their reasons for doing so vary. Those without extensive education in dogma, but knowledge of their own finances, merely lamented Despencer's failure to reestablish the wool trade between England and Flanders, leaving the territory once more in the possession of the French. Among those who valued spiritual over worldly wealth, though, were critics who took the opportunity to address the atrocities performed in God's name during the Great Schism, of which the Despencer crusade was the worst.

As Houseman states, during the high points of the Despencer crusade, notice circulated throughout England that the army had killed more than twelve thousand of its opponents (19). While the secular leaders praised this aspect of Despencer's early success, there were those who could not condone the killing of Christians in crusade, even if they were supporters of Clement VII. John Wycliffe (d. 1384), long known for his criticism of what he believed to be a Church corrupted by wealth and the desire for total authority, publicly denounced both popes after learning of the Despencer tragedy. Wycliffe had previously come under fire from the papacy for his theories on the

Dominion of Grace. As Anne Hudson explains, Wycliffe believed in predestination — that souls were either bound for eternal glory in heaven (*congregatio predestinatorum*) or damnation (*congregatio prescitorum*) (315). While only God could know who was predestined for which fate, a person's constant reliance on sinful actions was enough evidence to make an educated guess as to his final destination (Hudson 315). Moreover, only those given this grace by God could possess true dominion over power and possession because "God cannot co-operate with evil," as Lowe deduces (409). The theory states that:

Whoso hap leue of God, and al oonli such, hap verri possessioun ... Oonli he þat stondiþ in grace is verri lord of þingis, and whoeuer failiþ rigt bi defaute of grace, him failiþ rigtwise title of what þing þat he occupieþ. ... So lordis of þis world þat seruen not God treuli stelen Goddis goodis, for þingis þat þei occupien þei haue wiþout his leue — and þanne þei ben þeues (qtd. Hudson 4).

In the pre-Schism days, Wycliffe used this theory as justification for a king's right to expropriate the Church's wealth; wealth was a worldly possession that should only be used for worldly affairs. After the events of the Schism proved that the papacy would resort to sinful violence as well as the pursuit of authority and wealth, however, Wycliffe extended the theory to claim that no Christian owed allegiance to either pope, whose actions had proven them Antichrists (Creighton 123).

Wycliffe had initially supported Pope Urban VI, applauding him for his demands for reform and the decision to remain in Rome. Although he warned the Roman Pope not

to follow in the steps of his demoralized predecessors, Wycliffe appears to have had faith in Urban's claim to dominion. In a letter to the Pope he writes:

I have joy fully to telle to alle treue men þo bileve þat I holde, and algatis to þo Pope; for I suppose þat if my fayth be rigtgul and gyven to God, þo Pope wil gladly conferme hit; and if my fayth be errour, þo Pope wil wisely amende hit.

... I suppose over þis þat þo Pope be moste oblichid to þo keping of þo Gospel among alle men þat lyven here; for þo Pope is hyeste vicar þat Crist has here in erthe. For morenesse of Cristis vicar is not mesurid by wordly morenesse, bot bi þis, þat þis vicar sues more Crist by virtuous lyvyng; for þus techis þo Gospel, þat þis is þo sentence of Crist.

... And if I erre in þis sentense, I wil mekely be amendid, þo þhe, by þo deth, if hit be skilful, for þat I hope were gude to me. And if I mygt travel in myn owne persoun, I wold wiþ gode wille go to þo Pope. Bot God has nedid me to þo contrarye, and taugt me more obeche to God þen to mon. And I suppose of oure Pope þat he wil not be Anticrist, and reversen Crist in þis wirkyng, to þo contrarie of Cristis wille; for if he summone ageyns resoun, by him or by any of his, and pursue þis unskilful summonyng, he is an open Anticrist (*Wyclif* 75-76).

Yet, once the Despencer crusade provided proof that the Pope was willing to take and sacrifice Christian lives for his own agenda, Wycliffe equated the Roman papacy to that of his previous opinion of Avignon, writing that:

Crist in ech His dede and His word sougte þe glory of God, and sufferide many reproves in His manheed for þis ende; men seyen þat þe Pope agenward sekþ his oune glory on alle weyes, ye, gif Goddis worchip be lost. And þus he feyneþ many ungroundid gabbingis. And gif þis þing and many siche ben soþe of þe Pope of Rome, he is very Anticrist and not Cristis viker heere (*Wyclif* 72).

Wycliffe's beliefs on the Schism spread among his followers — Wycliffites or Lollards. To Wycliffe, the only true Pope would be he who refused to participate in violence to determine his position. Lowe suggests that the Despencer crusade was the reason behind Wycliffite teachings of total pacifism that continued throughout the Schism, because "Wycliffe and his Lollard followers could not get beyond the obviously impure motives of the combatants and the popes who sanctioned wars" (410). All of Wycliffe's theories rested on the belief that the Church and its members should follow the teachings of Christ who, among other acts contradictory to the popes of the Schism, chose to suffer rather than take vengeance on his enemies. By 1395, the Lollards openly condemned the crusades; the tenth of the *Twelve Conclusions* posted on the doors of English churches states that:

manslaute be batayle or pretense lawe of rythwysnesse for temperal cause or spirituel withouten special reuelaciun is expres contrarious to þe newe testament, þe qwiche is a lawe of grace and ful of mercy. Þis conclusiun in opinly prouid be exsample of Cristis preching here in erthe, þe qwiche most taute for to loue and to haue mercy on his enemys, and nout for to slen hem (*Selections* 28).

As Lowe points out, the contemporary Church largely dismissed Wycliffite teachings of pacifism as simplistic and naïve (432), but finally declared all of his doctrines as heresy in the early fifteenth century.

Because of this eventual declaration, some modern scholars label Wycliffe and his followers as radicals, arguing that the vast majority of late fourteenth century English citizens would have condemned his teachings.¹⁵ However, Wycliffe's belief that the State should have power over the Church earned him much support in the English court. For instance, Creighton describes how John of Gaunt, denied significant power by the prelates after the death of King Edward III, defended Wycliffe against Pope Gregory XI's claims of heresy (117). E.P. Kuhl has also pointed to the number of Richard II's knights and religious advisors who were known to be Lollards (32-3). Even Wycliffe's claim that secular rulers are also technically subject to disqualification under the theory of dominion appears not to have diminished the dissemination of his doctrines in the court, although it may have inspired the nobility to maintain allegiance to the Roman papacy rather than break from the Church entirely. This is probably due to the fact that, as Hudson points out, "though Wyclif's theory of dominion was couched first in general terms, he used it almost exclusively as a rod with which to beat the church" (360).¹⁶ In fact, opponents of Wycliffe claimed the entire theory was void because he never attempted to assert its claims on secular authority (Hudson 360). Indeed, rather than pursue equal enforcement of the theory on all authority, the Lollards more often preached that man should submit to secular rule, following the example of Christ.¹⁷ Instead, while the Bible promotes adherence to kings, there is no instance of promotion for papal authority in scripture.¹⁸ Because Wycliffe's theories never actively attacked secular

leadership, they continued to be discussed and sometimes followed (in the case of the Lollard knights) well into the fifteenth century, as Hudson notes (113). Courtly writers like Chaucer could therefore incorporate allusions to Wycliffite notions without facing vast condemnation from the audience.

Writers outside the court certainly appear to have supported aspects of Wycliffe's teachings, although they may not have referred to themselves as Lollards. Hudson clarifies that many of Wycliffe's views had long been debated without yet being declared heretical, so "many issues were still open and to express a view was not immediately to invite classification as pro- or anti-Wycliffite" (398). Most notably, John Gower's *Confessio Amantis* (c. 1390), and William Langland's *Piers Plowman* — the latest version c. 1387 — both deal with the state of the Church, voicing criticisms similar to Wycliffe's on the corruption of wealth and violence while simultaneously offering contrary opinions. In the *Prologue* to *Confessio Amantis*, Gower addresses the papal rivalry, urging his audience to:

Consider now the latest sprout
Which pride and envy have made grow
From schism, and to which we owe
This recent sect of Lollardry,
And also many a heresy,

Among the very clerks themselves (l. 346-51).

Even though Gower blames the popes' example as the root of the spread of Lollardry — which is obviously mentioned in a condemnatory tone — he goes on to express an outlook, similar to Wycliffe's that

though no other cause be there
 But only their desire for gain,
 Once started they will not restrain
 Themselves, but let the act proceed;
 And that is no good shepherd's deed (l. 402-06).

The *Prologue* appears to state, as Hudson suggests, that propagating opinions similar to those of Wycliffe did not make one a Lollard or even imply, to the contemporary audience, that one would agree with all Wycliffite theology.

Langland's *Piers Plowman* also shows a similar relationship to Wycliffe's ideas. Hudson notes that contemporary chroniclers often tied the poem and Lollards together as the cause of the Peasant's Revolt of 1381 (399), but that highly orthodox clerics also possessed the work and used it to defend dogma (401). Langland does indeed echo Wycliffite sympathies in blaming the state of the Church on the sinful desire for wealth,¹⁹ but he also differs from the theologian by praising the miracle of the Eucharist and accepting purgatory, as Hudson points out (403). The sheer quantity of legal and textual support among the English court and artistry supports Ezra Maxfield's claim that Wycliffe "remained merely a bold preacher and a teacher whose words found soil in the minds of many devout Romanists" (66). To support Wycliffe, or at least discuss his theories, then, was not a scandal or death sentence among Chaucer's peers. Indeed, scholars have long analyzed the multiple similarities to Wycliffite doctrine in the *Canterbury Tales*, leading some to question whether Chaucer was a Lollard.

Whether he actively espoused Lollardy or simply did not condemn it, it is certainly not a stretch to claim Chaucer was aware of and influenced by the popularity of

Wycliffe's teachings. As a member of John of Gaunt's court and a known associate, if not close friend, of the aforementioned knights and authors, Chaucer would have had more than the average citizen's knowledge of Wycliffe's doctrines and the Great Schism that they addressed. Craig T. Fehrman, for example, has shown through his analysis of the biblical references within the *Canterbury Tales* that Chaucer most likely possessed, or at least had access to, the Wycliffite Bible. However, Fehrman and most others acknowledge that whatever aspects of Lollardry Chaucer appears to accept in the *Canterbury Tales* are not particularly radical. Quite the contrary, as Maxfield states: "Whatever may be Wycliffite in Chaucer ... may still be fairly orthodox" (68). He argues that, like Wycliffe, Chaucer simply favored the earlier, simplistic Church and called for a return to the uncorrupted ways of the past (68). Karen A. Winstead has most recently revived the discussion on the one pilgrim of the *Canterbury Tales* who is specifically, although jokingly, referred to as a Lollard — the Parson. She concludes that while the Parson's aversion to swearing and fables was common among Wycliffe's followers, the *Parson's Tale's* traditional views on penance "reclaims the figure of the 'good priest' for orthodoxy and rejects identification ... with Wycliffe and his followers" (255). Similarly, Alastair Minnis' *Fallible Authors* studies the means by which Chaucer addresses Lollard doctrine through the Pardoner, the epitome of the Church's sinful greed, and the Wife of Bath, who represents the common Lollard argument that a moral woman is more fit to preach than an immoral man. Yet, like Winstead, Minnis concludes that "the fact that Chaucer was interested in such issues need not mean that he advocated them in some distinctly Lollard form" (xv), but rather that the author wished to participate in the theological debates of his time. In fact, Minnis

concludes, the portrayal of these ideas through the Pardoner and Wife of Bath do more to counteract Wycliffite theology in analyzing its validity — the Pardoner proves that a highly immoral man is still capable of telling a moral tale (xiv), while the Wife of Bath deliberately manipulates scripture to meet her own agenda (254-55). While scholars most often base their studies of Chaucer's Wycliffite tendencies on the portraits and tales of the aforementioned pilgrims, they do not discuss the manner in which the Knight and his tale criticize the corruption of Chaucer's contemporary Church. Indeed, Chaucer's transformation of the *Teseida* into an allegory of the Great Schism in the *Knight's Tale* provides a previously unacknowledged instance in which Chaucer, like Gower and Langland, simultaneously acknowledges the validity of some aspects of Wycliffe's arguments while counteracting others. Although Chaucer does condemn papal violence, he also disavows Wycliffe's conclusion that it permanently bars either pope from being worthy of the title.

III. The *Teseida* and the *Knight's Tale*

Although his works were well known, Chaucer did not make his living as a courtly writer; the most significant portion of his income came from his diplomatic services to the nobility. King Richard II's congratulations to the newly elected Pope Urban VI were made in June, so Chaucer may have been on one such diplomatic assignment when he first heard of the new Roman Pope. Derek Pearsall points out that Chaucer was in Milan, Italy from the late spring to early autumn of 1378 (106). If his status in the court had not already provided him with details of the election, he most likely would have learned them in Milan. As Peter Ackroyd explains, rumor had already spread throughout Italy by the time of Chaucer's journey that Urban had gone mad with power, angrily demanding reform from his cardinals (75). Although the Great Schism had not yet officially occurred — the cardinals had not yet nullified Urban's election — Chaucer's business in Italy may also have provided him with privileged facts of the events surrounding the papacy, possibly even informing him of rumored cardinal dissent. Chaucer was sent to Milan as part of an envoy to negotiate with the Italian leader Barnabo Visconti and his son-in-law, the infamous mercenary Hawkwood, about support for the English war with France (Ackroyd 74). Since Hawkwood "controlled the finest mercenary army in Europe" that played a large role in events before and during the Schism, as Ackroyd describes (75), he and Visconti may have shared with Chaucer more details about the papacy in Italy at the time than any Englishman could have known.

Most likely, on the same mission where he may have heard rumors of an impending Schism, Chaucer was first introduced to the works of the Italian poet Giovanni Boccaccio, as Visconti possessed a prodigious library that included works by the Italian

poet (Ackroyd 77).²⁰ It is therefore feasible that, if he began reading the *Teseida* after his return to England in the autumn, Chaucer's exposure to the epic poem may have coincided with the outbreak of Schismatic violence once Clement VII was elected in September. Given this context, Chaucer could have seen a particular relevance to current affairs in the Church as he read the tale of two men, supposedly the best of friends, resorting to violence to determine possession of a title — the husband of Emilia.

Synopsis of the *Teseida*

Boccaccio's epic romance begins by recounting the Athenian Duke Teseo's conquest of the Amazon women who had recently slain all the men in their nation. After Teseo defeats and marries the queen Hippolyta, he takes her and her sister Emilia back to Athens to live in civilized society. Emilia is pledged to marry one of Teseo's soldiers, Achates, but he soon dies in battle. On the journey back to Athens, Teseo's victory parade encounters a group of mourning widows who beg the duke to avenge their husbands. They explain that Creon captured their native city, Thebes, and fed the bodies of the defeated soldiers to his dogs. Teseo agrees and, after slaying Creon in battle, returns the city to the widows who subsequently burn the remains.

As Teseo's troops are leaving the ruined Thebes, they discover two royal cousins, Palamone and Arcita, begging for death to relieve them of the pain of their injuries. Because the prisoners of war are royalty, Teseo provides the knights with medicine and imprisons them perpetually within his own palace, providing them with anything they require. A year later, Arcita spies a beautiful woman he believes to be Venus incarnate singing romantic songs in a nearby garden. He invites Palamone to view the woman,

who then also believes her to be Venus. The two mourn together that they will never be able to have a relationship with the woman they later discover to be Emilia. For her part, Emilia realizes she is being watched from the prison and continues to visit the garden daily to fulfill her vanity.

At the intervention of his long-time friend Peirithous, Teseo agrees to release Arcita from prison on the condition that he never return to Athens under penalty of death. Arcita praises Teseo's noble decision, but secretly hopes to return to Athens some day and gain employment in Teseo's court. He returns to the prison to bid a tearful farewell to Palamone and the two lament that they will no longer have a companion in mourning their love for Emilia. After a final embrace, Arcita leaves his cousin and begins wandering throughout many lands gaining employment under various kings. Arcita is ashamed that he must take such lowered positions after the destruction of his homeland and royal blood, so he adopts the name Pentheus to prevent the nobility from realizing his fall from power. When a ship offers to take him to Athens, Arcita believes his time spent in manual labor has so altered his appearance that he can pursue his initial plan to garner employment in Teseo's court. He succeeds in becoming Teseo's personal servant but is immediately recognized by Emilia. However, to ensure that her beauty is daily admired, Emilia refrains from exposing Pentheus' identity, merely laughing to herself at his folly.

When Arcita then goes to a grove to lament his lowered status and inability to be with Emilia, he is overheard by Palamone's servant, Pamphilus. Pamphilus immediately informs Palamone that Arcita has returned to Athens and the two concoct a plan to switch places that night so that Palamone can challenge Arcita to a duel for the right to love Emilia. Although Palamone admits that he has no right to such a feeling, he is jealous

that Arcita is able to see Emilia every day and worried that she will one day marry him because of his royal blood. When he approaches his cousin with this demand in the grove, Arcita attempts to dissuade Palamone's jealousy by pointing out that it is the result of the Theban curse of fratricide. When Palamone refuses a truce, Arcita reluctantly submits to the battle, openly mourning every blow he gives his opponent.

Emilia happens upon the knights fighting, who then become more ferocious upon realizing the object of their desires is a spectator. Emilia watches for some time, praising herself that her beauty would inspire such rivalry, before finally calling Teseo to observe the battle. After briefly admiring the knights' prowess, Teseo interrupts to ask the identities of the blood-covered men. Arcita still claims himself as Pentheus, but Palamone reveals his cousin's and his own identities and requests death for himself because he believes he has lost any chance of loving Emilia. Teseo, however, immediately laughs at the knights' foolish rivalry and decides that, since they are of royal blood, one of them can marry Emilia. He proposes a tournament, to be fought in his lists, in which each knight can gather one hundred supporters from a group of soldiers he will assemble and whoever wins can have Emilia to wed.

The knights return to Teseo's palace where they are showered in riches as all the heroes of Greek history arrive to participate in the tournament. Although both Arcita and Palamone visit every temple in the land the day before the tournament, only their visits to the temples of Mars and Venus, respectively, are described. Arcita's prayer is given first, in which he requests victory in battle from the god of war. The prayer, taking human form, travels to Mars' house, itself described in great detail. Mars himself comes to answer Arcita's prayer and guarantees him that his request will be fulfilled.

Palamone then makes his observance at Venus' temple, professing his love for Emilia and requesting that she be given to him. He does not care if he wins the battle or not, so long as Emilia is somehow made his wife. Palamone's prayer enters the equally-elaborate house of Venus, who then goes to the temple to give Palamone a sign that his prayer has been answered and he will indeed marry Emilia.

Emilia then goes to the temple of Diana to request that she be allowed to remain a virgin. She fears for her own safety, believing herself to be cursed for her Amazonian past because Achates was killed. She believes it is only a matter of time before the gods' wrath turns on her and so has no desire to ever wed. She concedes that, if she must have one of the knights, she hopes it will be he who loves her the most because she thinks this may break the curse. There is no description of Diana's house and the goddess does not personally answer her devotee's prayer. Instead, she sends angels to tell Emilia that she cannot be informed who the victor will be but offers her a cryptic sign in the candles that one will appear to lose, only to be victorious in the end.

Before the tournament begins, both Palamone and Arcita briefly question whether they are willing to fulfill the Theban curse to pursue Emilia, but both finally agree to continue as planned. When Emilia sees the bloodiness of the battle she repents of her flirtatious ways and wishes she was not so beautiful. She does not care which of the knights wins, but pledges to herself that she will consent to marry the victor. When a man-eating horse finally captures Palamone, Emilia immediately falls in love with Arcita. However, once Mars has fulfilled his promise to grant Arcita victory in battle, he relinquishes authority to Venus, who has Pluto send Furies to scare Arcita's horse. The horse then falls on its rider and Arcita's chest is crushed under the weight. Although

Arcita knows better, Teseo, Palamone, and Emilia all assure him that he is not going to die. As proof, Teseo performs Arcita and Emilia's marriage ceremony and the union is praised throughout Athens.

As Arcita gets closer to death, he informs Teseo that he has never slept with Emilia and wishes her to be married to Palamone once he is gone. He knows it will please Palamone, but that Emilia will always love him more. Arcita then attempts to convince Palamone and Emilia of the plan, but both refuse because they love him too much to dishonor his memory. He dies not knowing if the two will wed, but laughs at the foolishness of the earlier rivalry as he ascends to the eighth sphere of heaven.

Teseo believes Arcita should be buried in the grove in which the knights first declared their love for Emilia and has the forest destroyed for his funeral. After several days of mourning, Teseo becomes determined to fulfill Arcita's dying wish that Palamone and Emilia be married. He calls the pair together and informs them that all living things must die, assuring them that Arcita's death was the most noble possible because he left the earth young and with an honorable name. He convinces Palamone and Emilia that they dishonor Arcita's memory by not consenting to his will and the two finally agree to marry. Teseo performs the ceremony and the two immediately consummate the marriage, implying that it is and remains a happy one.

Chaucer's adaptation of the *Teseida* as the *Knight's Tale*

Chaucer shortens the twelve books of the *Teseida* to four parts in the *Knight's Tale*, excising much of the epic machinery that Boccaccio employs in Teseo's conquest of the Amazons and the details of the tournament and its participants. He diminishes

Teseo and Emilia's roles to focus solely on the rivalry between Palamone and Arcita, of which he greatly expands. Although Palamon and Arcite are discovered in the same manner as the *Teseida*, implying that they will share the same bond, Chaucer's Theban knights immediately turn against each other upon first laying eyes on Emelye. He incorporates an oath of sworn-brotherhood to the plot to emphasize the fact that they sacrifice their friendship for the pursuit of a woman.

When Arcite is then released by the intervention of Perotheus, Palamon believes himself to be defeated because Arcite will gather the troops of Thebes (which is not destroyed in the *Knight's Tale*) and wage a war on Theseus to win Emelye. However, Arcite instead becomes so depressed in Thebes, no longer able to see Emelye, that he wastes away. After a visit from Mercury who suggests he return to Athens, Arcite decides to disguise himself as a servant so that he may serve in Emelye's court and see her every day.

In the meantime, Palamon escapes from prison by drugging his guard and flees for his life to a nearby grove. There he overhears Arcite imagine a relationship with Emelye and lament his assumed role as a servant. Palamon confronts his sworn-brother and the two fight for the right to love Emelye. Theseus, however, happens to come to the same grove to hunt and encounters the knights in battle. He immediately desires to kill them for their treasonous actions but, after the intervention of Emelye and her ladies of court, he agrees to settle the rivalry by tournament.

Chaucer's Theseus must build lists and temples for the tournament, which are described at great length. When the project is completed after one year, Palamon and Arcite return from Thebes to settle their dispute. Rather than visit every temple,

Chaucer's knights only attend those that are described in detail in the *Teseida*, emphasizing the role of the gods. The *Knight's Tale* also rearranges the order of the prayers to have Emelye offer her observances after Palamon and before Arcite. However, each character makes the same request and receives a similar reply to those of the *Teseida*.

The tournament battle that occupies an entire book of the *Teseida* only accounts for fifty-three lines of the *Knight's Tale*, but concludes with the same result. Instead of Palamon being captured in the jaws of a man-eating horse, however, he is taken by one of Arcite's soldiers. Still, Arcite is crushed by his horse and eventually dies as a result.

Although there is no marriage ceremony between Arcite and Emelye in the *Knight's Tale*, Arcite still requests on his deathbed that she accept the dutiful Palamon as her husband. Neither she nor Palamon offers any comment on the proposal because Arcite dies immediately after. Chaucer deletes Arcite's travel to the eighth sphere so that, once he is dead, he plays no role in the poem. Chaucer does include, however, all the details of Arcite's funeral and the destruction of the grove.

The mourning period of several days becomes several years in the *Knight's Tale* before Theseus finally calls Emelye and Palamon together. Rather than encouraging the pair to wed as a means of fulfilling Arcite's dying wish, though, Theseus uses the marriage as an opportunity to form a political alliance with Thebes. After giving a speech similar to Teseo's on the inescapability of death and the need to accept Providence, Theseus commands that the two be married. They agree and live in bliss the rest of their lives.

The Allegory

Because the Great Schism continued well beyond Chaucer's lifetime, the reflective battle between Palamon and Arcite is a violent one, not easily resolved. Unlike Boccaccio's empathetic knights, Chaucer's knights only share in torment before they lay eyes on Emelye. This brief camaraderie validates their sworn-brotherhood by implying a lifetime of reliance on each other for support. It also establishes Chaucer's opinion of the state of the Church before the Great Schism — that both the Archbishop of Bari and Cardinal of Geneva were figuratively imprisoned in a corrupt Church before the death of Pope Gregory XI, with no hope for reformation. The two knights' acceptance of perpetual imprisonment until the possibility of possessing Emelye is within grasp positions Urban VI and Clement VII, before the Schism, as equally without power to rescue the Avignon papacy from its reliance on luxury until given the authority to head the Church and provide salvation to the Christian populace. The English, especially, would have hoped for the dissolution of ties between the Church and their rival France, most likely blaming the corruption on the enemy's influence. However, Chaucer reflects how such hopes for reform were quickly extinguished by having the knights immediately threaten violence for the right to Emelye rather than equally mourn their inability to have a relationship her. Coming from two knights who believe themselves to be forever imprisoned, this battle emphasizes the irony of two popes who were given the opportunity to save the Church, only to further demolish its reputation by inciting violence among its adherents.

Of course, Christianity in the late middle ages was by no means a pacifist religion. While some theologians, such as Wycliffe, believed the Church should follow Christ's

word verbatim and refuse all forms of violence, most Christians believed crusades for the benefit of converting Muslims were acceptable. Although these crusades were undoubtedly also secularly motivated, most followers justified the breaking of God's commandment not to kill as being the result of higher intentions. As Lowe explains, St. Augustine defined a just war as one committed out of love for the enemy in an attempt to bring them to Christianity — a concept in which many people of Chaucer's time still believed (421). However, once the rival claimants to the papacy declared war against each other and their opponents' followers, the use of crusades to target fellow Christians resulted in what some believed to be the downfall of the Church. Because there was no need to convert the victims, the motivation behind these crusades could only be the pursuit of power.

Therefore, Chaucer must begin his adaptation of the *Teseida* on a note wholly different from Boccaccio. While scholars such as Robert Pratt believe that Chaucer deleted much of the epic storyline from the *Teseida* to distinguish his tale as a romance ("Chaucer's use of the *Teseida*" 612),²¹ the change also more accurately reflects Christian criticism of the Great Schism. To frame the conflict between Palamon and Arcite with descriptions of epic battles and traditions would have provided a sense of justification to their rivalry where none could be found in the Schism. Palamon and Arcite's hatred for each other and resolution to violence is supposed to seem absurd; to excuse it within the epic context is to excuse the real threat to the salvation of the Christian populace under a Church that cannot save itself. Gone are the details of Theseus' conquest of Femenye and Thebes, leaving Emelye as a mere victimized pawn and the knights as men who resolve promptly to battle without much development for the cause.

Chaucer's audience would not need an extensive history of the state of the Church before Pope Gregory XI's death; they had been experiencing it their entire lives. Instead, Chaucer can delve immediately into the events of the Schism in the *Knight's Tale*, creating literary representations of the rival popes, as well as symbols of the roles of secular leaders and the Christian populace involved in their violent dispute. After establishing the poem's relevance to contemporary events, Chaucer then provides a prediction for his audience as to how the Schism will eventually be resolved. The poem leaves the audience with a message on what approach they should take to the Church, the Schism, and their own salvation.

IV. The *Knight's Tale* and the Contemporary Schism

Palamon as Pope Urban VI

Palamon is the first character in the *Knight's Tale* to assume position as a representation of the rival popes of the Great Schism. From his first speech in the poem, he presents himself as the nobler, more holy of the knights and is apparent, once the allegorical mold begins to form, as the Pope to whom his audience gave allegiance. Although the court was often a hotbed for Wycliffite theology, the acceptance of many of his theories did not extend to disowning allegiance to the Roman papacy. Chaucer spent much of his younger years and all of his adulthood in the English court that comprised the majority of his audience, so he would be careful not to question his nobility's choice to adhere to the Roman Pope Urban VI. Moreover, Urban's call for reform of the luxurious ways of the Avignon papacy, commonly preached throughout England, appear to have appealed to the author whose works often criticize the corruption of the Church. The first image given of the knights in prison describes Palamon as being a "woful" (I [A] 1063) and "sorweful prisoner" (I [A] 1070) as he paces his cell. Because Arcite is not introduced in such a sympathetic manner, Chaucer immediately establishes preference and pity for Palamon. Since Palamone is eventually victorious in the *Teseida*, Chaucer creates his Palamon as a representation of Urban, with Arcite as a figure of the Anti-Pope Clement VII.

This requires significant alterations to the plot of the *Teseida* to successfully create Palamon as a representation of Urban VI. Although Pearsall believes Chaucer only rearranges the order in which the knights see Emelye because it provides more of a

sense of poetic justice when Palamon is ultimately declared the victor (157),²² in actuality Palamon must be the initial admirer of Emelye in the garden because Urban was the first man elected as Gregory XI's successor. Moreover, only Palamon believes Emelye to be Venus incarnate, further aligning the knight with the holier Urban. Not knowing if "she be woman or goddesse," (I [A] 1101), Palamon immediately falls to his knees to do his worshipful duty to the holy deity (I [A] 1103). Although Emelye is not, obviously, a celestial being, she does represent the ideal Christian. Therefore, Palamon's assumption that she is Venus represents Urban's view of the Christian populace in holy, righteous terms, as opposed to what the English Church would have portrayed as Clement VII's greedy lust for power. As Palamon prays to Emelye, as Venus, for "help that *we* may scapen" from Theseus' prison (I [A] 1107, emphasis added), he evidences the aspect of the Roman papacy most praised in England and every nation supporting Urban — his initial pursuit of a reformed Church for all members involved, including his then-Cardinal Robert of Geneva.²³ The *Knight's Tale* continuously depicts Palamon in the same manner in which Urban was depicted to the English populace — as the more honorable and noble man. This crucial distinction between his and Arcite's characters is nowhere more evident than in the debate over the specifics of their sworn-brotherhood.

In the *Knight's Tale*, Chaucer does not simply recreate Boccaccio's story of the loving bond between two loving cousins. Instead, he invents a bond of sworn-brotherhood, emphasizing the dissolution of such a relationship. In an allegorical reading of the *Knight's Tale* as representative of the Great Schism, this oath represents the sacred bond of love and dedication between the cardinals and the would-be Pope — one that should be upheld despite all obstacles. While Boccaccio does not make use of the oath

because his knights' actions repeatedly prove their love for each other, it is present in numerous medieval texts. As Robert Stretter explains in his comparison of the oath as used in the *Knight's Tale* and Lydgate's *Fabula Duorum Mercatorum*, many authors tell of men who swear oaths to each other to fight, and die if necessary, together. Although it was common for the love of a woman to threaten a dissolution of the oath, literary knights almost always overcame their desires in favor of maintaining the bond (Stretter 234). Some stories take this oath so seriously that the men desert or destroy their wives and families in order to uphold the oath to their sworn brother. P.J. Heather points out that even the Church approved of such promises in daily life as well as literature, believing the oath to be representative of spiritual duties and incorporating many allusions to sworn-brotherhood in religious works (170).²⁴ With the oath in literature came expectations that the men, like the popes of the Great Schism, would be governed by higher virtue and not by desire. Yet, just as the popes made their duties to the Christian populace subservient to the pursuit of total authority, Palamon and Arcite's bond is immediately shattered. This most overt change from the *Teseida* highlights the tragedy of two knights who immediately turn against each other once possession of a woman ignites their desires. Rather than honor Emelye and further their bond by sharing in admiration of her, as do Boccaccio's knights, Palamon and Arcite use their adoration of her as an excuse to argue the code of honor that binds them and determine who is more worthy of her love.

Chaucer's introduction of the oath to the plot of the *Teseida* is the first means by which he addresses the early events of the Great Schism, intended to make the instant rivalry between Palamon and Arcite recognizable. Upon hearing that Arcite, too, loves

Emelye, Palamon promptly reminds his cellmate that they are “Ysworn ful depe” unto each other (I [A] 1129). This scene reflects the understood and well-known oaths of canon law in which the cardinals are sworn to uphold the Pope in all matters. In the Schism, though, the cardinals broke from canon law to nullify Urban VI’s election. Palamon’s reminder to Arcite that he is supposed to be Palamon’s “conseil” (I [A] 1141) — of the same illegal council that declared the Holy See vacant while Urban remained alive — is a direct reference to the cardinals’ betrayal. In the eyes of the English and Urban’s other adherents, the cardinals’ continuation down a treasonous path to elect a replacement effectively creates an Anti-Pope.

Palamon attacks Arcite’s sense of honor regarding the oath to depict such criticism of the initial events of the Great Schism. He asserts that to break such a bond would make Arcite a “fals ... traitour” (I [A] 1130) with “no greet honour” (I [A] 1129). For a knight in the medieval period, the virtue of honor was a top priority. As Jones explains, critics of mercenary armies were most distressed by the soldiers’ lack of loyalty to any one lord, which they blamed for the scandalously violent pillaging and destruction of towns throughout Europe (13). If a knight could not fight with honor, he was not worthy of the position. No matter their opinion of mercenary soldiers, though, Chaucer’s audience, upon learning of the oath, would agree with Palamon that Arcite is

... ybounden as a knyght
To helpen me, if it lay in thy myght,
Or elles artow fals. (I [A] 1149-51)

As Douglas Brooks and Alastair Fowler explain in “The Meaning of Chaucer’s *Knight’s Tale*,” to understand the extent of Arcite’s treachery, one must know “that in the Middle

Ages promises were really supposed to be kept” (136). Hence, from the moment Arcite refuses to honor his oath to Palamon, Chaucer’s portrays the Schism as the result of a greedy cardinal, similar to a mercenary in his lust for power and riches, betraying a saintly reformer.

Unlike Arcite, Palamon maintains his honor throughout the *Knight’s Tale*. Palamon’s honor extends beyond oaths to the political realm, as well. Later, even though Arcite has broken his oath of sworn-brotherhood by challenging Palamon’s love for Emelye and accepting release from prison without his companion, Palamon still assumes that Arcite, as a knight, will pursue the expected path to win Emelye. He believes Arcite will “Assemblen alle the folk of oure kyndrede,/ And make a werre so sharp on [Athens]” (I [A] 1286-87). Palamon not only demonstrates the common assumption that any true knight would avenge his imprisonment, but also further indicts Arcite for not fulfilling this expectation. Allegorically, this represents what may have been Urban VI’s thoughts as his cardinals deserted him. Indeed, these “kyndrede” did gather and wage a war on the great city of Rome, attempting to overthrow Urban by force. This justifies the conclusion of Palamon’s lament, as the narrator describes “the fyr of jalousie” that begins to burn within Palamon’s breast (I [A] 1299). Chaucer’s audience, no matter how little they knew of the details of the Great Schism, was aware of the tragedy of the Despencher crusade and knew that Urban, too, turned to violence once his life and title were threatened.

The *Knight’s Tale* takes a Wycliffite stance towards the extended use of violence against other Christians in the Great Schism as Chaucer condemns Urban VI’s demand for crusades as ungodly. Thus, when he thinks he has lost Emelye to the free Arcite,

Palamon briefly turns against the gods just as Urban ignored the Christian God's command not to kill Christians when his title was threatened. After lamenting the governance of the gods who appear to take delight in human misfortune, though, Palamon immediately recovers his righteousness. As a representation of Urban, his statement that this governance "encresseth this al my penaunce,/ That man is bounden to his observaunce,/ For Goddes sake, to letten of his wille,/ Ther as a beest may al his lust fulfille" (I [A] 1315-18), becomes not a complaint but an acceptance that the Christian God has a plan for the Great Schism — a message that will be revisited in the conclusion of the *Knight's Tale*. Chaucer imagines that Urban knows it is his duty as the true Pope to submit to Providence, rather than challenge his authority like his "beest" opponent. Unlike Wycliffe, Chaucer immediately argues that Urban's papacy is not beyond redemption. With Palamon's conclusion, the poet speculates how Urban may have interpreted his role in the Church once the crusades of the Great Schism had officially begun; Palamon admits that his passion "hath destroyed wel ny al the blood/ Of Thebes with his waste walles wyde" (I [A] 1330-31). From his position in Rome, Urban would have had a better view than anyone of the Church in an even greater state of ruin than before the death of Gregory XI, so Palamon admits his "jalousie and fere" (I [A] 1333) against his opponent is only exacerbating the circumstances. Yet, although the *Knight's Tale* gives Urban the benefit of the doubt that he lamented the use of violence against fellow Christians through Palamon's acknowledgment of his own wrongdoing, the mere existence of the allegory years later addresses the fact that the Schism and its crusades were still ongoing at the time of composition. Palamon's inner struggle to justify his wrath becomes the first of many instances where, deviating from strict Wycliffite

theology, Chaucer defends the Roman Pope from criticism by explaining that his heart was penitent even if his body was driven to sin.

Chaucer explains that Palamon has been imprisoned while Arcite roamed free for seven years (I [A] 1452). While the entire plot of the *Teseida* takes three years maximum, Chaucer extends the setting of his work to at least eight years. Paul Thurston correctly claims that the extensive timeframe highlights the absurdity of two men fighting for so long over a woman who does not know of their love (222), but the period could also be an allusion to the unexpected amount of time that the Great Schism continued unresolved. By the time of composition, the Schism had already been in progress for several years. The longer the debate over the true claimant to the papacy lasted, the more ridiculous it must have seemed to adherents of both sides of the dispute. While Chaucer includes this criticism of the Church's failure to reconcile the Schism, he still maintains defense of Urban VI by reinforcing that Palamon "feelet double soor and hevynesse" (I [A] 1454) trapped in the prison that has now become the Schismatic Church. Not only has the Schism driven Urban to crusade against Christians, but it also hinders him from fulfilling his original desire to reform the corruption of Church officials. Lest his audience believe their support of Urban to be a lost cause, though, Chaucer emphasizes the dedication of their Pope to God's will by adding Christian significance to Palamon's actions. He labels Palamon's suffering as a "martirdom" that cannot be properly described in the English language (I [A] 1459-61).²⁵ This word, with its strong connotation of reward after extended persecution, clearly distinguishes Palamon from Arcite, and Urban from Clement, as the more righteous of the two, and foreshadows a conclusion that will place Palamon as the victor.

Admittedly, Palamon also has to resort to illegality to escape from prison, just as Urban VI had to resort to violence in retaliation for Clement VII's attacks on Rome. Yet, as Judith C. Perryman notes, Chaucer diminishes the deceitfulness of Palamon's action because Palamon does not disguise himself, as he does in the *Teseida*, to roam Athens like Arcite (125). Furthermore, while Chaucer addresses Urban's failure to follow God's law, he lessens the condemnation of the Pope's actions by describing Palamon's state of mind after his escape. Chaucer defends Urban's decision by emphasizing the fear he must have had for his life. When free, Palamon "fleeth as faste as evere he may" (I [A] 1475), hiding in a grove for fear of death, walking "with dredeful foot" (I [A] 1479). As Ian Christopher Levy explains, even the Wycliffites excused violence if it was performed in self-defense (15), and it may be that with this explanation Chaucer is turning Wycliffite theory against itself, showing that he is not wholly adherent to Lollard beliefs. If self-defense is a legitimate excuse for violence to the Wycliffites, then Chaucer's explanation for Palamon's actions allegorically argues that Urban was within his moral rights to use violence against Clement. Similarly, Chaucer contrasts Palamon's plan to that of Arcite, who dishonors himself by becoming a servant and choosing to praise his mortal enemy. Palamon's immediate intention upon escape is to head to Thebes, gather an army, and swiftly win Emelye by conquering Athens (I [A] 1481-87). Though Palamon plans violence like that employed by Urban, his goal serves as a defense of Urban's intention — to settle the Great Schism swiftly and by force, if necessary. However, even if Urban's crusades were excusable and motivated by necessity, they repeatedly failed to resolve the dilemma. Another defeat always followed every victory, leaving the popes and the fate of Christendom in a seemingly perpetual standstill.

Arcite as Pope Clement VII

While Palamon only strays briefly from his noble intentions, Chaucer never fails to present the allegorical Clement VII as the English people would have known him — as a deceitful, bloodthirsty Anti-Pope. Chaucer introduces Arcite with an invented speech that immediately differentiates between Clement's acceptance of the corrupt Avignon papacy and Urban VI's disgust with it. In response to Palamon's cry of pain at first seeing Emelye in the garden, Arcite assumes his companion is merely continuing his lament at being permanently imprisoned. Arcite has no hope of escape or pardon from prison, but instead argues that "We moste endure it; this is the short and playn" (I [A] 1091). As previously noted, every member of Chaucer's audience would have heard characterizations of Clement as corrupted by extravagance and greed. Since this was the complaint of many Christians about the state of the Church even before the Great Schism, it would appear to them that Clement was simply continuing the detestable ways of old. Thus, the addition of Arcite's speech about accepting their dismal fate, spoken in the prison that represents the state of the pre-Schism Church, paints Clement as being the pope who is content with the Avignon ways. The English audience had suffered for nearly a century under a papacy stationed in France, and this reinforcement of Clement's adherence to the Avignon lifestyle provides the first clue to Arcite's villainy. Though he may profess to loathe their current situation, Arcite, as a knight, would be expected to maintain hope, even plan, for an escape. Yet, he is content to remain imprisoned and even tells Palamon not to complain. With his opening words, Arcite places himself in the

rebellious cardinals' mindset before the Schism — unwilling to pursue or be lead to reform.

Arcite assumes his role as Clement VII by immediately seeking to usurp Palamon's claim of love for Emelye as the latter is on his knees praying for salvation for both prisoners. In the *Teseida*, although Arcita first lays eyes on Emilia, he *invites* his fellow prisoner to gaze upon her beauty. In the *Knight's Tale*, however, Arcite takes it upon himself to see the woman who has caused so much pain to his companion and proclaims with Clement's selfish pride that, if he cannot possess her, "I nam but deed; ther is namoore to seye" (I [A] 1122). Whereas Palamon is compelled to violence to defend his claim, Arcite's decisive statement alludes to Clement's history as a man of war as well as his immediate reliance on warfare to seize the papacy. Rather than take the Lollard stance that all violence of the Schism is abominable, this statement and Arcite's attitude are reminders that only Clement's selfish and illegal actions are inexcusable.

Arcite's denouncement of Palamon's love to defend his denial of the sworn-brotherhood oath guides Chaucer's audience to see the knight as a depiction of the deceitful Clement VII. Arcite's sinful nature becomes more evident as he accuses Palamon of being the false knight because his love of the woman in the garden was like devotion: "Thyn is affeccioun of hoolynesse,/ And myn is love as to a creature" (I [A] 1158-59). While some scholars argue that this debate offers no clear differentiation between the virtues of Palamon and Arcite,²⁶ this degradation of the holy aspect of Palamon's love is unchivalrous on Arcite's part and a reflection of Clement VII's corruption in the allegory. Paul Beekman Taylor points out that, according to ideals of

chivalry, knights were supposed to view women as holy, so Arcite here, as throughout, deviates from the codes of virtue that should guide his behavior (211). As Clement, Arcite's claim that his love is worldly where Palamon's is holy is an admittance of the Anti-Pope's attitude toward the Holy See. Chaucer's allegory portrays the outbreak of the Great Schism in much the same way that it was pronounced throughout English churches: Urban VI's holy, reformist agenda caused an uprising among spoiled cardinals whose reliance on Avignon worldliness led to the election of an Anti-Pope.

Similar to Clement VII and the cardinals' treasonous path, Arcite attempts to defend his denial of the sworn-brotherhood oath through legal loopholes. Arcite claims that "positif lawe and swich decree/ Is broken al day for love in ech degree" (I [A] 1166-67). Richard Green explains that Arcite's reference to positive law reflects the common practice of such a plea when someone had to steal for survival (108). For those in the audience who are familiar with the excuse in the terms that Green suggests, Arcite's defense provides further negative commentary on Clement, positioning him as a man who irrationally felt forced to steal the Holy See because he and his cardinals could not survive outside the Avignon lifestyle. The cardinals and Anti-Pope claimed that the council to depose Urban VI was necessary out of love for the Christian populace and the need for salvation, portraying Urban as a heretic. To Urban's supporters, however, this excuse would be in vain. For cardinals who had previously brought charges of heresy against people who challenged dogma²⁷ to then defend their position by claiming the laws of the Church were broken out of necessity must have seemed absurdly hypocritical. Arcite concludes his defense by claiming that one cannot help whom he loves, even if she is another man's wife (I [A] 1171). The declaration that he would love her even if she

were married implies that Arcite recognizes Palamon's rightful claim, yet he will continue to pursue Emelye just as Clement continued to pursue the same authority he originally gave to Urban. Moreover, as one of God's commandments strictly forbids adultery, Arcite's blatant acceptance of the sin solidifies Clement's lack of respect for God's, as well as the Church's, laws.

Yet, Arcite seems to be aware that his defense stands on loose soil. He attempts to drop the subject altogether, comparing their fight over the unattainable Emelye to two dogs fighting over a bone:

They foughte al day, and yet hir part was noon.

Ther cam a kyte, whil that they were so wrothe,

And baar away the boon bitwixe hem bothe (I [A] 1177-80).

While Thurston sees this scene as proof that Arcite is the more rational of the two knights (90), the attempt to quiet the debate is only a sly continuation of Arcite's previous defense — more an attempt at control of the situation than rationality. Because he next claims that “at the kynges court, my brother,/ Ech man for himself, ther is noon oother” (I [A] 1181-2), Arcite proves that he has not learned the lesson of his own metaphor and is only attempting to further justify his selfishness. His final statement of this initial rivalry scene, mirroring his first, has Arcite claiming there is no point to try and reform their situation just as Clement VII refused to surrender his extravagance to Urban VI's reform.

When depicting Clement's escape to Avignon through Arcite's release from prison, Chaucer chooses to emphasize the knight and Anti-Pope's dishonor rather than follow the plot of his source. In the *Knight's Tale*, Arcite cares little about the continued imprisonment of his sworn brother, lamenting only his loss of seeing Emelye. It also

never occurs to Arcite to pursue the logical means of winning Emelye; he chooses to continue his path of deceit, instead.²⁸ As Palamon will soon assume, a worthy knight would avenge his imprisonment on Theseus, attacking Athens and seizing Emelye as a spoil of war. Instead, the narrator explains that Arcite is inconsolable, weeping and wailing “pitously” (I [A] 1221) like the earlier Theban widows and secretly planning to take his own life (I [A] 1222). Alongside this lack of honor, Arcite demeans his title and nationality by wishing he could remain in enemy territory. Chaucer has Arcite specifically claim he would have been happier had he “dwelled with Theseus” (I [A] 1228) to emphasize the disgrace he does to his knighthood. For plot purposes it would have sufficed for Arcite to simply wish he could remain in prison, but his implied alliance with the man who should be his mortal enemy provides the ultimate disgrace to his honor. He, like Clement VII, values secular allegiances over his own virtue and will not hesitate to sacrifice his, or the Church’s, good name to appease his worldly desires.

When the second part of the *Knight’s Tale* then begins with Arcite in a state of depressed starvation, Chaucer constructs a resemblance to the state of affairs after Urban VI’s election, which Clement VII and the cardinals exaggerated to defend their illegal actions. He describes Arcite as:

lene ... and drye as is a shaft;
 His eyen holwe and grisly to biholde,
 His hewe falow and pale as ashen colde,
 And solitarie he was and evere alone. (I [A] 1362-5)

Chaucer is not describing Arcite’s state for the purpose of pity; rather, he goes to great lengths to describe Arcite’s pain so that the more he goes on the more absurd the knight’s

depression will appear, given his royal status and full ability to take Emelye by force. Chaucer adds that he is *not* suffering from the lover's malady, "but rather lyk manye" (I [A] 1374), driven out of his mind by his self-imposed mourning for Emelye to prevent the audience from viewing Arcite as a suffering hero.

Although Arcite's misery might invoke pity in a modern audience, Brooks and Fowler point out that "mania" in Chaucer's time was so dreaded "that it is hard to think that the [audience] were invited to identify with Arcite" (135). Indeed, far from sympathizing with Arcite, an audience aware of the poem's allegorical significance may have found this scene outright humorous, or at least ironic, since no one can be blamed for Arcite's miserable situation but himself. Chaucer concludes this sardonic sympathy with little emotion: "What sholde I al day of his wo endite?" (I [A] 1380), reminding the audience specifically that Arcite is "At Thebes, in his contree, as I seyde" (I [A] 1383). Chaucer's implication that Thebes has recovered its glory after Theseus' defeat of Creon (meaning Arcite's royal riches have been restored) suggests that it is not necessary to pity Arcite or Clement VII, who could have prevented the Great Schism if he and the cardinals would have submitted to Urban VI's reforms.

To reinforce the audience's expectations that the more righteous and honorable Palamon will eventually win the rivalry, Chaucer then has Mercury visit Arcite as he sleeps in his native land. Richard Hoffman explains that anyone in Chaucer's audience familiar with Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, as many educated members of the court would be, would recognize Mercury as an indication of Arcite's doom. As he notes, once Chaucer makes mention of Mercury's previous visit to Argus (I [A] 1390), there could be no doubt in the audience's minds that Arcite would not be victorious (63). W. Bryant

Bachman adds that even those among Chaucer's audience who were not familiar with Ovid's story would have known the association of Mercury with the death of Argus, as nearly every artistic rendering of the god in this age depicted him holding Argus' head (170). Because this scene foreshadows that there will be a decisive end to the rivalry of the knights, Chaucer introduces what he will predict to be the ultimate resolution of the Great Schism: divine intervention. When Mercury cryptically tells Arcite that a return to Athens will bring "of thy wo an ende" (I [A] 1392), Chaucer assures his audience that the Christian God will ultimately reward Urban VI for his initial righteousness, despite the contemporary chaos that would suggest otherwise. The *Knight's Tale* depicts Clement VII as being aware of the fact that his claim to the Holy See is against God's wishes by having Mercury directly warn Arcite of his impending doom if he continues to pursue Emelye. When Arcite concludes that he "reeche nat to sterve" if he returns to Athens (I [A] 1398), he therefore emphasizes Clement's total disregard for God's will and the well-being of the Christian populace and solidifies the Anti-Pope as the allegorical villain.

Instead, Arcite chooses to disguise himself as a poor servant to return to luxurious Athens in much the same manner that the Cardinal Robert of Geneva masqueraded as the true Pope to maintain his lifestyle in Avignon. Thurston points out the incongruity of Chaucer's description of Arcite as "yong and myghty for the nones,/ ... long and big of bones" (I [A] 1423-24), able to perform laborious tasks as a servant in Emelye's court, as being humorously ironic (154). While the discussion of Arcite's strength in direct contrast to his earlier weakness is overtly ironic, it is meant to reflect how Clement VII marketed himself and his cardinals as the victims of an oppressive and power-hungry Pope to gain sympathy and support for his own pursuit of authority. Unfortunately for

Urban VI and his adherents, Clement's deceit proved successful in garnering the support of many secular rulers and their Christian subjects, just as Arcite's deceit of Theseus and Emelye rewards him with unnecessary riches and the luxury to covet Emelye at his leisure.

The members of Theseus' court who fall for Arcite's deception and believe him to be a noble man with the misfortune of having been born into the laboring class represent those citizens of Christendom who have erroneously placed their allegiance with Clement VII. Because his criticism is only of Clement and not the citizens of the nations who support him, Chaucer defends their mistake by describing at length the extent of Arcite's ruse. To achieve his rise to prominence, Arcite adopts the name Philostrate, taken from another of Boccaccio's works, *Il Filostrato*. Vincent J. DiMarco explains that most scholars assume Philostrate to mean one "overthrown by love", but admits that the actual Greek translation means "army lover" (832). Therefore, scholarship may err in assuming that Chaucer intended the name to reflect Arcite's lovesickness. The change from Arcite's false name of Pentheus in the *Teseida* hints at an underlying purpose for the different name. Given the allegory of the Great Schism, the decision to name his fictional representation of Clement an "army lover" could easily be an indictment of the man known for his brutal violence who attempted to usurp the papacy. Any member of the audience who was educated enough to know the true translation of the name would then recognize the error of Theseus' decision to "putten [Arcite] in *worshipful servyse*,/ Ther as he myghte his vertu exercise" (I [A] 1435-36, emphasis added) and realize that the allegory places no blame on the people who support an Anti-Pope so adept at deception.

Not only does Arcite disguise himself as a man “overthrown by love” when actually a man of war like his counterpart Clement VII, but he also manipulates his followers into showering him with more riches than he needs. While posing as Philostrate, Arcite continues to receive income from Thebes: “And eek men broghte hym out of his contree,/ From yeer to yeer, ful pryvely his rente” (I [A] 1142-43). This note firmly establishes the city’s wealth as well as provides further accusation against Clement. This simple fact echoes the common complaint against the Avignon papacy that it lived in gluttony with more riches than needed by any man, much less a man of God. Hence, while Palamon remains in “derknesse and horrible and strong prisoun” (I [A] 1451), Arcite spends his life of servitude in “blisse” (I [A] 1449). Yet, Chaucer employs this scene, which transitions Arcite to the grove that will ultimately lead to his death, to begin his prediction of the outcome of the Great Schism. Knowing he must address the issue that would weigh most heavily on the minds of his English audience — whether there will ever be a downfall to the Avignon papacy’s obscene extravagance and false power — Chaucer does not allow Arcite to remain in good grace for long.

Emelye as the Idealized Christian Populace

In the *Knight’s Tale*, Emelye is not the same heroine of the *Teseida*; she is completely unaware of Palamon and Arcite’s love for her and plays no role in her own fate of marriage. Indeed, as Pearsall deduces, Chaucer’s Emelye becomes little more than “the agency through which powerful forces are released and find their way to destruction” (156). The consensus among scholars is that Chaucer must reduce Emelye’s role in the poem to fulfill expectations of the romance genre, in which, according to W.H.

French, “the dilemma was everything, the actors only a means of embodying it” (322).²⁹ However, this drastic change from the *Teseida* is necessary because Emelye represents the faithful Christian populace of Europe during the Great Schism, caught in between but powerless to resolve the battle over the fate of their own souls. As such, her character must be diminished to reflect the incapacity of the faithful to achieve their own salvation without the mediation of the papacy, whose effectiveness has been destabilized by the sinful nature of the violent rivalry. Because the common Christian could not choose which pope to worship, Emelye shows no preference to either knight throughout the *Knight's Tale*. Chaucer depicts the Christian populace as more concerned with the fate of their souls than the argument of who is the true pope, as Emelye never interferes with Palamon and Arcite's rivalry. Throughout the *Knight's Tale* she seeks only to please the gods and, as the ideal Christian, is always willing to accept what Providence decides for her.

The employment of a woman to represent an idealized aspect of the Church is not unusual for late medieval literature. As Taylor explains, women commonly played such allegorical roles in medieval literature because they were “identified as reflections of the Virgin Mary and, hence, figures of the Church” (210). Pearsall believes Chaucer and others of his contemporary authors use women to represent ideals of Christianity because:

Their relative lack of power in the social and domestic real world makes them apt representatives of a spirituality which goes out of its way to embrace powerlessness. They are the very image of that meekness and humility that are spoken of in the beatitudes as specifically blessed.

Through women, the meaning of power and weakness, as they relate to the world of the spirit, can be redefined. (265-66)

Indeed, Emelye's power is greatly diminished in the *Knight's Tale* as Chaucer provides almost no history or action for the heroine. Emelye only enters the plot in passing as a member of Theseus' party on his return from conquering the Amazons (I [A] 871).

Chaucer cannot include her violent past because the Amazonian murder of all men would have prevented audience recognition of her as a holy figure. Instead, she must remain an ideal with which they can empathize and admire if the message to follow her path is to succeed. Chaucer does not encourage rebellion among the citizens of Christendom, which a closer translation of Boccaccio's Emilia would have provided, but rather to encourage faith that God will resolve the Great Schism and not punish His devout followers.

The proper introduction of Emelye as more than a name reminds the audience of her perfection while simultaneously comparing her to the men who would fight over her. The *Knight's Tale* uses religious imagery to describe the heroine — the same type of language that is also applied to descriptions of Palamon to further establish his representation of Urban VI as the holier Pope. Chaucer depicts her as the first character to fulfill religious duties and show respect for the gods by writing that Emelye's journey into the garden is performed as an "observance" (I [A] 1045). Similarly, Chaucer depicts Emelye as singing like a "heavenly angel" (I [A] 1055), whereas Boccaccio has her sing tantalizing love songs. Emelye never lowers herself to secular love; the object of her affections is always a heavenly body. Chaucer uses this undying devotion to idealize those members of the Church who, instead of calling for a total destruction of both

papacies as Wycliffe did, remain faithful to what they believe to be Christ's plan. As a representation of the ideal Christian populace, Emelye's actions in the *Knight's Tale* are not only innocent, but also holy. When Palamon and Arcite then use her as inspiration for attempting to kill each other, Chaucer depicts what many in the audience viewed as the ultimate tragedy — two popes will turn against each other while serving in the highest, supposedly most holy, position in the Church.

Emelye represents one end of the spectrum of righteousness, and Chaucer further distinguishes the characters of Urban VI and Clement VII through Palamon and Arcite's approaches to the saintly woman. When he first provides evidence of an allegorical representation of the Great Schism in the knights' behavior, he immediately demonstrates the holier ambitions Urban had for the papacy upon election by having Palamon fall to his knees in prayer (I [A] 1103). Arcite, in response, instantly seeks to possess her with a "love as to a creature" (I [A] 1159). The knights continuously follow in these characterizations of their love for Emelye; as William Frost states, unaware of the allegorical significance: "It is a conflict, not between love and love, but between devotion and desire" (296). Indeed, through the knights' differing approaches to Emelye, Chaucer portrays the papal conflict in the same manner. The *Knight's Tale* maintains allegiance to the Roman Pope as Palamon's anger is the direct result of Arcite's declaration of lust for Emelye, but it directly contrasts Arcite's desires to Emelye's piety as he, like Emelye in her proper introduction, goes to the grove "for to doon his observaunce to May" (I [A] 1500). Yet, whereas Emelye's observance is one of love, described with religious terminology, Arcite's speech clearly demonstrates his more worldly desires as he prays that he "some grene gete may" (I [A] 1512). As Thurston explains, this is an overtly

sexual request on Arcite's part to take Emelye's virginity (157).³⁰ Chaucer then explains that Arcite makes this request "with a lusty herte" (I [A] 1513) to ensure his audience understands the innuendo. When Palamon can no longer stand to hear this degradation of Emelye's virtue, he finally confronts Arcite and the two engage in the first physical, brutal confrontation of the poem. Chaucer argues that, while Urban may err in using violence against his opponent and fellow Christians, he does so believing that it is for the defense of the souls of the faithful.

When both knights are on the brink of death, Chaucer takes the opportunity to encourage his Christian audience to voice their desires for a peaceful resolution to the Great Schism. When Theseus, filled with wrath, threatens to slay both knights for their treacherous behavior, Chaucer imagines that the entire Church will perish if the Schismatic popes are allowed to continue their crusades. Lest his audience think the poem calls for a violent end to an equally violent Schism, Chaucer gives voice to the Christian populace by inventing a scene in which their counterparts, Emelye and her company of ladies, beg for mercy (I [A] 1748-57). Like the ideal Christian, the women fall to their knees as if in prayer, begging for pity on their behalf (I [A] 1758). As such, the women in this scene represent the faithful in Chaucer's audience who, having been earlier reassured that the religion is not to blame for the Great Schism, still retain the belief that they need a pope for salvation. While Thurston believes the intervention of the women because of the knights' royal blood demonstrates the shallowness of the Athenians, only willing to save those of the upper class (33), Chaucer has a deeper regard for these advocates of mercy. Pitying that the fighting knights are "of greet estaat" (I [A] 1753) reminds the audience that the concept of papacy has not itself been degraded by the

Schism. While the actions of the claimants to the title may be falsely motivated, the Church and Christ's law can return to a state of purity once the Schism is resolved. Until then, Chaucer encourages, one can only pray like Emelye and her ladies and wait for God's will to be realized.

Theseus as the English Nobility

Chaucer composed the *Knight's Tale* for an English court experiencing its own troubles outside the Great Schism. England had already been at war with France for over half a century before the residence of an Anti-Pope in Avignon provided the nation with further motivation to attack its rival. Further, the death of King Edward III in 1377 left the English under the authority of a boy king and his advisors. Pearsall explains that, as Richard II grew older, these advisors encouraged him to prove his — and by extension, the country's — prowess through military escapades that were not always successful (199). Although he was inexperienced, Richard knew kingship required the demonstration of military might to prevent invasion. Once the Schism immersed England in a spiritual war with its rivals and Urban VI's bulls provided ecclesiastical monies for the cause, Richard and the nobility capitalized on the opportunity to fulfill their own agenda; the reclamation of hereditary territory could be justified under the guise of God's will.

As a man who establishes power through conquest, Chaucer's Theseus, by attempting to use his authority to control the rivalry between Palamon and Arcite, represents the approach of the English government to the Great Schism. Scholars have long argued over whether the *Knight's Tale* presents Theseus as the epitome of a just

ruler or a tyrant who seeks only to ensure that his will is fulfilled. Of the former, William Woods claims that Theseus' intervention in the contest over Emelye proves he values order over violence because he could have left the knights to kill each other (288). Yet others, like Jones, argue that the duke's action is further proof that "his primary motivation is self-aggrandizement, his actions are arbitrary and oppressive, and his main concern is to assert his own authority and to satisfy his own will" (194). The text, however, supports more of a middle ground. Writing for the royal court, Chaucer is careful not to offend those in power while simultaneously criticizing the approach they have taken towards the Schism up to that point. Chaucer briefly acknowledges Theseus in the opening lines of the poem, lauding his position as a conqueror, "[t]hat gretter was ther noon under the sonne" (I [A] 863). He includes this praise, as well as many epithets of Theseus as a "noble" and "gentil" duke throughout the poem, softening the blow of reprimand that accompanies the portrayal of English participation in the crusades of the Schism.

Boccaccio provides Chaucer with a scene that encourages the nobility to see the allegory's relevance to their own actions — the intervention of Perotheus in securing Arcite's freedom. As Catherine Rock suggests, Chaucer's placement of this scene immediately after the invented strife between Palamon and Arcite emphasizes the hostility between the knights by contrasting it to an ideal friendship (420),³¹ and also works in the allegory to contrast the papal rivalry to that of an ideal loving relationship. Moreover, the action of the scene closely resembles one taken by the English king in the early stages of the Great Schism. Once England learned of the election of Clement VII, King Richard II immediately proclaimed that any person on English soil attempting to

convert allegiance to the Anti-Pope would be charged with treason. In the summer of 1379, as Ullman describes, an Aquitaine citizen Bernard de Aula Viridi and Gascon knight Jean Chamberlhac were imprisoned in the Tower of London for being missionaries in Clement VII's name (125). Within days of their imprisonment, the Bishop of Dax intervened, convincing Richard II to release de Aula Viridi, his close friend; Chamberlhac, however, was not released for another six weeks (Ullman 125). The obvious parallel between this aspect of Schism history and the scene in the *Teseida* is an opportunity for the courtly audience, ideally even the king himself, to recognize the similarity and seek further instruction in the poem on how to proceed in the papal rivalry.

Theseus' intervention in Palamon and Arcite's intended battle to the death in the grove transforms him from a portrayal of the English government's role in the past events of the Great Schism to Chaucer's hopeful prediction of its future role. When Theseus hears of the knights' competing love for Emelye, he initially intends to participate in the violence. Calling on his history of battle, Theseus swears, "by myghty Mars the rede," that he will slay both knights (I [A] 1743-47). This first reaction symbolizes the history of England's participation in the crusades of the Schism to advance in the war with France. Just as Theseus seeks to destroy both knights, opponents of the Schism believed the crusades had effectively destroyed the Church no matter who was victorious. As the laity saw their tithes wasted in failed crusades and the spiritual war continue without end, Wycliffe's call for peaceful resolution may have spread to popular opinion. Although the *Knight's Tale* consistently asserts that the Church is not beyond redemption, Theseus' action warns that the purity of the Church could be destroyed if secular rule allows the Schism to continue in the same manner. Chaucer gives his government the benefit of the

doubt that it will soon fulfill the desires of its people and seek a means for ending the papal violence. He invents an intercession from Emelye and her company of ladies that convinces Theseus that “pitee renneth soone in gentil herte” (I [A] 1761). Altering his initial decision and adopting one of neutrality, Theseus transforms into what Chaucer argues is the ideal stance for his government in the Schism — to stand aside until God decides the victor.

Unlike the representatives of the rival popes, Theseus turns to God as the only answer for the Great Schism. As Thomas Van aptly deduces, Theseus’ change of heart evidences his movement beyond selfish desires to the pursuit of the greater good (94). Chaucer establishes that the best approach a secular ruler could take to the papal rivalry would be to put the fate of the Church in God’s hands, trusting in Providence to make the right decision when Theseus declares that “[t]he god of love .../ ... kan maken, at his owene gyse,/ Of everich herte as that hym list divyse” (I [A] 1785, 17889-90). However, he admits the situation has gotten dismal, pointing out that “for Goddes sake that sit above,/ See how they blede!” (I [A] 1800-01). Chaucer acknowledges that this would be a difficult stance for his government to take, especially given the fact that the citizens who seek reconciliation of the Church do not even know all the details surrounding the Schism. He writes that Emelye, the object of their desires, “woot namoore of al this hoote fare,/ By God, than woot a cokkow or an hare” (I [A] 1809-10). Nevertheless, a benevolent ruler must defend what is best for his populace; as such, Theseus takes it upon himself to speak for the members of the English Church. He declares that, since Emelye “may nat now han bothe” (I [A] 1839), just as the Church can no longer have two popes, the situation must be settled by God. Palamon and Arcite may each assemble one

hundred companions to fight, but Emelye's hand will ultimately go "[t]o whom that Fortune yeveth so fair a grace" (I [A] 1861). Thus, while he acknowledges the slim possibility that a single secular ruler could convince the rival papacies to reconcile and that other nations would follow the example, Chaucer encourages the English authorities to refrain from further participation until God's will becomes clear.

The Allegory of Crusade in the Grove

Chaucer brings his knights into the grove that symbolizes the crusades of the Great Schism by refreshing his audience's memory on the state of affairs before the outbreak of schismatic violence. While Palamon hides in the grove for fear of his life, depicting Urban VI's reliance on war as a means of self-defense, Arcite joyfully enters, reflecting the ease with which Clement VII, a man of war, approached battle. By introducing his representation of Clement as "Arcita, that in the court roial/ With Theseus is squire principal" (I [A] 1497-98) in direct contrast to the fearful knight in Urban's stead, Chaucer reminds his audience how unnecessary it was for Clement to pursue what little power Urban retained when his own was overflowing. When Arcite's mood erratically changes from blissful joy in imagining his lusty love for Emelye to lamenting his lowered status as a servant, his self-pity should not provoke the same emotion in the audience because, like Clement, he simply cannot be satisfied with a life that has provided him with much more freedom and luxury than he deserves.

Rather, Palamon's reaction to Arcite's complaint should more closely model that of the audience. He shakes with anger at Arcite's words that cut through him like a sword until "no lenger wolde he byde" (I [A] 1575-76). In recalling all of Arcite's

treacherous activities, Palamon also reminds Chaucer's audience of all the deeds of Clement VII that must have seemed justification enough to Urban VI for the righteous Pope to resort to violence. Palamon again accuses Arcite of being a "false traytour wikke" (I [A] 1580) who not only betrayed his sworn-brother, but also deceived the people and ruler of Athens into praising him (I [A] 1585- 86). Even though Palamon should have no concern whether Arcite has deceived Theseus, who should also be his mortal enemy, this statement assumes Urban's value of honesty at whatever cost. With it, Chaucer counteracts any criticism among his audience that Urban's crusades were secularly motivated by using Palamon's accusations to claim that Urban condemned only Clement while pitying his opponent's supporters. Yet, even Urban can only withstand so many attacks on his character, person, and title; as Palamon declares himself Arcite's "mortal foo" (I [A] 1590), Chaucer appears to lean towards a Wycliffite stance on the Schism, somewhat stripping Urban of the saintly characterization that was given to him by the English churches, but still argues in his favor. Possibly addressing those members of the court known to have Lollard sympathies, the *Knight's Tale* briefly acknowledges that the violence of the Schism appears to justify Wycliffe's call to dissolve the institution of the papacy completely. However, Chaucer implies that such a change should not be made without due consideration of each pope's motivation for the papal see. If Urban could maintain his desire for reformation of the Church, perhaps his means of achieving such a goal could be excused.

Although the audience may have had mixed opinions on Urban VI's use of crusade in retaliation to that of Clement VII, Chaucer provides further justification why Urban, as a mere man, could no longer turn the other cheek to his opponent. Arcite's

promise to bring armor for Palamon so that the two may battle the next day may seem laudible, but in the context of his previous behavior, it is actually the ultimate demonstration of Clement's arrogance. As a man practiced in the art of war, Clement must have thought his spiritual opponent would prove little match in the battlefield until Urban's skilled mercenaries proved otherwise. Chaucer assumes this belief on Clement's behalf, having Arcite proudly admit: "I defy the seurete and the bond/ Which that thou seist that I have maad to thee" (I [A] 1604-05). Like Clement, Arcite feels himself to be the more powerful of the two combatants and no longer bothers to defend himself against Palamon's accusations of betrayal; he is so confident that he will be victorious that he even offers to bring Palamon armor that is better than his own (I [A] 1614). Had they doubted Urban's use of violence before, Chaucer's audience may have found it excusable by witnessing the representation of their Pope facing such an arrogant opponent.

Yet, whether Urban VI intended them to be or not, the crusades of the Great Schism became political battles. Chaucer could not ignore the popular criticism of crusades against other Christians that crossed the boundaries of what was considered a spiritually just war and more closely resembled a secular struggle for authority. Chaucer includes this theory by stating:

Ful sooth is seyde that love ne lordshipe
 Wol noght, his thanks, have no felaweshipe.
 Wel fynden that Arcite and Palamoun. (I [A] 1625-27)

The comparison of Urban and Clement's rivalry to that of one for a secular throne officially extends Chaucer's condemnation of the Great Schism to both papacies for

having degraded the Church to a common political dilemma if Urban, like Clement, seeks only secular power.

Because he aims to accurately reflect English opinion on the Great Schism to the present date, Chaucer finally levels Palamon and Arcite as each “leyd his feith to borwe” for the battle (I [A] 1622). Many scholars disagree as to how similarly Chaucer portrays Palamon and Arcite throughout the poem. Most believe the knights are given identical amounts of praise and condemnation,³² but Chaucer clearly establishes preference for Palamon until the grove scene, in which his comparison of the two knights to the equally fierce lion and tiger in battle equalizes his representations of the rival popes. In doing so, Chaucer admits that Urban VI’s repeated employment of crusades makes it seem that neither man is worthy of filling the Holy See. When, after many years, the Schism remained unresolved, the *Knight’s Tale* includes the common concern that the rivalry will continue indefinitely. It must have appeared to the English populace that the dilemma that plagued the Christian faith could only be brought to an end by divine intervention. Therefore, Chaucer leaves Palamon and Arcite “Up to the ancle ... in hir blood” (I [A] 1660) to develop his own prediction of what would happen if the secular rulers withdrew from battle and allowed such an intercession to occur.

V. The Prediction of God's Plan for the Great Schism

The battle in the grove designates the turning point in the allegory of the *Knight's Tale*. Chaucer spends roughly the first half of the poem recounting the events of the Great Schism as his audience would have known them, showing clear preference for Palamon as his representation of the Roman Pope Urban VI. Nevertheless, as the Schism continued for years without any sign of resolution, Chaucer's audience likely grew anxious that the Church would never again unite Western Europe. The crusades between the rival popes effectively served as an extended trial by battle, an outdated form of conflict resolution in which the victor is believed to have been chosen by God. Because Urban still had not established a sole claim to the Holy See after numerous attempts, it appeared that God refused to choose a side. In the second half of the *Knight's Tale*, therefore, Chaucer places his rival knights in an actual trial by battle, providing hope for eventual resolution. He predicts that Urban's suffering will eventually be rewarded once he returns to his nobler goals for the Church. If Urban can reform his own agenda, God will intervene to defeat Clement VII and restore the papacy to its rightful occupant. Palamon quickly returns to his more righteous state to justify his eventual victory. After briefly equalizing the knights in the grove, Chaucer argues to his audience that their Pope, unlike Clement VII, will see the error of his actions and submit to God's authority. As such, the prayers of Palamon, Emelye, and Arcite ultimately determine the outcome of the poem.

Palamon circles back to his initial holy love for Emelye by praying to the same goddess of love that he believed she embodied. After explaining that "Now cometh the point" (I [A] 2208), Palamon's decision to go pray is made "[w]ith hooly herte" (I [A]

2213) under nearly miraculous circumstances. Chaucer explains that the lark which awakens Palamon sings “Although it nere nat day by houres two” (I [A] 2211). This reminds the audience that there is still a Pope worth defending, one worth worshipping, when Palamon approaches the temple of Venus “with humble cheere” (I [A] 2219). Palamon redeems himself and Urban VI by wisely and humbly requesting only that Emelye be his, no matter the circumstances. Palamon’s unpretentious prayer fully trusts the will of God, and he is willing to sacrifice his own life if he is not deemed worthy of victory. He begins by comparing his love for Emelye to that which Venus had for Adonis (I [A] 2224), providing, through pagan mythology, a metaphor for Urban’s initial goal for the Church. Venus’ love for Adonis was so strong that she attempted to control his pride by warning him not to hunt beasts that could kill him. When Adonis ignored her caution, he paid the price with his life. Similarly, as it was portrayed to the English, Urban attempted to reform the Church of its extravagance because he knew it would be the downfall of Christianity, yet his attempts at reform only led to the Great Schism. Palamon represents Urban’s recognition that he erred in swaying from his initial goal by fully admitting that he is “so confus that [he] kan noght seye/ But ‘Mercy” (I [A] 2230-1).

Palamon even goes so far as to promise to “holden were alwey with chastitee” if Venus will aid him in his quest (I [A] 2236). While Paull Baum views this as a negative comment on Palamon’s character, believing the line to mean he will wage war on chastity (303), Thurston points out that the line actually means he will remain chaste and true to Emelye while at war, a concept which few knights upheld in reality (189). Pledging to remain chaste while at war symbolizes Urban VI’s pledge to only pursue justified

crusades against heathens, spreading the word of the Christ, if God chooses to let him maintain the papacy. By extension, this is a promise to return the Church to its uncorrupted ways even before the Schism; the Avignon papacy had used force against rebellious Christians well before the election of Clement VII, so Palamon's oath promises to undo nearly a century's worth of corruption.

Chaucer maintains Palamon's request in much the same form as it is written in the *Teseida* to ensure that the audience no longer believes Urban VI to be fighting merely for the sake of power. Palamon prays:

I kepe noght of armes for to yelpe,
 Ne I ne axe nat tomorwe to have victorie,
 Ne renoun in this cas, ne veyne glorie
 Of pris of armes blowed up and down;
 But I wolde have fully possessioun
 Of Emelye, and dye in thy servyse. (I [A] 2238-43)

...

And if ye wol nat so, my lady sweete,
 Thanne preye I thee, tomorwe with a spere
 That Arcita me thurgh the herte bere.
 Thanne rekke I noght, whan I have lost my lyf,
 Though that Arcita wyne hire to his wyf. (I [A] 2254-58)³³

The noble knight's request predicts that Urban would still do his best to honor and serve both God and the Christian populace, even if he were to lose the papacy to his rival. This willingness to sacrifice victory for the sake of service to a higher power justifies

both his eventual victory and Chaucer's multiple classifications of Palamon, and by extension Urban, as a potential martyr.

Arcite's prayer mirrors Palamon's with requests and goals that are the total opposite of his opponent's. Where Palamon begins his prayer with a plea on behalf of his love, Arcite proudly begins by acknowledging his own strengths. Not only does he base his worthiness around his "youth" (I [A] 2379) and "myght" (I [A] 2380), but he also pledges these advantages to Mars' benefit, not Emelye's. This placement of the god of war above the goddess of love suggests that Clement VII, unlike his opponent, will maintain his worldly quest for power unless defeated by God himself. Arcite gives no humble admittance that he is not sure whether he is worthy or not, but demands, even to the gods, that his superiority be acknowledged. With this, Chaucer depicts Clement as so blinded by pride that he does not even consider the possibility that God would interfere with his intentions. When Arcite does admit his one weakness — the pain of his love — he still maintains a defense that this pain has not been brought by his own hand, just as Clement blamed Urban for destroying Christendom when it was actually he and his cardinals who enacted the Great Schism. Throughout the poem, and most notably in this scene, Arcite blames Emelye for not returning his love, as "she that dooth me al this wo" (I [A] 2396), so he feels justified in pursuing her with force. Arcite's constant excuse exposes the driving force behind Clement's continued pursuit of the papacy — the arrogant refusal to allow any Christian to place Urban as his superior.

Arcite also references his deity's romantic history in comparison to his own, but his choice presents a motivation wholly dissimilar to that of Palamon. He equates his love to the treacherous affair that Mars had with Venus:

Whan that thow usedest the beautee
 Of faire, yonge, fresshe Venus free,
 And haddest hire in armes at thy wille —
 Although thee ones on a tyme mysfille,
 Whan Vulcanus hadde caught thee in his las
 And foond thee liggyng by his wyf, alas! — (I [A] 2385-90)

Rock discusses the error of Arcite's plea, pointing out that one seeking assistance would do better not to remind his god of the one time in which he was defeated (426). Yet, Chaucer reflects Clement VII's mindset in this scene. Arcite's pride, like that of his counterpart, prevents him from showing the proper respect to his god. Arcite reminds Mars of the affair to demonstrate himself as more powerful than the god, reflecting what the allegory consistently depicts as Clement VII's view that he is more powerful than the will of the Christian God.

This aspect of Arcite's prayer also symbolizes Clement VII's role and pursuit during the Great Schism. As he admits, Mars' love for Venus was adulterous, as she was already married to Vulcan. However, Chaucer does not use this scene to indict Palamon's choice of Venus because he portrays the goddess of love as a victim in the situation. Whereas Boccaccio's Arcite simply reminds Mars of the spoiled affair with Venus, Arcite notes that Mars loved her by force, "usedest" her against her will. This condemns Clement's relationship to the Christian populace by comparing it to the dishonorable notion that a man can force himself on a woman. Clement is portrayed as being so consumed by desire to possess the papacy that he is willing to take it against the will of those who support his opponent. They are already pledged to Urban VI, as Venus

was married to Vulcan, yet he feels it perfectly within his right to break the vows of devotion. Ironically, the only negative aspect of this adulterous affair that Arcite, as Clement, sees is that Mars was caught and punished — “allas!” (I [A] 2390). The prayer predicts what would be Clement’s last stance until death: if it seemed that he might lose the claim to the papacy, be caught and punished, he would employ even more sinful means to delay defeat.

Between these suitors’ prayers to determine her fate lies the supplication of Emelye to Diana — the only scene in which the heroine speaks at length in the *Knight’s Tale*. Chaucer alters the sequence of the prayers in the *Teseida* to reflect the state of the Church during the Great Schism. As Paul Ruggiers notes, the rearrangement of the prayers to place Emelye in the middle resembles her position in the *Knight’s Tale* as the object of the knights’ contention (158). However, Emelye is also representative of the Christian populace caught in the crossfire of the rival popes; the matter of salvation for Christian souls rests on the hope that the true pope will be victorious in the Great Schism just as Emelye’s fate depends on the outcome of the tournament soon to take place. To acknowledge the grave fears of many members of the Church, Chaucer has Emelye speak for the first and only time to request that Diana intervene and protect her. As throughout, the poem implies that the only hope is continued devotion and faith.

Like the men who pursue her, Emelye relates her situation to those experienced by the goddess she chooses. Emelye tells Diana that she does not wish to ignite the same wrath the goddess brought upon Attheon (I [A] 2302-3), whom Chaucer earlier reminded the audience was punished for seeing Diana naked (I [A] 2066). Emelye does not remind her goddess of a past love affair, as Palamon and Arcite did, but rather acknowledges her

patron as one capable of avenging herself on those who do not respect her. With this, Emelye suggests that the ideal Christian as one who is always aware of the wrath of God, and would anticipate His vengeance during the Great Schism as His Church was being destroyed. Emelye's desire to remain chaste her entire life, therefore, symbolizes the Christian populace's wish to salvage the Church from the devastation of the Schism and remain faithful to the religion they know to be true.

Yet, Emelye submissively allows Diana to determine her fate and make the best choice for her husband if the choice need be made. Woods believes this to be the most positive aspect of Emelye's prayer, the factor that distinguishes hers from those of Palamon and Arcite (295). While this does, indeed, demonstrate Emelye's truer devotion, it also implies what role the common Christian should play in the Great Schism: in all matters, even those that seem to be beyond control in the Church, one should submit all power to God, for it is only He who can determine the outcome of the papal rivalry. As a reward for Emelye's submission, Diana is the only deity who comes in person to provide the exact circumstances in which the battle will be resolved. Although it comes in cryptic form, Diana offers Emelye a sign through the sacrificial fires that one knight will appear to win, only to be destroyed and replaced by the other (I [A] 2334-40). She informs Emelye:

Among the goddess hye it is affirmed,
 And by eterne word written and condermed,
 Thou shalt ben wedded unto oon of tho
 That han for thee so muchel care and wo (I [A] 2349-52).

These words comfort not only Emelye, but also potentially those among Chaucer's audience concerned for the fate of their souls. While they must continue to be lead by the Church, headed by a Pope, God will not make them suffer the consequences of the rivalry. There will be a victor, and it will be he with the most righteous desires for his followers. Emelye then responds as should the faithful; she once more puts herself entirely in Diana's protection and trusts in the goddess' providence (I [A] 2363-64). Although they are not aware of it, all the characters' fates are now in the hands of the gods. Chaucer concludes the poem with the assertion that God will be the one to finally end the Schism, even if its outcome appears to be in the hands of secular rule.

Theseus continues the transformation begun in the grove by issuing a decree specifying that no man be killed in the tournament. He decides it would be an error for "gentil blood to fighten in the gyse/ Of mortal bataille now in this emprise" (I [A] 2538-40). The women in the grove, protesting Theseus' death sentence upon Palamon and Arcite, made the same defense, so Chaucer again reminds his audience that it is not the office of the Pope that is to blame, but its corruption at the hands of fallible men. The ideal secular ruler would refuse violent participation in the Great Schism to inspire the rival popes to do the same and provide God with the motivation to resolve the battle; Theseus' herald concludes, "this is the lordes wille" (I [A] 2560). To offer incentive for his own government to follow this path, Chaucer includes Athenian praise for Theseus' decision that "touchede the hevene" (I [A] 2561), praying that "God save swich a lord, that is so good/ He wilneth no destruccion of blood!" (I [A] 2563-64). Although Jones believes the Athenian reaction to this decision further proves the extent of the duke's tyranny that his subjects are trained to praise him for any decision (200), the praise is a

sincere effort to affect the English role in the Great Schism. The *Knight's Tale* proposes that if the English government takes a neutral stance and allows God to decide the dilemma, the popes will evidence their true characters and the Schism's trial by battle can finally conclude with divine intervention.

As the fighting commences, Palamon and Arcite's battle becomes the final stand of the Great Schism that Chaucer predicts will follow the refusal of secular authority to condone it any further. Chaucer does not diminish the passions of the contestants, but, rather, suggests that each will maintain his original intent for the office. He depicts both Palamon and Arcite as fighting like wild animals in the tournament as an echo of the knights' intentions during the grove battle. In that peak of sinful Christian violence, Chaucer compares both knights to a hunter who feels his prey is about to attack (I [A] 1638-46). In the grove, this metaphor criticizes both sides of the Schism for not realizing they brought the situation on themselves by seeking to usurp the papacy, in Clement VII's case, or in continuing crusades against Christians, in Urban VI's case. These animalistic drives in the tournament, however, are not equal. Chaucer compares Arcite to a tiger whose cub has been stolen (I [A] 2626-27) and Palamon to a hunted lion (I [A] 2630-31). Perryman has noted that, in literature contemporary to the *Knight's Tale*, lions typically represent nobility while tigers carry connotations of "inconstancy and deceit" (127). This is certainly fitting of the allegory, but the comparison also refigures Urban to his original state at the onset of the Schism — hunted in his own home — and maintains Clement's skewed view of his own circumstances. Even after being given the opportunity to reform his ways before allowing God to decide the victory, Clement still feels himself to be the victim, that the papacy was rightfully his and was stolen from him

by the circumstances surrounding the election of Urban. Rather than disown his treacherous intent, Clement, in the form of Arcite and his soldiers, makes a final attempt to defeat his opponent by any underhanded means possible.

Chaucer rewrites the scene in which Palamon is captured to illustrate, for the last time, the extent of Arcite's dishonesty before allowing God to settle the Great Schism. As Palamon is engaged in battle with Arcite, Emetreus attacks Palamon and stabs him with his sword (I [A] 2638-40). Jones is quick to point out that the soldiers later complain about the outcome of the tournament, presumably because of the unfair play (185), until Theseus is forced "To stynten alle rancour and envye" (I [A] 2732). Chaucer invents these lines and those in which the narrator demands the audience to "stynteth noyse a lite" (I [A] 2674), implying dissatisfaction with the outcome. The deceitful means by which Arcite defeats his opponent creates suspense that Clement VII, through the repeated employment of crusades, will win the papacy by drawing Urban VI so far from his virtuous intentions that God will be forced to allow the man with more experience in battle to rule Christendom.

Chaucer reassures his audience that even if Clement VII were to finally defeat all of Urban VI's armies and the secular rulers were forced to acknowledge him as the true Pope, God would correct the errors of man. Accordingly, "a miracle" overrides the secular verdict and declares that Palamon shall be the victor (I [A] 2675). As Arcite parades the stadium in vainglorious pride, fulfilling the earlier prediction of Clement's final refusal to repent of his sinful intentions, his horse is startled by the furies sent from the gods and falls on him, crushing his chest. The narrator then immediately goes into great detail about the remedies used on the wounded soldiers so that no one died from the

tournament (I [A] 2707-14). Not only does this once more praise Theseus' noble attempt at a nonviolent resolution, but it also solidifies the fact that Arcite's outcome was chosen by God. When the same remedies and more are applied to Arcite, they have no effect (I [A] 2745-57). No amount of medicine can save Arcite, as Chaucer writes:

Nature hath now no dominacioun.

And certainly, ther Nature wol nat wirche,

Fare wel phisik! Go ber the man to chirche! (lines 2758-60)

Robert Hanning excuses these lines as indicative of a heartless narrator Knight who has become desensitized to death (538), but within the allegory they provide a transition to the scene in which Clement's representation is allowed his final chance to repent and achieve salvation. Just as God is the only one who can resolve the Schism, so He is the only one with the authority to judge Clement's soul, according to Chaucer.

It would undermine the entire allegory if Chaucer were to refuse forgiveness for his representation of Clement VII. The Church teaches that anyone who sincerely repents shall have absolution, and Chaucer wishes to encourage the continuance of this practice among his audience, even if that means forgiving the Anti-Pope. The dying Arcite acknowledges that he has seen the error of ways, seeking to make amends with Palamon who has once again become his "cosyn deere" (I [A] 2763). He speaks to Emelye, admitting with many an "allas!" that it was wrong to suffer so much pain in her name, that he "[h]ad strif and rancour many a day agon/ For love of yow, and for my jalousye" (I [A] 2784-85), and finally taking the blame away from Emelye and placing it on his own desires. Knowing himself to be dying, Arcite echoes what the Bible preaches, that man may not take his riches and glory with him after death, but must make the journey

“Allone, withouten any compaignye” (I [A] 2779). Chaucer practices the same forgiveness he encourages in the audience by creating a concession on Clement’s behalf if Urban is finally declared the rightful Pope. He provides hope that Clement will repent of his trespasses against the Church and Christian populace when Arcite asks Emelye to marry Palamon “For love of God” (I [A] 2782).

Arcite finally acknowledges the supremacy of Palamon’s character that Chaucer has been arguing throughout the poem. The dying knight significantly does not make mention of prowess or strength — factors typical of acclaim for a knight — when describing Palamon’s noble characteristics. Instead, his praise is more fitting for a true Pope, as Arcite tells Emelye that Palamon possesses “trouthe, honour, knyghthede,/ Wysdom, humblesse, estaat, and heigh kynrede” (I [A] 2789-90). Of course the “estaat, and heigh kynrede” are more significant to a secular leader, but in the spiritual world they also demonstrate a closer relationship with and approval from God. Arcite concludes by hailing Palamon and Urban VI’s dedication and humility as he promises Emelye that his cousin “serveth yow, and wol doon al his lyf” (I [A] 2795). Although Arcite has continually spoken of his love for Emelye in terms of possessing her, as opposed to Palamon’s wish to serve her, he here acknowledges as Clement VII that a Pope’s true goal should be to benefit the Christian populace, not own them. As such, Chaucer’s fictional Clement seeks forgiveness from the people whose souls he endangered with his final words: “Mercy, Emelye!” (I [A] 2808).

The narrator’s refusal to determine the fate of Arcite’s soul has been hotly debated. The poem states that,

His spirit chaunged hous and wente ther,

As I cam nevere, I kan nat tellen where.

Therefore I stynte; I nam no divinistre;

Of soules fynde I nat in this register,

Ne me ne list thilke opinions to telle

Of hem, though that they written wher they dwelle. (I [A] 2809-14)

Ruggiers argues that the narrator “kan nat tellen wher” because Chaucer had already made use of the *Teseida*’s scene in *Troilus and Criseyde* (296), whereas Brenda Schildgen believes Chaucer denies knowledge of Arcite’s fate because he cannot promote the acceptance of pagan souls into heaven, a disputable topic among theologians of the time (15).³⁴ Yet, there is no other condemnation of pagan rituals elsewhere in the poem; rather, those most devoted in their religious duties, like Emelye and Palamon, are praised for their actions. Instead, this refusal illustrates an ideal stance for those victimized by Clement VII’s usurpation of the papacy — rather than participate in the same hypocrisy that led to the Great Schism and feign knowledge of the fate of Clement’s salvation, one should follow the Bible’s command and leave judgment to God.

Arcite’s death, as the fulfillment of God’s will through Clement VII’s forced concession, ends the rivalry between he and Palamon and, by extension, resolves the Great Schism. Once it is decided that Palamon should marry Emelye, that Urban VI deserves the ability to govern the Church, “Al stynted is the moornynge and the teres/ Of Grekes, by oon general assent” (I [A] 2968-69). Chaucer predicts that Western Europe will not only be united once more in Christian love, but that Urban will fulfill his pledge to return the Church to its days of pre-Avignon corruption if declared the true Pope. The marriage of Palamon to Emelye will bring Thebes into “obeisaunce” (I [A] 2974), the

city that, like Avignon, implicitly endowed both knights with the ability to turn against each other for the pursuit of power. When Theseus announces the marriage, he addresses it as the will of the highest power amongst the pagan deities, and invites his audience to “thanken Juppiter of all his grace” (I [A] 3069). By doing so, Chaucer once more assures his audience that the Christian God recognizes Urban’s rightful claim to the papacy as the only means of making “of sorwes two/ O parfit joye, lastyng everemo” (I [A] 3071-72). Begging a blessing from God on the newlyweds (lines 3099-3100), the poem concludes that “nevere was ther no word hem bitwene/ Of jalousie or any oother teene” (lines 3105-6). Thus, Chaucer leaves his audience with hope for the victory of Pope Urban VI, his ability to reform the Church, and his true devotion to the Christian populace — so long as the Pope, the populace, and secular rulers heed the warnings provided by the *Knight’s Tale* in regards to their current roles in the Schism.

VI. Implications for the Audience

The *Knight's Tale* is not strictly an allegorical depiction of the contemporary papacy; it also depicts how the Church came to such a point of debauchery and offers suggestions for change. As Patterson explains, court writers often composed allegorical works to start discussion among the nobility; it was considered a mark of social superiority if one could find the true meaning behind the allegory (56). Certainly, a poem containing a symbolic representation of the Great Schism would have been a hot topic for discussion among the English court as the dilemma affected their financial as well as spiritual life. The fact that the *Knight's Tale* provides an imagined conclusion to the Schism would likely inspire those members of the audience who recognized the allegory to debate how feasible such a proposition would be. However, if they deduced Chaucer's implications on the state of the Church even outside the Schism, the courtly audience may not have found the poem's conclusion reassuring.

Once Chaucer has established his depiction of contemporary events up to the present day through the grove scene, he transitions into a prediction for the future of the Great Schism and the role of the English government and populace in the outcome. Significantly, it is only after the grove scene that Chaucer incorporates the epic machinery of the *Teseida*. The disproportionate amount of description for the construction of the lists and temples, the tournament festivities, and Arcite's funeral are often accepted as evidences of the Knight's influence on his tale.³⁵ As a man of war, the Knight would take great pride in describing the extent of Theseus' nobility, and on the surface level of the poem, this may indeed be Chaucer's intention. However, like those events of the *Knight's Tale* that are strictly plot-driven, the extensive descriptions carry

within them a relevancy to audience. In these scenes, Chaucer criticizes the worldliness of the Church as well as those of its members who inspire and enable such opulence.

All historians acknowledge that the love of money was one of the principal motivations behind the cardinals' decision to strip Urban VI of his title. The cardinals had become accustomed to lives of luxury and, rather than submit to Urban's demands for reformation of these ways, they chose to break from their elected leader. Because the second half of the *Knight's Tale* provides a hypothetical resolution to the Schism, Chaucer suggests ways in which the audience can prevent such a dilemma from reoccurring. His first commentary on the shared love of wealth between the Church and its English members comes as he incorporates a lengthy account of Theseus' construction of the lists in which Palamon and Arcite will fight. The first lines of Part III of the *Knight's Tale* state: "I twoe men wolde deme it necligence/ If I foryete to tellen the dispenche" involved in construction for the tournament (I [A] 1881-2). This direct reference to the audience of the poem calls for a closer analysis of the next event depicted, as well as those similar to it, for relevancy to their own lives. The comment implies that the English churchgoers' support of ecclesiastical wealth only contributed to the cause of the Great Schism.

To reinforce the implication and draw attention to its importance, Chaucer also adds the details of Theseus' construction of the various temples, bridging the gap between his audience and the fictional world of the *Knight's Tale* by interchangeably slipping into second- and first-person narration while describing these rich temples built for "ryte and sacrifise" (I [A] 1902). As the narrator claims that "I saugh" or "marstow se" the artwork within the temples, Chaucer criticizes his contemporary Church for

resorting to seemingly pagan ways in their luxurious habits. He alters the description of Venus' temple because the indictment would be lost if the temples were praised or in any way made appealing. Chaucer only describes the deceit and jealousy that arise from those who devote their lives to pursuing their desires. He ensures that the audience recognizes the relevance to the Great Schism by adding that it is "The othes that hir covenantz assuren" which lead to such despair (I [A] 1924). Multiple uses of the word "lust" in describing the temple of love solidify Chaucer's interpretation of his contemporary Church — a religion that is supposed to be founded on love has been corrupted by the sinful desires.

To continue the foreboding sensation created by the description of Venus' temple, Chaucer provides an almost verbatim translation of Mars' temple as it appears in the *Teseida*. The only significant addition to the portrait is a depiction of those "Who shal be slayn or elles deed for love" (I [A] 2038), which ties the temple back to the contemporary affairs of the Great Schism. It addresses the irony behind the ordeal, where both men who are sworn to a religion of love have appeared to change their allegiance to a god of war, attempting to kill each other in the name of the loving, Christian God. Specifically, this scene of the *Knight's Tale* criticizes the use of spiritual weapons — crusades, excommunication, and indulgences — which critics of the Schism believed should be reserved for justified crusades performed out of love and aimed at converting Muslims to Christianity. It is, therefore, no mistake that the description of Mars' temple is by far the longest at eighty-three lines (I [A] 1967-2050).³⁶ The *Knight's Tale* is not a poem about love, but rather the degradation of love by those who have lost sight of its value.

Diana's temple, however, is more closely aligned with that of the Christian God. Whereas Venus and Mars are described in terms of the destruction their values cause among their followers, Diana is depicted as a goddess of justice. She only avenges those who have wronged her, but works equally strong to aide those who seek her assistance. Yet, despite being the most positive, Chaucer's description of Diana's temple is the shortest. There is little evidence of true Christianity during this age, so Chaucer laments that "As shortly as I kan, I wol me haste,/ To telle yow al the descripsioun" (I [A] 2052-53). Logically, this could be because Boccaccio provides no description of Diana's house. Allegorically, though, the brevity of Chaucer's description represents how far the pursuit of worldly wealth, as depicted in Venus' temple, and glory, as depicted in Mars', has driven the Schismatic Church from the ideal.

When these gods then debate over whose devotee will be victorious, Chaucer incorporates a god of which Boccaccio makes no mention in the *Teseida* to further indict the Church's sinful practices. Saturn introduces himself as the god of all mischief, responsible for all the tumult among mankind (I [A] 2454-69). Chaucer provides an extensive list of the evils for which Saturn is responsible, equating him to the deadly sins that his audience would recognize as being the cause of all pain in the world. However, he also incorporates a sense of reformation into Saturn's description, claiming that the god decided "to stynten strif and drede,/ Al be it that it is agayn his kynde" (I [A] 2450-51). The contrasting descriptions of Saturn's evil ways with his desire to end the strife represents the action that will necessarily have to be taken to resolve the Great Schism. Chaucer teaches his audience the mode of behavior that will have to be adopted if the Church is ever to recover by having one so evil reform his typical behavior and directly

determine the outcome of the tournament. The burden of Church reform cannot rest on the papacy alone; it must be incorporated into the daily lives of all Christians if the Church is ever to return to its purity.

Chaucer leaves his audience with this message by carrying his denouncement of the pursuit of extreme wealth beyond the point at which the Schism as he depicts it is resolved. Arcite's funeral stands as the most obvious reference to unnecessary expenditure through the narrator's use of *occupatio* — the description of an event while simultaneously claiming to be unable to describe it. For forty-six lines, Chaucer refuses to describe the extravagance of the funeral (I [A] 2919-64), but manages to include every precious metal thrown onto the pyre as well as every tree cut down to build it. Although Theseus has previously built the tournament lists in the grove where Palamon and Arcite had their first battle, the landscape is mysteriously revived to allow for Arcite's funeral. Joshua Eyler and John Sexton believe this fact "ultimately highlights Theseus' failure to resolve the chaos caused by the strife between the two Theban cousins" (433). However, Theseus never actually attempts to resolve the battle himself, but simply creates the circumstances under which fate can determine the victor. As such, the grove's reappearance, only to be destroyed once more, represents Chaucer's pessimistically mournful prediction that the Church will continue in its extravagant ways beyond the Great Schism. The ecclesiastical reliance on wealth may have been forgotten during the Schism as focus shifted to the violence of the crusades against Christians, so Chaucer repeatedly warns his audience that unless they seek reformation of this aspect of the Church, the Schism will not be its last threat. Even the holy Pope Urban VI may not be

able to shield the Church from the plague of opulence that had so long weakened its strength. History will only repeat itself just as the grove's revival is only momentary.

VII. Conclusion

The most obvious obstacle to this allegorical interpretation of the *Knight's Tale* is that fact that Urban VI died before Clement VII, contrary to Chaucer's prediction of the outcome of the Great Schism in the poem. Urban only lived until 1389 while Clement's reign lasted until 1394. Although this discussion assumes that Palamon and Arcite represent Urban and Clement, respectively, throughout the *Knight's Tale* (as it was likely intended upon the earlier composition of the work), the poem's later inclusion into the *Canterbury Tales* need not nullify that interpretation. The Schism continued beyond the deaths of both of the initial rival popes, as Boniface IX replaced Urban and Benedict XIII followed Clement. These men continued in much the same manner as their predecessors; Boniface renewed Urban's call for reform while, according to Bokenkotter, Benedict continued Clement's path of deception by agreeing to resign his position and end the Schism once elected, only to renege and once more attempt to conquer his Roman opponent (183). Far from preventing perception of the allegorical Schism in the *Knight's Tale*, however, the continuation of the ordeal beyond the deaths of Urban and Clement would have made the poem's recommendation on how to approach the division all the more relevant to its initial audience. When even death did not resolve the Schism, the audience would be more hopeful that divine intervention would put an end to the matter. The allegory's implication that individuals should possess their own relationship with God, trust Him with the salvation of the Church, and seek a cessation of violence against fellow Christians, sets the stage for the *Canterbury Tales* to debate the validity of Wycliffite theology. Indeed, throughout the *Canterbury Tales*, Chaucer raises aspects of Wycliffe's theories that were popular in the court only to balance them with conservatism

or deny them altogether. Like Gower and Langland, Chaucer incorporates the controversial ecclesiastical issues in his work that circulated in court without crossing the limits of acceptable discussion.

Chaucer begins this pattern with the reaction to the *Knight's Tale* among the pilgrims and the tale that follows it. When the Knight has completed his tale, the Canterbury pilgrims all "seyde it was a noble storie / And worthy for to drawen to memorie, / And namely the gentils everichon." (I [A] 3111-13). To those in his audience who comprehend the allegorical nature of the poem, Chaucer explains that, while the courtly audience ("the gentils everichon") may wish the Great Schism to be resolved for the fate of their souls, the same noble hopes may not be shared by the lower class. It was the common man and woman who most acutely felt the financial pain of being forced to support crusades against other Christians, not the members of the court or government who would willingly do so to pursue their own political agendas. Wycliffe and his followers employed this complaint of the common citizen to support the theory that their fellow countrymen should refuse monetary support of the Church and the crusades of the Schism.³⁷ Although Chaucer makes a similar argument in the *Knight's Tale* by allegorically calling for the English government to cease support for the militaristic actions of the popes, he immediately counteracts this Wycliffite aspect of the allegory through the Miller and his tale. He implies that the common Englishman who the Lollards seek to recruit does not understand the gravity of the Schism. When the Miller adapts the *Knight's Tale* into a fabliau, the pilgrim unintentionally implies that the Lollard influence on commoners has caused them to disrespect the Church and turn it into a farce.

There is an extensive body of scholarship on the ways in which the *Miller's Tale* echoes the *Knight's Tale* in character and theme. In the Miller's hands, the noble Emelye, Palamon, and Arcite become the comically mischievous and immoral Alison, Nicholas, and Absolon, seeking to fulfill their own sexual desires under the unknowing eyes of Alison's husband, John. Christopher Dean has summarized the common conclusion by stating that the latter is "courtly, chivalrous and in the high style, the other colloquial, scurrilous and in the low style," in their approaches to romance (153). The pagan setting of the *Knight's Tale* prevents most critics from discussing its relevance to the contemporary Church, yet scholars of the *Miller's Tale* often point out the way in which the narrator mocks Christianity. Critics search for every similar instance between the *Miller's Tale* and its predecessor in the *Canterbury Tales*, yet miss the fact that the Miller's depiction of the Christian faith is also a reference to the *Knight's Tale*. As Frost states, the Miller lowers Christianity to no more than "a ready means of duping an illiterate and credulous husband," as John's unfaltering but erroneous faith in the Biblical story of Noah's flood leads to his cuckoldry and humiliation (303). The fact that the Miller includes this religious aspect in adapting the *Knight's Tale* implies that he, and possibly all the pilgrims, identified the allegory under discussion. The Miller also offers his own opinion on the Church; the townspeople's laughter at the folly of John's faith — the image with which the Miller chooses to end his tale — positions the narrator, too, as mocking the ability of the laity to possess pure devotion. He reflects the Wycliffite argument that the laity need not fulfill their duties to a Church that misinterprets scripture, misinforms its subjects, and therefore undermines the faith upon which the institution is built. When, "for the moore part," the pilgrims "loughe and pleyde" at such

a highly immoral tale that derides a man who believes himself to be following God's will (I [A] 3858), Chaucer's discussion of Wycliffite doctrine regarding the Schism that is begun in the *Knight's Tale* is brought to a conclusion. While the *Knight's Tale* agrees with the Lollard notion that crusades against fellow Christians must cease if the Church is to regain righteousness, the *Miller's Tale* argues that too close an adherence to Wycliffe's teachings would ruin the English Church. The pilgrims who condone the Miller's attitude toward faith and, by extension, submit to Wycliffe's influence, become no better than he; as Harry Bailly calls him: "a fool; [whose] wit is overcome" (I [A] 3135).

A full discussion of Chaucer's subtle references to Wycliffite teachings within the *Canterbury Tales* would be another thesis in itself. As mentioned above, the Pardoner and Wife of Bath are the most commonly recognized instances in which Chaucer directly confronts questions of Wycliffe's ideology, only to debunk their application to the real Church and life. Throughout the *Tales*, Chaucer repeatedly picks and chooses which aspects of Wycliffite doctrine to condone and condemn. And, as most agree, the fact that Chaucer closes the *Canterbury Tales* with a tract from the supposedly "Lollere" Parson (II [B] 1173) and a Retraction that prays for forgiveness for "the tales of Caunterbury, thilke that sownen into synne" (X [I] 1085) does not form enough evidence to accuse Chaucer of Lollardry. However, given this fresh interpretation of an allegorical representation of the Great Schism in a manner reminiscent of Wycliffe's opinion on the matter, perhaps more evidence can still be found in the *Canterbury Tales* and others of Chaucer's works to provide a more cohesive view of what, exactly, were the author's religious beliefs. Even though scholars such as Lillian M. Bisson have argued that "the contemporary papacy is a great absence — a black hole — in [Chaucer's] portrayal of the

Church” (56), the *Knight's Tale* may be the missing link in better understanding Chaucer's attitude, at least as it is expressed in his work, towards the Church. If a poem that is usually studied for its placement in the romantic tradition can be found to contain commentary on the Great Schism and the Church as a whole, perhaps more clues towards Chaucer's stance on religion and politics exist in the poet's work that lay undiscovered.

End Notes

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- ¹ Admittedly, the entire fact that the characters worship pagan gods may appear to nullify any positive praise for the Christian Church. Yet, Chaucer's depiction of the pagan gods would be recognizable to the audience as a reference to their own religion. Brooks, Douglas and Fowler, Alastair, "The Meaning of Chaucer's *Knight's Tale*," *Medium Ævum* 39.2 (1970) discuss how medieval authors commonly used ancient mythology as a setting for allegorical representations, and that Chaucer's audience would have respected Venus as the most praiseworthy of the pagan gods (135). Her title as goddess of love was commonly related to that of the loving Christian God in literature. Mars, however, was seen (and is portrayed in the *Knight's Tale*) as the antithesis to their loving God. Mars' influence as the god of warfare was not revered, but used as an explanation for all the violence and destruction of the world. If Venus represented the loving Christian God, Mars represented mankind's ability to corrupt and misuse that love for its own agenda.
- ² Bokenkotter, Thomas, *A Concise History of the Catholic Church* (Garden City: Doubleday and Co., Inc., 1977) describes how the Great Schism was not resolved until the 1417 Council of Constance, comprised of representatives from many nations, finally deposed the rival popes and elected Martin V, who was required to periodically call councils (188).
- ³ For a full description of the events within and surrounding the Great Schism of the Catholic Church, I recommend Creighton, M., *A History of the Papacy: From the Great Schism to the Sack of Rome* Volume I (New York: AMS Press, Inc., 1969), and Ullman, Walter, *The Origins of the Great Schism: A Study of Fourteenth-Century Ecclesiastical History* (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1972).
- ⁴ Some, however, have argued that the poem was revised, perhaps beyond recognition from its previous form, for its inclusion in the *Canterbury Tales*. For example, Parr, Johnstone, "The Date and Revision of Chaucer's *Knight's Tale*," *PMLA* 60.2 (1945): 307-324, argues that much of the latter half of the poem reflects events after 1390. However, Pratt, Robert A. and Parr, Johnstone, "Was Chaucer's *Knight's Tale* Extensively Revised After the Middle of 1390?" *PMLA* 63.2 (1948): 726-739. and Weese, Walter E, "'Vengeance and Pleyne Correccioun,' *KnT* 2461," *Modern Language Notes* 63.5 (1948): 331-333, both successfully defend the earlier composition.

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- ⁵ For similar interpretations, see: Kaske, R.E., "The Knight's Interruption of the Monk's Tale," *ELH* 24.4 (1957): 249-268. Maxfield, Ezra Compton, "Chaucer and Religious Reform," *PMLA* 39.1 (1924): 64-74. Robertson Jr., D.W., "The Probable Date and Purpose of Chaucer's *Knight's Tale*," *Studies in Philology* 48.4 (1987): 418-439.
- ⁶ Lewis, Celia M., "History, Mission, and Crusade in the *Canterbury Tales*," *The Chaucer Review* 42.4 (2008), explains that the Alexandria crusade also impacted the finances of English citizens by hindering trade between Muslim and Christian lands (355).
- ⁷ Madden, William A., "Some Philosophical Aspects of *The Knight's Tale*," *College English* 20.4 (1959): 193-194, also states that "the Knight emerges from the *CT* [sic] as a man who has had his faith and aspirations trimmed by experience" (193).
- ⁸ Creighton discusses how papal mercenaries switched sides according to which pope provided the best financial reward (93-4).
- ⁹ For interpretations similar to Muscatine's, see: Arner, Timothy D., "No Joke: Transcendent Laughter in the *Teseida* and the *Miller's Tale*," *Studies in Philology* 102.2 (2005): 143-158. Blake, Kathleen A., "Order and the Noble Life in Chaucer's *Knight's Tale*?" *Modern Language Quarterly* 34 (1973): 3-19. Burrow, J.A., "Romance in *The Canterbury Tales*," *Readings on The Canterbury Tales*, Ed. Don Nardo (San Diego: Greenhaven Press, 1997) 115. Cameron, Allen Barry, "The Heroine in the *Knight's Tale*," *Studies in Short Fiction* 5.2 (1968): 119-127. Knapp, Peggy, *Chaucer and the Social Context* (New York and London: Routledge, Chapman, and Hall, Inc., 1990) 18.
- ¹⁰ Following this interpretation, see: Ackroyd, Peter, *Chaucer* (New York: Doubleday, 2005) 113 and 159. Frost, William, "An Interpretation of Chaucer's *Knight's Tale*," *The Review of English Studies* 25.100 (1949): 289-304. Stevens, Michael, "The *Knight's Tale*: A Stately Story of Uneven Justice," *Readings on The Canterbury Tales*, Ed. Don Nardo (San Diego: Greenhaven Press, 1997) 129-135. Underwood, Dale, "The First of *The Canterbury Tales*," *ELH* 26.4 (1959): 455-469. Woods, William F., "'My Sweete Foo': Emelye's Role in *The Knight's Tale*," *Studies in Philology* 88.3 (1991): 276-306.
- ¹¹ Bokenkotter, Thomas, *A Concise History of the Catholic Church* states that Philip blackmailed Clement V into returning to Avignon, but does not provide any further detail (176). Bisson, Lillian M., *Chaucer*

and the Late Medieval World (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999) claims that Clement V agreed to move to Avignon merely to reconcile Philip with the Church (54).

¹² See Creighton 64, Ullman 16 and 72.

¹³ See Creighton 67, Ullman 48, and Zacour, Norman P., "Papal Regulation of Cardinals' Households in the Fourteenth Century," *Speculum* 50.3 (1975): 434-455.

¹⁴ See also Ullman 46.

¹⁵ For example, Tatlock, John S.P. "Chaucer and Wyclif," *Modern Philology* 14.5 (1916): 257-268.

¹⁶ As Minnis, Alastair, *Fallible Authors: Chaucer's Pardoner and Wife of Bath* (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania UP, 2008) explains, Richard II did eventually turn against the Wycliffites in 1395, although it was not a result of any claim of false dominion. Instead, Richard appears to have been filled with a desire for orthodoxy that led him to threaten punishment for support of Lollardy (28). However, Minnis also notes the previous acceptance of Wycliffite theology in the court, as Richard's 1395 decision contradicted the nobility's earlier message to the court "that protecting Wycliffites and expressing sympathy with Wycliffite views (perhaps even holding them) was what their lords and masters expected" (28). Richard did not declare the discussion of Wycliffite doctrine to be heretical, though, and the Church did not deem it so until well into the 15th century, so Chaucer would not be taking any more of a risk to address the beliefs in his work than other authors before him. It may explain, however, why the *Knight's Tale* and others of Chaucer's works do tend to settle on orthodox opinions rather than support those of Wycliffe and the Lollards.

¹⁷ An anonymous Lollard sermon on the function of the secular ruler states:

Crist chese to be borne when þo empirer florischild moste; Criste chese to be worschipid and susteyned by thre kyngus; Crist payed taliage to þo emperour; Crist taugt to pay to þo emperoure þat was his; Crist ches to be biried solemply of knygttis, and he commyttid his chirch to gouernaile of knygttes. And herfore techis Petur þat cristen men schulden be suget in mekenes to alle maner of men, as to kyngus as passynge bfore oper men, and to dukus as next vnder kyngis; and pese bene in statis to perfoureme pese offices, to take vengeance on yuell men and to prayse gode men (*Selections* 128-9).

¹⁸ The same text further states:

Mony syche wordis spekis Goddus lawe of kyngus, but his spekis not of popis nouþer gode ne yuel. But when venym of dowynge was entrid into þo chirch was þo nome of ‘pope’ founden: þat sownep wonderfull, for hit were a grete wonder þat Criste schulde make his vicare þo man þat moste contraries hum in manere of lyuyng (*Selections* 129).

¹⁹ Langland writes:

And now there’s war and woe, and whoever asks why —
Because of covetousness for a cross; the crown stands in gold.
Both rich men and religious honor that rood
That is engraved on groats and gold nobles (Passus XVII 204-07)

²⁰ Chaucer incorporates Boccaccio’s *Teseida delle Nozze d’Emilia* in many of his own works, although he never directly references his source. The first work of Chaucer to make significant use of the *Teseida* is the unfinished poem entitled “Anelida and Arcite,” in which Chaucer extends a character created by Boccaccio, Arcita, to a tumultuous, treacherous love affair with the queen Anelida. The most substantial influence of the *Teseida* on Chaucer’s work, however, is the Englishman’s translation of the work into the *Knight’s Tale*.

²¹ See also Thurston, Paul T., *Artistic Ambivalence in Chaucer’s Knight’s Tale* (Gainesville: Florida UP, 1968), 105.

²² Also Hulbert, J.R., “What Was Chaucer’s Aim in the *Knight’s Tale*?” *Studies in Philology* 26 (1929): 375-385.

²³ Rock, Catherine A., “Forsworn and Fordone: Arcite as Oath-Breaker in *The Knight’s Tale*,” *The Chaucer Review* 40.4 (2006): 416-432, also points out that Palamon’s request for freedom of Arcite as well as himself also upholds the oath of sworn-brotherhood (417).

²⁴ Heather, P.J., “Sworn-Brotherhood,” *Folklore* 63.3 (1952): 158-172, also discusses the use of sworn-brotherhood in Layamon’s *Brut*, as well as the anonymous works *Amis and Amiloun*, *Guy of Warwick*, *Florice and Blaunche flour*, and *King Richard*. From the extensive summary of these instances of the oath in medieval literature, Heather concludes that Arcite’s stance is relatively rare in claiming love as the exception to the rule (165).

- ²⁵ Significantly, Boccaccio also uses the word “martyr” in the *Teseida*, yet he describes both knights in such a light at various times. Chaucer reserves religious undertones specifically for Palamon, systematically reinforcing his preference for the knight and his pope, possibly to prevent association with the Wycliffites who denounced both popes.
- ²⁶ See Thurston 90, Green, Richard Firth, “Palamon’s Appeal of Treason in the *Knight’s Tale*,” *The Letter of the Law: Legal Practice and Literary Production in Medieval England* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2002) 105-114, and Reiss, Edmund, “Chaucer’s Courtly Love,” *The Learned and the Lewed: Studies in Chaucer and Medieval Literature*, Ed. Larry D. Benson (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1974) 105.
- ²⁷ Including those brought against Wycliffe in 1377 that John of Gaunt had dismissed.
- ²⁸ Curtis III, Carl C., “Biblical Analogy and Secondary Allegory in Chaucer’s *The Knight’s Tale*,” *Christianity and Literature* 57.2 (2007): 207-222, excuses Arcite’s abandonment of his chivalric duty because the knight has discovered a higher love; he argues that Palamon’s refusal to participate in the expected manner is a reflection of the pagan’s conversion to Christianity (214). Yet, this interpretation is immediately nullified when Arcite turns to a life of deceit by impersonating a servant to live at Theseus’ court after explicitly promising never to return.
- ²⁹ For similar opinions, see also Cameron, Allen Barry, “The Heroine in the *Knight’s Tale*,” Knapp, Peggy, *Chaucer and the Social Contest*. Ruggiers, Paul G., “Some Philosophical Aspects of *The Knight’s Tale*,” *College English* 19.7 (1958): 296-302. Van, Thomas A., “Theseus and the ‘Right Way’ of the *Knight’s Tale*,” *Studies in the Literary Imagination* 4.2 (1971): 83-100.
- ³⁰ See also Crane, Susan, “Medieval Romance and Feminine Difference in *The Knight’s Tale*,” *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 12.1 (1990): 47-63, who directs the same argument towards the Knight as narrator.
- ³¹ Brooks, Douglas and Fowler, Alastair, “The Meaning of Chaucer’s *Knight’s Tale*,” and Frost, William, “An Interpretation of Chaucer’s *Knight’s Tale*,” both make similar assertions.
- ³² For those who believe there is no distinction between the values of Palamon and Arcite, see Brewer, Derek, *Chaucer and His World* (Suffolk, England: D.S. Brewer, 1992), 154. Ham, Edward B, “*Knight’s Tale* 38,” *ELH* 17.4 (1950): 252-261. and Pearsall, Derek, *The Life of Geoffrey Chaucer: A Critical Biography* (Oxford, England and Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell Publishers, 1992), 156.
- ³³ In the *Teseida*, Palamone prays:

I do not ask you for victory in battle so as to adorn the temples of Mars with armor. I do not ask for the glory of those against whom tomorrow it will be necessary for me to contend, nor do I seek enduring remembrance of the deeds I perform. I seek only Emilia, whom you can give me, goddess, if you want to give her to me (Book 7, Stanza 46).

³⁴ Tatlock, John S.P., "Chaucer and Wyclif," also makes this assertion.

³⁵ For example, see: Thurston, Paul T., *Artistic Ambivalence in Chaucer's Knight's Tale*, and Wetherbee, Winthrop, "Romance and Epic in Chaucer's *Knight's Tale*," *Exemplaria* 2.1 (1990): 303-328.

³⁶ Compare to the description of Venus' temple at forty-nine lines (I [A] 1918-66) and that of Diana at thirty-six lines (I [A] 2051-86).

³⁷ The tenth of the Lollard *Twelve Conclusions* states:

it is an holy robbing of þe pore puple qwanne lordis purchase indulgencis *a pena et a culpa* to hem þat helpith to his oste, and gaderith to slen þe cristene men in her londis for god temperel, as we haue seen (*Selections* 28).

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