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The Two Noble Kinsmen: Shakespeare's tragic re-reading of Chaucer's "The Knight's Tale"

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Introduction

On May 18th, 2020, amid one of the world's harshest lockdowns post-Covid-19 outbreak, Shakespeare's Globe's YouTube premiered for free their 2018 production of *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, a play that, compared to the other ones they had advertised until then (excellent productions of plays such as *Romeo and Juliet*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *The Tempest*, *The Merry Wives of Windsor* and *Hamlet*), I had never heard of. I watched its trailer, was intrigued, and, eventually, I found the production hilarious, its acting compelling and its musical acts thoroughly engaging. What drew me in further, however, was my immediate recognition of its plot. Despite never having heard of *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, and despite the ever-persisting linguistic barrier between a Shakespeare's play and a non-native modern viewer, I knew who Theseus was and what these three women in black demanded of him, I knew of Arcite and Palamon, I knew why they were detained in an Athenian cell and the reasons behind their quarrel even before the actors on stage could depict the fallout of their characters. I soon realised I was familiar with the plot of this unheard play because of the very first exam I studied for in the University of Padua, medieval English literature. I realised that these characters belonged to Chaucer's "The Knight's Tale," that the two works were extremely similar, and filed this information away for future reference.

When I began thinking about a possible topic for my master's degree thesis, I realised that I could explore the interconnexions between *The Two Noble Kinsmen* and "The Knight's Tale" further, and when Professor Petrina asked me to find one aspect I wanted to discuss here on paper, at first, I decided I wanted to carry out a study on how Shakespeare and Chaucer decided to portray the same women, for I found Shakespeare's Hippolyta, Emilia and the Jailer's Daughter much more compelling than their counterparts in the tale. However, the more I researched the topic, the more I was

surprised by a recurring theme. Apparently, scholars everywhere seemed to agree on one bewildering aspect of the play: it is a much darker depiction of Arcite and Palamon's story than "The Knight's Tale" is. This to me was odd. I thoroughly enjoyed my time watching it and laughed alongside the live audience whenever Arcite would stomp his feet in childlike manner, or whenever the Jailer's Daughter giddily swooned over Palamon's mere existence while at the same time turning up her nose at the Wooer's clumsy advances. To me the tale was stiff, static, artificial as it had but been an object of study and academic analysis for me. I decided to focus on this eventually, I wanted to understand what was at the core of such divergence of beliefs and whether I could be swayed by my own research. Eventually I was. I had been so focused on approaching *The Two Noble Kinsmen* as if it were just a product meant for my own entertainment, that I had failed to realise that both the tale and the play, in dealing with similar motifs and themes, treat them completely differently.

In this thesis I have explored the two works singularly: Chapter 1 focuses on *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, on its genre, tragicomedy, on what makes it such and on the reasons why it cannot be considered a romance, a tragedy or even a comedy. The play is a concoction of too many elements to be ascribed to genres as straightforward as those. As a matter of fact, I demonstrate how the play cannot be ascribed to Shakespeare's canon of romances, for they often abode by specific patterns of ordered realities born out of chaos and *The Two Noble Kinsmen* portrays little to no order within its narrative walls. I also demonstrate how, despite showcasing a vast array of comic and tragic elements, it cannot fall perfectly into either of the two categories. The play is often too crass and undignified to be featured among Shakespeare's former tragedies, and, despite its undoubted comedy, it fails to achieve a full comedy status, because the deathly culmination of its plot invalidates any comic relief often provided by the hand of

Shakespeare's collaborator and The *Two Noble Kinsmen*'s co-author, John Fletcher. Indeed, the second half of Chapter 1 focuses on the play's co-authorship, for it has often been at the centre of various recriminations on behalf of critics who faulted Fletcher for having tarnished a work of literature that could have been much more coherent and cohesive than what it eventually ended up being. Indeed, I also go great lengths to explain why the play is supposedly as little mainstream as it appears to be. On his own, Fletcher was a renowned writer of tragicomedies and I argue how his personal flavour of comedy shaped *The Two Noble Kinsmen* in the play it is today. He approached "The Knight's Tale" in a less serious manner than Shakespeare did and introduced comedic elements that clash greatly with the tragedy seeping through every other fibre of the story at hand.

Chapter 2 focuses on "The Knight's Tale," on its origins, what its genre is supposed to be, and where it stands in Chaucer's production. Moreover, I explore Chaucer's take on tragedy as it was not a concept as pervasive of the English literary sphere as it was elsewhere. Indeed, even though "The Knight's Tale" belongs to the literary canon of romances because of its proximity with its source material, Boccaccio's *Teseida*, it does possess and explore tragic themes that allowed *The Two Noble Kinsmen* to twist and morph them into something entirely new. Chaucer was arguably among the first poets who introduced the concept of tragedy in English literature and in the English vernacular. In his tragedy, Chaucer explored the concept of Fortune and of its capricious wheel that twists and turns of its own volition, with no warning to wretched humankind whatsoever. In this regard, Chaucer drew from Italian authors and Latin sources such as Boccaccio's *De casibus virorum illustrium*, whose depiction of tragedy is embodied by the tragic hero who, upon having risen to his highest, is doomed to fall the hardest, and Boethius's *De Consolatione Philosophiae*, a

philosophical treatise that mainly focuses on the ways of Fortune, on the matter of human free-will, human agency and predestination, recurring themes in Chaucer's production, but, most of all, in "The Knight's Tale."

Finally, in Chapter 3, I will disentangle what was introduced in Chapter 1 and 2 into my own conclusions on why I personally think that *The Two Noble Kinsmen* is indeed a much darker depiction of Arcite and Palamon's story, on why the often crasser and over-the-top comedy in *The Two Noble Kinsmen* is eventually at fault for such a reading and why, contrary to my initial belief, "The Knight's Tale" is indeed much more bitterly amusing in its expository satire of the human condition under the capricious will of the heavens than the hopeless and chaotic Universe portrayed in *The Two Noble Kinsmen*.

Chapter 1

1.1 Shakespeare and Fletcher and how their collaboration shaped "The Knight's Tale"

Composed in collaboration with the new King's Men's leading playwright, John Fletcher,[1] *The Two Noble Kinsmen* (1612-13) was printed in its first and only quarto in 1634, nine years after Fletcher's death and eighteen after Shakespeare's own, by John Waterson, owner of the London-based publishing house The Crown.[2] The play is supposedly Shakespeare's last work for the stage,[3] and it follows what are canonically considered the playwright's last plays, *Pericles*, *Cymbeline*, *The Winter's Tale* and *The Tempest*.[4] *The Two Noble Kinsmen* is a direct and extensive dramatization of Chaucer's "The Knight's Tale," directly celebrated by Fletcher who, in the very prologue of the play, addresses Chaucer as the *noble breeder* of the story about to unfold:

> We pray our play may be so; for I am sure
> It has a noble breeder, and a pure,
> A learnèd, and a poet never went
> More famous yet 'twixt Po and silver Trent.
> Chaucer, of all admired, the story gives. (Prologue 9-13)[5]

Before the *Two Noble Kinsmen*, Shakespeare and Fletcher had had multiple close encounters with the medieval poet. Shakespeare had already used "The Knight's Tale" in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and had returned to the poet while working on *Troilus*

[1] Thompson, Ann, *Shakespeare's Chaucer: A Study of Literary Origins*, Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1978, p. 166.
[2] Lesser, Zachary, "Shakespeare's Flop: John Waterson and *The Two Noble Kinsmen*", *Shakespeare's Stationers: Studies in Cultural Bibliography*, ed. by Marta Straznicky, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013, p. 177.
[3] Thompson, p. 167.
[4] Shakespeare's last plays, or late plays, were plays composed by the playwright towards the end of his career that some critics believe should be grouped in their own distinctive category for the drastic way the playwright's approach to the genre, themes and style differs from his previous compositions. Marshall, Cynthia, *Last Things and Last Plays: Shakespearean Eschatology*, Carbondale: Southern Illinois University, 1991, p. 2.
[5] Shakespeare, William, John Fletcher, *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, ed. by Lois Potter, London: Arden Shakespeare, 1997, p. 177. I will be using this edition throughout.

and Cressida.[6] Fletcher, on his part, had previously re-adapted "The Wife of Bath's Tale" in *Women Pleased* and had worked on a freer adaptation of "The Franklin's Tale" in *Triumph of Honour*, one of the plays featured in *Four Plays, or Moral Representations, in One*, written in alleged collaboration with fellow dramatist Beaumont.[7] However, despite their vast experience with Chaucer's subjects, *The Two Noble Kinsmen* stands out as an oddity in the two playwrights' production.

"The Knight's Tale" is the first tale that follows the "General Prologue" in *The Canterbury Tales* and is narrated by the Knight. The Knight is portrayed as a *worthy man* whom the narrator holds to the *highest degree*: he is the embodiment of chivalric values such as *trouthe and honour, fredom and curteisie*, is so skilled in warfare that his coat of mail is now torn and *bismotered* as a result of his latest military expedition. Because of its narrator and its content, "The Knight's Tale" is often ascribed to the genre of epic romances, and as a romance, it intends to walk the reader through old stories, "remote in time and often in place."[8] "The Knight's Tale" is thus set in ancient Greece and narrates the story of two noble knights of *blood roial* whose highly idealised chivalric image crumbles under the ruthlessness of the chaotic reality they inhabit. In the tale, two Theban knights who fight under the tyrannic King Creon share both a chivalric bond and a "blood-brotherhood."[9] These men are Arcite and Palamon, and throughout the tale, they will see each other's bond deteriorate at the hands of their shared blind passion over the Amazon Emelye, King Theses' sister-in-law. The poem opens on Theseus's return to Athens after having conquered Scythia, the land of the Amazons, and married their queen, Hyppolita. On his way back home stand three

[6] Cooper, Helen, "Jacobean Chaucer: *The Two Noble Kinsmen* and Other Chaucerian Plays", in *Refiguring Chaucer in the Renaissance*, ed. by T. M. Krier, Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1998, p. 190.
[7] Cooper, p. 190.
[8] Chaucer, Geoffrey, *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. by Larry D. Benson, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987, p. 7. I will be using this edition throughout.
[9] Waith, Eugene M., "Shakespeare and Fletcher on Love and Friendship", *Shakespeare Studies*, 18 (1986), p. 236.

weeping widows who beg the king to confront Creon on the battlefield and return their deceased husbands' remains for a proper burial. Thus, Theseus sets siege on Thebes, defeats Arcite and Palamon, and detains them upon realising they are both royalty. Years go by when, for the first time, the men see Emelye from a window in their cell and fall in love, forswearing the knightly oath that neither shall hinder the other in matters of love. Both knights manage to escape their captivity, and when their antagonism and violence against each other escalates in a way that the king cannot contain any longer, the latter devises a tournament that will grant the winner Emelye's hand in marriage. The deterioration of the cousins' bond culminates with Arcite's fortuitous death at the hands of Saturn, who, having interceded on Venus's behalf, steals the man's victory to benefit Palamon and the goddess whose favour the knight had previously requested. Before drawing his last breath, a dying Arcite regains enough consciousness to make amends with his cousin and to suggest Emelye that, if she ever is to marry, she should marry Palamon, "As in this world right now ne knowe I non / So worthy to ben loved as Palamon." (2793-2794)

In *The Riverside Chaucer*, Benson argues that "the romancer is […] little concerned with providing realistic motivations for the actions; these are controlled by thematic necessity rather than a lifelike chain of causes and effects,"[10] arguing that what romances seek is to produce a specific type of emotion, not to give a realistic portrayal of causes and effects. However, when in the tale an unspecified number of years has gone by, Theseus carries out a philosophical disquisition intended to comfort the still grieving Palamon and Emelye as he supposes they "nedeth litel sermonyng." (3091) He proceeds to give a speech determining how earthly matters are inherently transitory and supervised by the *Firste Moevere* through *His wise purveiaunce*. In doing so, even

[10] Chaucer, p. 7.

though Theseus cannot determine the exact causes behind Arcite's sudden death, he gives it a godly driven motivation and denounces the still grieving Palamon and Emelye because, in being unable to let go of their grief, they *dooth folye*, for they question and resist God's wise plan. The tale ends with Palamon and Emelye's wedding, which paints the picture of a blissful life "That nevere was ther no word hem bitwen / Of jalousie or any oother teene." (3105-3106)

In *Artistic ambivalence in Chaucer's Knight's Tale*, Thurston argues that "The Knight's Tale" can be interpreted either as an example of medieval metrical romance about courtly love and the deeds of noble knights and as "a work of art satirizing the hallowed institutions of the chivalric tradition and the societal foundations upon which they were presumably based."[11] Indeed, the tale is highly satirical and bittersweet in its irony as it targets chivalric values on the one hand and its characters' perception of their own free will and destiny on the other. The tale's audience is rendered aware of the chaotic universe these characters are a part of and sits side by side with the narrator looking down upon these men whose destinies are, unbeknownst to them, not governed by *wise purveiaunce* at all. However, when we put "The Knight's Tale" and *Two Noble Kinsmen* side by side, the latter lacks any profound ironic attitude towards its subject matter. As an audience, we are only left to deal with the absolute tragedy that unfolds from the moment the two sworn cousins renounce each other in the name of Emilia to the moment Arcite draws his last breah. Both for the characters and the audience, the latter is the result of utter chaos as, contrary to the poem, no outer force is to be blamed for his demise. For this very reason, when it comes to the play's criticism, a theme that seems to emerge quite often is the ambiguousness of its genre: Arcite and Palamon's story starts as an epic romance with Chaucer and becomes a tragicomedy, darkly tragic

[11] Thurston, Paul T., *Artistic Ambivalence in Chaucer's Knight's Tale*, University of Florida, 1968, p. 1.

at times while bordering on absurd at others, with Shakespeare and Fletcher. Thompson argues that "Shakespeare and Fletcher clearly saw completely different things in "The Knight's Tale" and dramatized it in quite independent ways."[12]

To establish what I mean with tensions within the play better, let us take the example of the first two acts from *The Two Noble Kinsmen*. It is generally assumed that Shakespeare authored the first act of the play, including the first scene of Act II.[13] Shakespeare showcases a thorough understanding and knowledge of the source material from the very beginning as he employs plot elements that Chaucer only mentioned in passing and expands on them, gives the original characters more depth and motivations and creates new parallelisms. For instance, Shakespeare takes full advantage of Hyppolita's military status to characterise her as a powerful woman with a soldieress' voice and a soldieress' attitude, whereas in the poem, she barely even has a speaking role.

> We have been soldiers, and we cannot weep
> When our friends don their helms, or put to sea,
> Or tell of babes broached on the lance, or women
> That have sod their infants in – and after ate them –
> The brine they wept at killing 'em; then if
> You stay to see of us such spinsters, we
> Should hold you here for ever. (I.iii, 18-24)

Likewise, the playwright expands upon the vague figure of *a freend* who helps Palamon "brake his prisoun" (1468) and creates an entirely new character embodied by the Jailer's Daughter which, on the surface, appears to be one of the many comic reliefs of the play, but, as I will explain later in Chapter 3, she will eventually serve as the very first victim of the destruction that human passions bring into men's lives. The Jailer's Daughter, who grows infatuated with Palamon, suffers from her unrequited feelings and the subplot of her slow descent into madness parallels the madness that is at the core of

[12] Thompson, p. 167.
[13] Thompson, p. 167.

Arcite and Palamon's fallout, even though hers is depicted in a much less dignified manner.

Shakespeare takes his time to explore the nuances behind Chaucer's characters' motivations and personalities. For instance, his Theseus is much more mindful than Chaucer's, less impulsive. At the beginning of the play, instead of besieging Thebes as soon as the three queens beg for his aid, he is shown to be reluctant and hesitant. His feelings, which are rarely considered or explored in the tale, mainly concern his duties towards his soon to be wife, Hyppolita. The two royals are not married yet, and when Theseus is asked to abandon his wedding ceremony for the sake of war, Shakespeare's portrayal of him shows a man who cherishes both his bride and the ritualistic aspect of marriage over warfare.

> Why, good ladies,
> This is a service whereto I am going
> Greater than any war; it more imports me
> Than all the actions that I have foregone,
> Or futurely can cope. (I.i, 170-174)

Theseus ponders at length his options, listens to what Hyppolita and Emelye have to suggest on the matter of war and aid, before forlornly confessing, "Troubled I am." (I.i, 76) In a similar manner, Shakespeare's Arcite and Palamon's personalities are more flashed out than their counterparts in the poem. For instance, in I.ii Shakespeare includes a scene that does not feature in "The Knight's Tale" that gives us a glimpse into the nobility of these men who are noble both in title and at heart. Indeed, in The Two Noble Kinsmen, Arcite and Palamon are knights who unwillingly fight under Creon who is "A most unbounded tyrant, whose successes / Makes heaven unfeared and villainy assured" (I.ii, 63-64), but they do so to protect their people as their "services stand now for Thebes, not Creon" (I.ii, 99). One last aspect that justifies Shakespeare's pondered approach to Chaucer's tale I would argue is Emilia who, in "The Knight's Tale" only, truly expresses her desire to "noght to ben a wyf and be with childe. / Noght

wol I knowe compaignye of man" (2310-2311) toward the second half of the poem. In the play instead, her character is given much more prominence. In I.iii, for instance, she confesses to Hyppolita that she will never "love any that's called man" (I.iii. 84), not after she has known what utter contentment it is to be fully known and understood by a friend such as her childhood *playfellow*, Flavina. Such declaration renders her later vehement refusal of betrothal to either Palamon or Arcite much more credible, motivated, supported by in-text evidence, less sudden, thus her later compliance with Theseus's orders more bitter. It is clear that *The Two Noble Kinsmen* is a better dramatization of a source material intended for oral exposition only, a means that had not required such levels of dramatization and characterisation on its author's part.

When it comes to Fletcher, many have argued that the plots of most of his plays had the fault of being too fragmented, contrived, his characters too theatrical and extreme.[14] When it comes to *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, the playwright maintained a lighter approach to "The Knight's Tale," and this lightness, whose often farcical attitude lacks any semblance to Chaucer's original irony and thinly veiled satire, is odd and clashes with Shakespeare's much more serious approach towards it. For instance, whereas in "The Knight's Tale," the two cousins revendicate their bond and *ooth* to one another after they have fallen for Emelye's beauty:

> Ysworn ful depe, and ech of us til oother,
> That nevere, for to dyen in the peyne,
> Til that the deeth departe shal us tweyne,
> Neither of us in love to hyndre oother
> Ne in noon oother cas, my leeve brother,
> But that thou sholdest trewely forthren me
> In every cas, as I shal forthren thee --
> This was thyn ooth, and myn also, certeyn; (1132-1139)

Fletcher plays with Arcite and Palamon's relationship before swiftly disrupting it in the name of love. In II.ii, as the two men begin to accept their fate and celebrate their life in

[14] Chen, Xing, *Reconsidering Shakespeare's 'Lateness': Studies in the Last Plays*, Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2015, pp. 210-211.

prison together ("Whilst Palamon is with me, let me perish / If I think this our prison!" II.ii, 115-116), they ruminate over the corruption of the outside world. Their cell, they declare, shall become their new *holy sanctuary* that will keep them from the *poison of pure spirits* that is the outside world.

> And here being thus together,
> We are an endless mine to one another;
> We are one another's wife, ever begetting
> New births of love; we are father, friends, acquaintance;
> We are, in one another, families;
> I am your heir, and you are mine. This place
> Is our inheritance; no hard oppressor
> Dare take this from us; here with a little patience
> We shall live long and loving. (II.ii, 132-140)

However, it is from the confinement of their *sanctuary* that they will be first subjected to the abjection of human passions.

> PALAMON: I do not think it possible our friendship
> Should ever leave us.
> ARCITE: Till our deaths it cannot.
>
> [Enter Emilia and her Woman] (II.ii, 167-169)

The quarrel that follows becomes humorous as Fletcher omits key elements from the poem that would otherwise anchor the knights' responses to much more curteous and mature grounds. If in "The Knight's Tale," Palamon reminds Arcite that they have sworn that none should hinder the other in matters of love ("Neither of us in love to hyndre oother" 1135), in the play, he is almost childish in his petulant remark that he saw Emilia first:

> PALAMON: I saw her first.
> ARCITE: That's nothing.
> PALAMON: But it shall be.
> ARCITE: I saw her, too.
> PALAMON: Yes, but you must not love her. (II.ii, 203-207)

In the same scene, Fletcher omits one of the most prominent philosophical features of "The Knight's Tale": its Boethian attitude towards fate, Fortune and human predestination. I will explore Boethius's role in the tale in Chapter 2, but it is worth noting how what follows Arcite and Palamon's dispute over Emelye in the tale is

followed by a passionate Boethian outcry on Palamon's behalf. Indeed, in the tale, as Arcite is released from prison and banished from Athens, Palamon is left alone in his cell and denounces the *cruel goddess* that has allowed his foe to walk freely. He dreads the possibility that Arcite may assemble an army to set siege on Athens and win Emelye for himself. His lonely detention allows him to wonder what it truly means to ask Fortune for happiness, for a man never knows what it is that he is asking before he has acquired it as he may ask for riches and be murdered by others for it. Nonetheless, of one thing Palamon is confident: his only source of happiness may be found outside of his confinement, for outside is Emelye, and as long as he cannot see her nor keep her for himself, he is as good as dead.

> Ther now I am exiled fro my wele.
> Syn that I may nat seen you, Emelye,
> I nam but deed; ther nys no remedye. (1272-1274)

Fletcher neglects this aspect of Palamon's character. In the play, the man still despairs over Arcite's departure from Athens, still fears the knight's possible reprisal against the capital, still bemoans his cousins' chance at making *himself a worthy lover* for Emilia and complains when the Jailer moves him to a more secluded cell for he will not be able to see the Amazon roam the garden anymore. However, this entire section lacks the philosophical gravitas of human pain and sense of loss provided by Chaucer, a gravitas that Shakespeare nonetheless still employs later in his own sections of the play. We can see then how even if Fletcher seemingly and closely re-adapts the tale's highly ironic, comic and somewhat mocking attitude towards its characters more than Shakespeare does, *The Two Noble Kinsmen* as a whole proves how seriously Shakespeare took the poem instead and how different the two playwrights' attitude towards their source material really is.

The playwrights' clashing attitudes towards the poem are often considered one of the main reasons why, despite the popularity of its subject matter, *The Two Noble*

Kinsmen failed both to arouse a rich and positive critical reception and to experience an immediate theatrical success. When it comes to determining *The Two Noble Kinsmen*'s reception, we must be aware that it was not the first play that Shakespeare and Fletcher had co-authored for they had composed together *Cardenio*, now lost, and *All is True (Henry VIII*) as well.[15] I would argue that the scholarly attitude towards the joint authorship of the latter resembles closely the attitude dedicated to *The Two Noble Kinsmen* despite the two plays having underwent different levels of public reception. Indeed, *Henry VIII*'s authorship was first questioned in the mid-19th century by critics like Hickson and Spedding,[16] and indeed their argument rested on the basis that some stylistic aspects and tensions within the text of the play suggested the presence of another hand alongside Shakespeare's, often assumed to be Fletcher's.[17] Nonetheless, unlike *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, despite eventually surviving as a "lesser" Shakespearean history play, *Henry VIII* underwent a period of relative success,[18] meaning that the presence of contrasting attitudes within a play does not necessarily justify the former's poor reception by the public. In "Shakespeare's Flop: John Waterson and *The Two Noble Kinsmen*," Lesser argues that, other than the play's joint authorship, there must be other elements at play able to justify the unfortunate history around the public reception of *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, namely its publication history.[19] To begin with, actors John Heminges and Henry Condell failed to include it in their 1623 edition of Shakespeare's First Folio, meaning that the first official publication of *The Two Noble Kinsmen* dates back to 1634 and is attributed to John

[15] Gossett, Suzanne, "*The Two Noble Kinsmen* and King Henry VIII: The Last Plays", *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare's Last Plays*, ed. by Catherine M. S. Alexander, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009, pp. 186-187.
[16] Hope, Jonathan, *The Authorship of Shakespeare's Plays*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994, p. 67.
[17] Wells, Stanley, Michael Dobson, *The Oxford Companion to Shakespeare*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001, p. 82.
[18] Gossett, p. 189.
[19] Lesser, pp. 177-196.

Waterson,[20] the same Waterson who had first entered it in the Stationer's Register on April 8th 1634, as "a TragiComedy called the two noble kinsmen by John ffletcher and William Shakespeare."[21]

Lesser identifies *The Two Noble Kinsmen* as an "oddball"[22] in the Shakespearean canon as he argues that its publisher, Waterson, albeit not responsible for the play's absence from Shakespeare's First Folio, is in part responsible for having "ensured, or at least contributed to, the failure of *The Two Noble Kinsmen* as a commodity in the book trade."[23] Previous to publishing the play, the Crown was run by Simon Waterson, one of the most successful and reputable members of the Stationer's Company.[24] Located in the centre of the national book trade, St. Paul's Churchyard, [25] the Crown specialised in publishing educational literature that catered to London's urban clientele,[26] a business choice that had Waterson's bookshop thrive for over fifty years and allowed him to publish over two hundred new titles.[27] Under Waterson, the Crown published learned texts, such as grammar books, anthologies, dictionaries, standard schoolbooks and classic literature.[28] The publisher was able to find the right balance between "cheap print"[29] and the literature only accessible to a highly intellectual audience. However, when his son, John Waterson, inherited and ran the business from 1634 to 1656, he did so to the detriment of the shop.[30] The man's finances were in fact troubled way before he inherited the business, and only got worse as time went on. Whether it be for external

[20] Gossett, "*The Two Noble Kinsmen* and King Henry VIII: The Last Plays", p. 188.
[21] O'Shea, José Roberto Basto, "With a 'co-adjutor': Collaboration between William Shakespeare and John Fletcher in *The Two Noble Kinsmen*", *Revista Letras*, 92 (2015), p. 59.
[22] Lesser, p. 177.
[23] Lesser, p. 178.
[24] Lesser, p. 179.
[25] Berger, Thomas L., "Shakespeare Writ Small: Early Single Editions of Shakespeare's Plays", *A Concise Companion to Shakespeare and the Text*, ed. by Andrew R. Murphy, Malden: Blackwell, 2007, p. 30.
[26] Lesser, p. 27.
[27] Lesser, p. 179.
[28] Lesser, p. 180-181.
[29] Like ballads, a type of literature that was heavily exploited by Waterson's contemporaries and neighbouring publishing houses. Berger, p. 30.
[30] Lesser, p. 185.

reasons or for an inherent inability to keep the shop running, from the two-hundred editions published under his father, Waterson only managed to publish twenty-three before his death in 1656.[31] To benefit his income and reputation, Waterson decided to cater to his clientele's social ambitions rather than intellectual needs and began publishing plays from indoor theatres, relying on their unavailability to the public to attract an elite clientele.[32] In doing so, he alienated both his father's clientele, much more loyal to the Crown's long-standing reputation as an educational publishing house and his newly targeted one that might have been unaware of the sudden change in the direction of the bookstore.[33] *The Two Noble Kinsmen* was caught in such crossfire as it was part of Waterson's new direction towards professional drama and courtly texts. Lesser argues that the publisher's failure to turn his father's bookshop into a successful endeavour might have both hindered its respectability among its contemporaries and the respectability of the plays published under its new administration.

Waterson's quarto introduces the play as having been written by "the memorable Worthies of their time; Mr John Fletcher, and Mr William Shakespeare,"[34] bracketing and identifying them both as "Gent.," the same title that Thomas Walkley had used in his 1622 quarto of *Philaster* to identify Fletcher and his then collaborator Beaumont.[35] In this regard, Gossett argues that the popularity of Fletcher and Beaumont as collaborators was so great that it must have influenced the way *The Two Noble Kinsmen* was perceived by its contemporaries.[36] As a matter of fact, it was part of Shakespeare's so-called apocrypha, those types of works associated with the author "often more in

[31] Lesser, p. 185.
[32] Lesser, p. 191.
[33] Lesser, p. 198.
[34] Wells, p. 81.
[35] Gossett, "*The Two Noble Kinsmen* and King Henry VIII: The Last Plays", pp. 188-189.
[36] Gossett, "*The Two Noble Kinsmen* and King Henry VIII: The Last Plays", p. 189.

fancy than in fact,"[37] for a long time, but it was later canonised in the 1997 edition of the *Riverside Shakespeare* alongside *Edward III*.[38] For this very reason, despite carrying Shakespeare's name on its title page, the play wandered in and out of Shakespeare's canon and was eventually reprinted in a Beaumont and Fletcher's 1679 folio collection that comprised plays that the two playwrights had either composed alone, together or in collaboration with other authors.[39]

Despite Beaumont and Fletcher's popularity, *The Two Noble Kinsmen*'s mixed genre always seemed to ill fit the audience's current tastes as it kept being re-adapted throughout the 17th and the 18th centuries through more straightforward perspectives: it became a comedy in 1664 with *The Rivals* by Sir William Davenant, and later a tragedy in 1779 with Richard Cumberland's *Palamon and Arcite*. It was finally re-adapted into another comedy comprised of songs in 1795 with *Love and Madness; or, the Two Noble Kinsmen* composed by Francis Godolphin Waldron.[40]

1.2 Considering the Genre of *The Two Noble Kinsmen*

1.2.1 Romance

We have ascertained that *The Two Noble Kinsmen*'s genre is an odd mix of comedy and tragedy despite re-adapting what is conventionally considered an epic romance with a philosophical twist. Indeed, there is little romance in the *Two Noble Kinsmen*, and certainly not the type of romance that Shakespeare had accustomed his audience to in his previous works despite including the archetypal romantic elements of chivalry such as a faraway land, noble protagonists, an ambiguous yet ancient time period, romantic

[37] Berger, p. 62.
[38] Berger, p. 61.
[39] Gossett, p. 189.
[40] Gossett, "*The Two Noble Kinsmen* and King Henry VIII: The Last Plays", p. 189.

conflicts in the name of love, a royal wedding and the prospect of marriage.[41] However, *The Two Noble Kinsmen* cannot be read as a romance because its overall structure and motifs differ from Shakespeare's previous romances, whose structure often relied on a newly found order born out of chaos.[42]

Let us compare *The Two Noble Kinsmen* with another play composed by Shakespeare, a play that is conventionally considered a romance due to its exotic setting, its magic elements, its themes of *fin amour* and the inclusion of the romantic pattern that moves the action from chaos to "transformative reorderings of persons, events, and societies":[43] the late play *The Tempest*. The once-proud Duke of Milan, Prospero, is ousted by his brother, Antonio, and is exiled with his daughter, Miranda, on a desert island. A witch "so strong / That [she] could control the Moon"[44] (V.i, 269-270), Sycorax, once inhabited the island, and it is here that Prospero develops his magic craft and frees Ariel, a spirit formerly enslaved and later imprisoned in a pine tree by the witch. When Antonio sails near Prospero's island twelve years later, the magician conjures a storm that shipwrecks his vessel onto his land. He does so "So safely [...] [that] not so much perdition as an hair / Betid to any creature in the vessel" (I.ii, 29-31). Chaos soon ensues: Ariel yields to Prospero's commands under the promise of freedom and keeps a close watch on the stranded crew in his invisible form. He puts an end to a conspiracy led by Antonio and Sebastian, the second in line to the throne of Naples, to kill Alonso, king of Naples; he stops Caliban, Sycorax's son who begrudges Prospero's unyielding authority over him, from plotting against the magician and having him killed by the castaways. He even summons a banquet to lure Antonio, Alonso and Sebastian

[41] Chen, p. 222.
[42] Chen, p. 222.
[43] Bieman, Elizabeth, *William Shakespeare: The Romances*, Boston: Twayne, 1990, p. 5.
[44] Shakespeare, William, *The Tempest*, ed. by Virginia Mason Vaughan and Alden T. Vaughan, London: Arden Shakespeare, 2003. I will be using this edition throughout.

and explodes in "Thunder and lightning" upon their arrival, reproaching their sins against his master.

> […] But remember—
> For that's my business to you—that you three
> From Milan did supplant good Prospero;
> Exposed unto the sea, which hath requit it,
> Him and his innocent child: for which foul deed
> The powers, delaying, not forgetting, have
> Incensed the seas and shores, yea, all the creatures,
> Against your peace. (III.iii. 68-75)

Eventually, before finally meeting the man who had once betrayed him, Prospero breaks his staff and throws his magic book of spells in the sea, for he seeks to pursue a *nobler reason* against his first, more violent instincts and finally grants him his forgiveness for "The rarer action is / In virtue than in vengeance" (V.i, 27-28).

The Tempest is a story that opens with Prospero's proud dukedom, an indication of societal order, an order that is disrupted first when Prospero is sent into exile and then when Antonio shipwrecks onto his island. Eventually, we return to an ordered world where Prospero has given up his magic and is reinstated as Duke of Milan, Ariel is freed, those who once betrayed are now forgiven, and Alonso's son, Ferdinand, and Miranda end up getting married. Considering that this is a recurring pattern in most of Shakespeare's romances, what happens in the *Two Noble Kinsmen* challenges this cyclical model. Society in the *Two Noble Kinsmen* is never forwardly disordered. The central conflict of the story arises from within our main characters: Arcite and Palamon's chivalric bond is threatened by none other than the two men themselves, and as their entitlement over Emilia does not reflect chivalric values, the chivalric love, proper of romances, is here portrayed as selfish, possessive, obsessive, detrimental to the noble oaths of friendship that both knights had upheld until they set their eyes upon the woman for the first time.

PALAMON: […] Base cousin,
Dar'st thou break first?
ARCITE: You are wide.
PALAMON: By heaven and Earth,
There's nothing in thee honest.
ARCITE: Then I'll leave you.
You are a beast now.
PALAMON: As thou mak'st me, traitor. (III.iii. 72-80)

This kind of sentiment refutes the selfless nature of chivalric romances. Shakespeare and Fletcher never seem to want to showcase an array of circumstances where love is perceived as a regenerative force rather than a disruptive one. For instance, the Jailer's Daughter is pushed by her father towards the nameless man referred to as the Wooer, a man who loves her but who is not loved in return. Unlike Emilia, the Jailer's Daughter knows who she desires and loves more between Arcite and Palamon, and even though she is aware that her love will lead her nowhere (To marry him is hopeless, / To be his whore is witless", II.iv, 4-5), she still allows herself to obsess over Palamon. Her hopelessness leads her to eventually lose her mind, experiencing an Ophelia-like descent into madness. Contrary to Ophelia's, however, the Jailer's Daughter's madness becomes the object of comic deception. In a series of scenes conventionally attributed to Fletcher, upon realising that "she has a perturbed mind, which I cannot minister to" (IV.iii, 60), the character of the Doctor advises the Wooer to dupe the woman into thinking he is Palamon. In doing so, both the Wooer and the Jailer's Daughter achieve, albeit through deceit, their "happy" ending. However, in doing so, the conclusion of their sub-plot not only is bawdy and almost grotesque in its treachery and exploitation of the Jailer's daughter's madness, but it contradicts every etiquette proper of noble and chaste courtly love as well:

DOCTOR: Please her appetite,
And do it home; it cures her, ipso facto,
The melancholy humor that infects her.
WOOER: I am of your mind, doctor.
DOCTOR: You'll find it so. (V.ii. 52-56)

Finally, while Shakespeare's conventional romances end in a happy marriage between characters who have finally achieved order in their own world, *The Two Noble Kinsmen* does not. Indeed, "The Knight's Tale" culminates in a happy and idyllic marriage where one "loveth so tenderly" and the other "serveth so gentilly," while the epilogue in Shakespeare and Fletcher's play is abrupt and less blissful. Not only does it not end in a wedding or in a mention of a past wedding, but Palamon's last lines are full of grieving, regretful despair.

> O cousin,
> That we should things desire which do cost us
> The loss of our desire, that naught could buy
> Dear love but loss of dear love. (V.iv. 131-134)

There is thus little romance in the play, and its tragedy is at times overshadowed by the oftentimes absurd comedy typical of Fletcher's own writing.

1.2.2 Comedy

Even though I have argued that Fletcher managed to implement his personal flavour of comedy in his sections of the play and exploit Chaucer's original ironic approach to enhance his own, *The Two Noble Kinsmen* play cannot be considered a pure comedy either. As mentioned above, the play's rather odd mix of genres proved problematic when post-Jacobean authors tried to re-adapt it for modern tastes. For instance, one of the play's first adaptations was the Restoration comedy *The Rivals* by Sir William Davenant, written and performed in 1664 and published in 1668.[45] Here, the tragic disruption of a chivalric bond that culminates with the loss of one's friend takes a back seat. The first key difference between the two plays is in their titles: if *Two Noble Kinsmen* informs us that the play has to do with the noble bond between cousins,

[45] Griffiths, Huw, "Adapting Same-sex Friendship: Fletcher and Shakespeare's *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, and Davenant's *The Rivals*", *Adaptation and Early Modern Culture: Shakespeare and Beyond*, 11 (2015), p. 20.

Davenant's highlights the mere rivalry of his protagonists, and if the rivalry in *The Two Noble Kinsmen* is resolved with the death of a once close friend, it ends instead with another wedding in *The Rivals*. The underrepresentation of disrupted chivalric bonds is also highlighted by Davenant's replacement of the King Theseus with Arcon, King of Arcadia. Indeed, in Chaucer's time, Theseus was not just the "champion of idealised Athenian values,"[46] and the perfect example of a wise and just ruler, but his bond with Pirithous was considered to be the perfect realization of male friendship,[47] a realization that is used both in "The Knight's Tale" and in *The Two Noble Kinsmen* to parallel the otherwise disastrous outcome of Arcite and Palamon's relationship. In avoiding any reference to the ideal set by Theseus and in redirecting Theocles (Arcite) and Philander's (Palamon) friendship from the tragic downfall of two sworn brothers to two rivals fighting over the coveted object of their desire, Davenant successfully turned Shakespeare and Fletcher's play into a comedy.

1.2.3 Tragedy

The Two Noble Kinsmen is thus not a romance nor a comedy due to the thread of underlying tragedy that draws together all its characters, but, as we have stated already, the play is not a tragedy either. Cynthia Marshall argues that, in general, authors tend to explore the profoundly tragic late in their careers, whereas, in Shakespeare's case, he did so before that, at the very peak of it.[48] The motifs and themes of tragedies such as *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *King Lear*, and *Macbeth* are difficult to establish, for determining what a tragedy is is difficult in itself. Kastan argues that "the death of the titular character

[46] Woodard, Roger D., *The Cambridge Companion to Greek Mythology*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007, p. 166.
[47] Woodard, p. 9.
[48] Marshall, p. 2.

might seem to unify the [Shakespeare's] Folio's tragic plays,"[49] however, he adds, "they display remarkable differences in how that death is experienced."[50] Indeed, he continues, deaths like Macbeth's do not produce the same sense of anguish and grief in the audience that deaths like Hamlet's do. Hamlet finds himself uncovering a conspiracy that killed his father, and in a quest to unmask his murderer, he is driven to madness. The mark of death around him, be it by his own hand or as a result of his endeavours, is a result of the initial unfairness he was forced to endure. Macbeth is instead introduced as a character able to resist the drive of the lowest of human passions at first. At the beginning of the play, he and his ally Banquo are foretold by three witches their future and Macbeth is told he is to be the future king of Scotland. Initially, he does not give in to his wife's demands to kill King Duncan, the current king of Scotland, as he lies asleep in their castle. However, his ambitiousness, greed and lust for power eventually turn the play's titular character into an anti-hero. Macbeth kills the current king, frames his chamberlains for his murder and, with Duncan's heirs fleeing the country, ascends to the throne thanks to his kinship to the former king and his high-ranking status as a thane. Macbeth's concern about possible conspiracies against his title leads him to be the cause of many more deaths. Eventually, his own demise is not unjustified nor undeserved, and as a result, it defies the pathos that a traditional tragic hero's death is supposed to produce in the audience. Thus, Kastan argues that if death is not the sole indicator of a tragedy, a common thread that runs through Shakespeare's is that they all have to do with pain, loss, the horror and the mystery of human suffering.[51] However, when it comes to Shakespeare's last plays, even though they deal with tragic plots and instances of death as well, they head more often toward an ending that celebrates the qualities of

[49] Kastan, David Scott, "A Rarity Most Beloved: Shakespeare and the Idea of Tragedy", *A Companion to Shakespeare's Works: The Tragedies*, ed. by Richard Dutton, Jean E. Howard, Malden: Blackwell, 2003, p. 6.
[50] Kastan, p. 6.
[51] Kastan, p. 9.

forgiveness and reconciliation. Indeed, it is often argued that Shakespeare's last plays seem to be homogenous in their dealing with themes of "separation and reunion, loss and restoration, and repentance and forgiveness,"[52] motifs we have previously seen in *The Tempest,* where Prospero abandons vengeance in pursuit of his *nobler reason*.

> Though with their high wrongs I am struck to th' quick,
> Yet with my nobler reason 'gainst my fury
> Do I take part. The rarer action is
> In virtue than in vengeance. They being penitent,
> The sole drift of my purpose doth extend
> Not a frown further. Go, release them, Ariel.
> My charms I'll break, their senses I'll restore,
> And they shall be themselves. (V.i, 25-32)

Thus, Shakespeare went from producing high tragedies to producing stories significantly softer in attitude later in his production years, and amid this change, he came into contact with the world of tragicomedies.

1.2.4 Tragicomedy

Having ascertained why *The Two Noble Kinsmen* cannot be univocally ascribed to the aforementioned genres, let us consider our fourth option: tragicomedy. As we will come to see, *The Two Noble Kinsmen* is an oddity, even when it comes to tragicomedies. Both Shakespeare and Fletcher had approached the genre during their career before collaborating on the play, and their attitudes towards it do not seem to match perfectly with the tomfoolery coupled with the existential dread that instead transpires from *The Two Noble Kinsmen*.

Shakespeare's first approach to the genre was with *Pericles*. The playwright first produced the play for the Globe, probably between April and June 1608, allegedly in collaboration with fellow dramatist of the King's Men and the company's principal

[52] Griffiths, p. 22.

shareholder, George Wilkins.[53] What suggests Wilkins's name alongside Shakespeare's is a number of meeting points between the two authors. The text, for instance, presents noticeable stylistic inconsistencies that cannot be ascribed to Shakespeare's hand only: the tone changes are too abrupt and keep shifting from serious to trivial,[54] there are metric irregularities such as the alternation of quantities in names as Perĭcles and Perīcles, Thaĭsa and Thaīsa, Pentapŏlis and Pentapōlis,[55] and its plot is often deemed as meandering and seemingly impersonal. As for what happened with *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, a possible joint authorship seems to bear the brunt of these faults.[56] The assumption that Wilkins co-authored *Pericles* alongside Shakespeare does not stop at a mere stylistic level: his alleged collaboration with Shakespeare suits the chronology of their works, as all of Wilkins's surviving plays were produced between 1606 and 1608.[57] In this regard, Gossett argues that Shakespeare must have noticed and appreciated Wilkins's recent tragicomic efforts and supposedly took him up as his own collaborator for the composition of his first tragicomedy. Indeed, by the time *Pericles* was supposedly composed, Wilkins had already written the tragicomedy *The Miseries of Enforced Marriage*, published in London in 1607.[58]

1.2.4.1 Wilkins's *The Miseries of Enforced Marriage*

Before delving into Shakespeare's definition and approach to tragicomedy, we cannot ignore the collaborative element in *Pericles* and Wilkins's handling of the genre. Between 1606-1607, two years before the publication of *Pericles*, the King's Men

[53] Gossett, Suzanne, "Taking Pericles Seriously", *Early Modern Tragicomedy*, ed. by Subha Mukherji, Raphael Lyne, Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2007, p. 106.
[54] Vickers, Brian, *Shakespeare, Co-Author: A Historical Study of the Five Collaborative Plays*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002, p. 293.
[55] It is worth noting that the play comes from a corrupted printer's copy which could ascribe some of its contents, misspellings and stylistic aspects to a reporter rather than to its authors. Shakespeare, Shakespeare, William, George Wilkins, *Pericles*, ed. by F.D. Hoeniger, London: Methuen, 1997, p. LVI.
[56] Boyce, p. 458-459.
[57] Shakespeare, *Pericles*, LIX.
[58] Gossett, "Taking Pericles Seriously", p. 106.

staged two of what are often referred to as "marriage plays" or "domestic dramas,"[59] that is, dramas inspired by real-life criminal events: Wilkins's tragicomedy *The Miseries of Enforced Marriage*, and A *Yorkshire Tragedy.* The latter was initially treated as a Shakespearean play but later removed from his canon as its gritty source material contained "the least cosmic grandeur and the least sense of universal significance of all [of Shakespeare's] major tragedies."[60] Indeed, both plays overturn the elements of a high tragedy. When we consider that the archetypical characters of a tragedy are largely princely and their actions heroic, *A Yorkshire Tragedy* and *The Miseries of Enforced Marriage* portray the wretchedness of domestic tragedies and explore the low passions of ordinary life instead.[61]

A Yorkshire Tragedy and *The Miseries* are dramatizations of an infamous criminal case named after the murderer Walter Calverley, an English squire who, in 1605, as a result of a life spent drinking, squandering and gambling,[62] went bankrupt and in a drunken frenzy murdered two of his sons and stabbed his wife. The infamy of his actions spread like wildfire as they predominantly concerned the murder of children, and it was not uncommon for authors to try and profit from the sensationalism of such high-profile scandals, nor was it uncommon for playhouses to play into their high demand. Whereas *A Yorkshire Tragedy* does not intend to give a sociological explanation for Calverley's actions and instead recounts the events in a merely informative manner,[63] Wilkins's *The Miseries* does not develop as such. The playwright focused on other elements surrounding Calverley, such as his unhappy marriage after

[59] Lieblein, Leanore, "The Context of Murder in English Domestic Plays, 1590-1610", *Studies in English Literature, 1500*-1900, 23 (1983), p. 181.
[60] Sturgess, Keith, *Three Elizabethan Domestic Tragedies*, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1969, p. 14.
[61] Sturgess, p. 7.
[62] Matthew, Henry Colin Gray, Brian Harrison, *The Oxford dictionary of national biography, Volume 9 Burt-Capon*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004, p. 569.
[63] Gossett, "Taking Pericles Seriously", p. 104.

having broken a previous betrothal.[64] Indeed, albeit entering the Stationers' Register as a tragedy, Wilkins wrote *The Miseries* as a tragicomedy that seeks to rationalise Calverley's character's actions through a more sympathetic light. Instead of blaming outside evil forces like *A Yorkshire Tragedy* does when Calverley's character declares that "Now glides the devil from me, / Departs at every joint, heaves up my nails."[65] (xviii. 18-19), the *Miseries* focuses on the highs and lows of married life and the dangers of enforced marriages. The latter reports Calverley's slow descent into abjection, an abjection that is not given a chance to erupt into a familial tragedy when Calverley inherits a fortune, putting a halt to his debauchery.[66]

1.2.4.2 Shakespeare's first Tragicomedy: *Pericles*

Wilkins's theme of prevented tragedy in favour of a happy ending is a central theme in *Pericles*. *Pericles* merges elements from both tragedy and comedy: it is tragic in its ever-present lingering threat of familial loss and romantic in the cancellation of the previous suffering through reconciliation. It is the story of Pericles, Prince of Tyre, who is forced to escape his kingdom after having attracted the animosity of the current king. In his travels, he meets his future wife, Thaisa, with whom he will sail back home after the king's death. On their way back, amidst a violent storm, Thaisa gives birth to Marina, but when childbirth renders her unconscious, leading everyone on board to believe she has died, her body is thrown overboard and washes ashore in the city of Ephesus. Here she is found and later revived by a physician. Marina is at first left under the care of Tarsus's governor and his wife, Dionyza, who, upon realizing that Marina "gets / All praises, which are paid as debts" (IV. 33-34), gets rid of the child, for she is more

[64] Matthew, p. 569.
[65] Middleton, Thomas, "A Yorkshire Tragedy", *Three Elizabethan Domestic Tragedies*, ed. by Keith Sturgess, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1969, p. 180.
[66] Sturgess, p. 35.

beautiful and talented than her own daughter. On her way to be disposed of, Marina is kidnapped by pirates and sold to a brothel in Mytilene but is later sheltered by a local governor. At his point in the play, the theme of familial loss reaches its climax, a climax that is soon disrupted when Pericles, amid his despair for having lost his daughter, sets out to sea and, through a series of fortuitous coincidence and a dream-like vision of the goddess Diana, is eventually reunited with both Marina and his wife, Thaisa.

Commentators have deemed *Pericles*'s dramatic power inferior to Shakespeare's previous plays' not only because it lacks a central conflict, often the catalyst for the final climax,[67] but because, as stated previously, it consciously distances itself from the playwright's dark comedies and darker tragedies by mixing elements from both. *Pericles* is a story that celebrates hope and offers a more optimistic view of the world than Shakespeare's previous plays did. *Pericles* prepares the ground for the playwright's later preoccupation with exploring the world of separations and reunions contemplated in his last plays. In this regard, what has troubled commentators and critics most about *The Two Noble Kinsmen* is the clash of attitudes between the playwright's aforementioned romantic attitude to play-writing and his bitter approach to *The Two Noble Kinsmen*'s. Indeed, as mentioned before with tragedy, ascribing univocal characteristics to a literary genre is a complicated endeavour, an endeavour that grows more complicated to handle when what we are analysing is a collaborative work of literature. As I have already stated, *The Two Noble Kinsmen* cannot be read solely through Shakespeare's own perspective and reading of the tragicomic genre. Moreover, by the time Shakespeare composed *Pericles*, the genre was a relatively new endeavour for the playwright. We could argue that John Fletcher had a much more detailed and established vision of what a tragicomedy is supposed to be as he and

[67] Shakespeare, *Pericles*, p. LXXV.

Francis Beaumont published in 1608-1610 *Philaster, or Love Lies a-Bleeding*, regarded as one of the most successful tragicomedies of the era which set afoot a newly found interest in the genre.[68]

1.2.4.3 Fletcher's Approach to Tragicomedy

There are not many records about John Fletcher's personal life besides what we know about his career and literary output under the King's Men.[69] Born in 1579 in Rye, Sussex, Fletcher began writing either in collaboration or by himself for children's companies, often performing in private theatres.[70] What characterised his earlier plays was their theatricality, globality, and unity; they were romantic, bawdy, and often boisterous. In Squier's words, "the actors' roles […] are more important than the delineation of character; surfaces count more than depths."[71] Squier argues that these characteristics stayed true throughout Fletcher's entire career, something we have already established when dealing with the clashing of characterizations between Fletcher and Shakespeare when dealing with *The Two Noble Kinsmen*'s characters.

Fletcher maintained a fruitful partnership with many fellow playwrights throughout his career, namely with Francis Beaumont. Indeed, except for *The Faithful Shepherdess* (1609-1610), his early plays were all written in collaboration with the playwright,[72] regarded as one of his most renowned collaborators with whom he began a "unique literary partnership."[73] Despite the popularity and contemporary literary influence, their partnership did not last long: it probably began in 1608, with their first joint play

[68] Chen, p. 5.
[69] Squier, Charles L., *John Fletcher*, Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1986, p. 6.
[70] Squier, p. 8.
[71] Squier, p, 15.
[72] Squier, p. 15.
[73] Fletcher, John, *The Faithful Shepherdess*, ed. by F. W. Moorman, London: J. M. Dent, 1897, p. V. I will be using this edition throughout.

Cupid's Revenge,[74] and ended in 1616 with Beaumont's death. From 1609-1610 Fletcher wrote exclusively for the King's Men, became the company's chief dramatist following Shakespeare's retirement, and was supposedly involved in co-authoring forty-two plays in total for the company.[75]

Fletcher's first independent work as a playwright was the aforementioned highly poetical and aristocratic pastoral play *The Faithful Shepherdess*. The play was composed sometime around 1608 for the Children of the Queen's Revels, and it was first published in an undated quarto in 1609. It does not have a linear plot as it is a somewhat episodic play: it stars the faithful shepherdess and healer Clorin, who leads a lonely and mournful life near the grave of her long-lost lover. We are then introduced to a rich party of characters: the lovers Amoret and Perigot, the deceitful Amarillis who is in love with Perigot and who threatens to sabotage their relationship, the lustful Cloe who seeks a worthy lover but who is later threatened by the equally lustful Sullen Shepherd, and the smitten Thenot, who loves Clorin but who is not loved back. Their storylines interconnect with Clorin's, who takes care of their wounds and predicaments, ultimately leading to an uneventful plot. *The Faithful Shepherdess* was Fletcher's first genuine attempt at serious drama,[76] and it was heavily inspired by the latest Italian trends concerning the pastoral genre, namely by Giovan Battista Guarini's *Il pastor fido*, composed between 1580 and 1585 and printed in 1590.[77] From *Il pastor fido*, Fletcher borrowed plenty of elements such as the name of *The Faithful Shepherdess* and characters such as the shepherdess Amarillis and the lustful Cloe, which he modelled after Guarini's Corisca. What interests us in this disquisition about tragicomedy is the

[74] Fletcher, *Philaster*, p. XXI.
[75] Squier, p. 9.
[76] Mincoff, Marco, "The Faithful Shepherdess: A Fletcherian Experiment", *Renaissance Drama*, 9 (1966), pp. 163-177, p. 163.
[77] Fenlon, Iain, "Music and Spectacle at the Gonzaga Court, c. 1580-1600", *Proceedings of the Royal Musical Association*, 103 (1976-1977), pp. 90–105, pp. 90-91.

literary debt that Fletcher owes Guarini: *Il pastor fido* grew to be "the most influential of all pastoral tragi-comedies,"[78] a term, "tragicomedy," that Guarini himself used to refer to his play to better highlight the difference between his work and its predecessors',[79] and it is from this play that Fletcher will draw his first approach to the genre.

1.2.4.4 Battista Guarini's *Il pastor fido*

Il pastor fido owes its main characteristics to pastoral dramas, a genre that thrived in Italy in the second half of the 16th century and that has roots in the dramatic form of the "commedia rustica", which mixes classic and pastoral elements with comedy and local folklore.[80] Later on, as this particular flavour of comedy began incorporating elements from Ovid and Virgil's poetry, it developed into a new and more defined art form. In this regard, Antonucci argues that "pastoral comedy begins where *commedia rustica* shows its limits and ambiguities as a «mixed» and vague genre."[81] Traditionally, pastoral drama deals with the lives of shepherds, nymphs, satyrs and other sylvan creatures who act against a bucolic backdrop usually represented by the Greek Arcadia. What Guarini did with his *Il pastor fido* was to tinker with the genre and challenge that tradition, a tradition that he only followed in regard to its pastoral themes and the Arcadian backdrop. As Casella argues in his preface to the 1866 edition of *Il pastor fido*, "the scope of idyllic life […] is too narrow because it does not make way for the shepherds' actions and sentiments,"[82] thus *Il pastor fido* broke away from its strict,

[78] Bradbrook, M. C., "Courtier and Courtesy: Castiglione, Lyly and Shakespeare' s Two Gentlemen of Verona", *Theatre of the English and Italian Renaissance*, ed. by J. R. Mulryne, Margaret Shewring, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1991, p. 170.
[79] Antonucci, p. 34.
[80] Antonucci, p. 33.
[81] Antonucci, p. 33. All translations from Antonucci will be mine hereafter.
[82] Guarini, Battista, *Il pastor fido*, ed. by Giacinto Casella, Firenze: Barbèra Editore, 1866, p. LXI. I will be using this edition throughout. All translations from Guarini's *Il pastor fido* and commentary are mine.

conservative definition of genre in an era when Italian courts privileged city-centred stories and the adoption of classic models over the life of the peasantry.[83]

In *Il pastor fido*, Arcadia is under a curse that can only be lifted via the marriage of two people of a divine race; thus, Montano marries his son, Silvio, to Amarillis, descendants, respectively, of Hercules and Pan. The two, however, do not love each other. In this scenario, to dwell within the narrow walls of idyllic representation diminishes the dramatic outcome of the story. Indeed, while Silvio does not care for love, Amarillis loves the "faithful" shepherd Mirtillo, who requites her feelings. Even though they do not dare to consume their union, for Amarillis is promised to another man, their affection is exploited by the overtly wicked nymph Corisca and the shepherd Coridon. Corisca is in love with Mirtillo, and Coridon, for the sake of her love instead, agrees to frame Amarillis as unfaithful to Silvio. Such betrayal would result in the woman's sentence to death, but when Mirtillo offers to sacrifice his own life on behalf of his beloved, he discovers he is Montano's long-lost son, making him a descendent of Hercules himself. Thus, as the two lovers are both of divine race, they can marry and bring peace to Arcadia.

This play shows us how Guarini sought to "clothe the pastoral with city people and city sentiments, [...] [and to] bring the city to the countryside, or the countryside to the city."[84] He did not resolve to centre his characters and their actions solely within the refined context of the city, nor did he only employ a mere lowbrow pastoral setting. Instead, he took advantage of the shared knowledge of the Arcadia, which evoked in the audience's mind the image of a place of sylvan beauty and highly poetic value. He

[83] Salingar, Leo, "Postscript: EIizabethan Dramatists and ltaly", *Theatre of the English and Italian Renaissanc*e, ed. by J. R. Mulryne, Margaret Shewring, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1991, p. 231.
[84] Guarini, p. LXII.

elevated his characters' speech, rendering their aristocratic tendencies natural and indeed expected.[85]

Guarini rejects the idea that his play may be interpreted as a mix of tragedy and comedy, for the author thinks it is "impossible for a tragedy that calls for tears to befit a comedy that calls for laughter."[86] A tragicomedy is not the simplistic blend of tragic and comic where one's deeds perfectly align with the other's. When we are experiencing a tragicomedy, Guarini says, we are not dealing with a tragedy tarnished with the low qualities of a comic tale; neither are we experiencing a comedy sullied by tragic death. According to Guarini, a tragedy only ever deals with "real characters, serious issues, the terrible and the miserable,"[87] whereas a comedy deals with "the person and [their] private matters, [with] laughter and [its characters'] jests."[88]According to the author, tragicomedy is a third new genre, nobler than tragedy and comedy in that it explores the four humors and thus comprises the full and complex spectrum of the human experience.[89]

Guarini makes an example: when we mix water and wine, the two liquids do not lose their inner qualities, but they do collaborate to make an entirely new substance. When it comes to blending the tragic and the comic instead, both will not blend seamlessly, for both are art forms that are complete in themselves, they are whole. Mixing them would inevitably result in an altered version of both genres, which is why Guarini's firm belief is that tragicomedy cannot be a simple blending of tragedy and comedy. They could cooperate in making a tragicomedy, but they would cease to exist as independent entities to produce something entirely new.[90]

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[85] Guarini, p. LXV.
[86] Guarini, p. 368.
[87] Guarini, p. 378.
[88] Guarini, p. 378.
[89] Guarini, p, 391.
[90] Guarini, pp. 389-391.

1.2.4.5. Fletcher's Tragicomedy in *The Faithful Shepherdess*

When *The Faithful Shepherdess* appeared for the first time on stage in 1608-09, Fletcher's audience did not warm up to his attempt at the latest trends in Italian pastoral drama.[91] In his preface to the 1897 edition of *The Faithful Shepherdess*, Moorman argues that the play was initially "a play for the study rather than the stage,"[92] as its speech, just like Guarini's, is highly poetic, decorative, languid and rich in beautiful and decorative sylvan imagery. Mincoff argues that the *Shepherdess*' insertion of high lyricism justifies the subordination of its plot, and it is what sets the play apart from the rest of Fletcher's traditional and canonical plays. By the time Fletcher had composed *The Faithful Shepherdess*, pastorals were not an innovation per se. However, the playwright had attempted to write one that was too artificial for the average theatregoer. In a period where theatre had been about realism, the tangible, the uses of everyday speech and everyday plain imagery,[93] Fletcher had attempted to turn one of the simplest and most lowbrow genres into a celebration of romantic beauty and employed poetic imagery of an age long gone that did not reflect his audience's needs anymore.

Nonetheless, the register is not what is of interest in my analysis of Fletcher's tragicomedy. What interests us is the preface of *The Faithful Shepherdess*. Here, Fletcher addresses his audience and reflects on the play's poor reception upon being first staged. Here, the playwright attempts a theoretical definition of tragicomedy even though it only reiterates Guarini's position.[94] According to Fletcher, the audience had misunderstood his intentions: *The Faithful Shepherdess* was both a *pastoral Tragi-comedy* and a form of high aristocratic entertainment: his audience had expected "a play of country hired shepherds in gray cloaks, with curtailed dogs in strings, sometimes

[91] Mukherji, Subha, Raphael Lyne, *Early Modern Tragicomedy*, Cambridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2007, p. 1.
[92] Fletcher, John, *The Faithful Shepherdess*, ed. by F. W. Moorman, London: Aldine House, 1897, p. X.
[93] Mincoff, p. 166.
[94] Forster, Verna A., *The Name and Nature of Tragicomedy*, Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004, p. 21.

laugh-ing together, and sometimes killing one another,"[95] and had rightfully got upset at the lack of "Whitsun-ales, cream, wassail, and morris-dances."[96] Fletcher approaches the issue of the play's mixed genre this way:

> A tragi- comedy is not so called in respect of mirth and killing, but in respect it wants deaths, which is enough to make it no tragedy, yet brings some near it, which is enough to make it no comedy, which must be a representation of familiar people, with such kind of trouble as no life be questioned; so that a god is as lawful in this as in a tragedy, and mean people as in a comedy.[97]

In Fletcher, tragicomedy includes death but only a semblance of it. Thus, it has a right to exist, but not so much that it might hinder the levity of the overall comedy. Moreover, as mentioned before, The *Shepherdess*, like Il pastor fido, elevates its characters' speech in an acknowledgement of their Arcadian origins; thus, it cannot include something as common as morris-dances (which do instead feature in *The Two Noble Kinsmen*). In depriving his play of traditionally pastoral elements, Fletcher took away what Alastair Fowler calls "domains of association,"[98] meaning that he did not allow his audience to adjust its expectations of the play, thus resulting in a theatrical flop.

Even though Fletcher's initial attempt at tragicomedy resulted in a failure, his influence and reputation owe everything to the genre. As he worked as a dramatist for two decades and established his own dramatic voice, style and technique, critics have often reckoned that his particular strength in playwriting resided in his comedic wit, a strength that he heavily utilised in later tragicomic works. His influence was so prevalent that even though his plays were often characterised by improbable and convoluted plots and predominantly shallow characterisations,[99] Fletcher's works were often compared to the likes of Ben Jonson and William Shakespeare.[100]

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[95] Fletcher, John, *The Faithful Shepherdess*, ed. by F. W. Moorman, London: J. M. Dent, 1897, p. 6.
[96] Fletcher, *The Faithful Shepherdess*, p. 6.
[97] Fletcher, *The Faithful Shepherdess*, p. 7.
[98] Alastair Fowler, 'The Formation of Genres in the Renaissance and After', *New Literary History*, 34 (2003), pp. 185–200, p. 190.
[99] Squier, p. 49.
[100] Squier, p. 48.

Just as pastorals were not an innovation by the time Fletcher had written one, nor were tragicomedies. The juxtaposition of tragic and comic situations is not an early modern invention. The term was not classical, but it did originate in antiquity thanks to Plautus, who, in the Prologue to the *Amphitryon*, uses it playfully talking about the god Mercury, who plays the doppelganger of Amphitryon's slave, Sosia. Mercury prefaces that he will change the myth from tragic to tragicomic, for the element of himself, a god, in slave's clothing is comic in and of itself.[101] The critical theory surrounding tragicomedy has a long history that dates back to Aristotle, considered "the tragic theoric par excellence."[102] The dramatic units included in the philosopher's *Poetics* led the 16th-century critics to wonder what the text could imply about other drama forms, which made commentators keen on drawing new meanings and forms of drama from the text. Following the trend, the idea of a mixed genre gained footing and acquired prestige as well. In this regard, even though tragicomedy enjoyed great popularity in the 16th century, it initially lacked status among the literates, a deficiency that prompted several authors to deny their association with the genre.[103]

Fletcher's definition of tragicomedy can be analysed and compared to 16th-century Italian poet and dramatist Giambattista Giraldi Cinthio's *On the Composition of Comedies and Tragedies* (1543). The author takes it upon himself to analyse the tragic and comic genres relying on Aristotle's *Poetics*. Cinthio claims a crucial difference between comedies and tragedies: comedies do not deal with "terror" and "commiseration" the same way tragedies do. Instead, the former seems to "bring about

[101] Mukherji, p. 17.
[102] Dewat-Watson, Sarah, "Aristotle and Tragicomedy", *Early Modern Tragicomedy*, ed. by Subha Mukherji, Raphael Lyne, Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2007, p. 15.
[103] For instance, Philip Sidney condemned the genre for "mingling kings and clowns." Sidney, Philip, *An Apology for Poetry*, ed. by R. W. Malsen, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002, p. 70.

its end with pleasure and with some pleasing saying."[104] However, even though Cinthio never employs the term tragicomedy in his writing, the dramatist does acknowledge that tragedies can end happily, for, just like a comedy, a tragedy is but an imitation of real life. In his opinion, a *tragedia a lieto fin,* still needs to include the terrible and the pitiful, for "without those there cannot be a good tragedy."[105] He goes on to say that Aristotle referred to these types of plays as "mixed," that they are more pleasing to the spectator because they end well and that if he has ever "composed some [plays] with happy conclusions," he has done so "merely as a concession to the spectators and to make the plays appear more pleasing on the stage." [106] Thus, if in some literary circles tragicomedy was deemed lowly, and some authors like Cinthio refrained from publicly admitting to actively composing them, what is interesting about Fletcher's contribution is that by the time he had dabbled in tragicomedies professionally, he was already a playwright for the most successful commercial acting company in England. [107] As Ornstein said, Fletcher represents not a novelty but "the first stage of a long-continuing evolution that transformed the drama from an amateur communal undertaking in provincial cities and towns into a capitalistic enterprise,"[108] and his influence was so significant that it did not only shape the way entertainment was perceived in the theatres of London but in the court as well. In this regard, it is worth mentioning one of the foundations of English tragicomedy, *Philaster: or, Love lies a-bleeding*.

[104] Gilbert, Allan H., *Literary Criticism: Plato to Dryden*, New York: American Book Company, 1962, p. 252.
[105] Gilbert, p. 255.
[106] Gilbert, p. 256.
[107] Squier, p. 49.
[108] Ornstein, Robert, *The Moral Vision of Jacobean Tragedy*, Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press. 1960, pp. 164-165.

1.2.4.6 Fletcher and Beaumont's *Philaster, or Love Lies a-Bleeding*

First published in 1620, *Philaster, or Love Lies a-Bleeding,* is "one of the most ambitious works of literary collaboration ever written."[109] It aims to convey the high literary designs of highbrow pastorals concerned with their "dramatic complications of heroes falling in love"[110] into commercial drama (thus more accessible in vocabulary and syntax compared to the *Shepherdess*), while at the same time implementing the new hybrid genre of the tragicomedy.

The play opens with a political and an amorous dilemma: the eponymous hero, Philaster, is the rightful heir to the throne of the Kingdom of Sicily, but despite being greatly loved and supported by the locals, his royal title was dispossessed when the previous king took over and displaced his royal house. The current king of Calabria and Sicily, fearing Philaster's possible reprisal, decides to marry off his daughter Arethusa to a Spanish prince and secure himself a Spanish heir who will subjugate the Kingdom of Sicily, as he cannot. Arethusa is, however, in love with Philaster and, having her feelings reciprocated, their union is, in her opinion, a "secret justice of the gods" (I.ii.103) that will eventually grant him his former princely position. Philaster sends her his page, Bellario, to function as their intermediary. From this point onwards, the plot proceeds in a very Fletcherian manner, as the author is less concerned with politics than he is with the play's various romantic subplots: the princess exposes her fiancé Pharamond as unfaithful and, in an attempt to save face, he and his lover do the same and cast doubt over Arethusa's chastity and expose her purported affair with Bellario. Philaster believes the allegations to be true and reproaches Bellario upon meeting him in the woods. He later asks both the page and Arethusa to stab him, for he shall finally find peace in death:

[109] Fletcher, *Philaster*, p. XXV.
[110] Kalstone, David, *Sidney's Poetry: Context and Interpretations*, New York: W. W. Norton., 1965, p. 47.

> Kill me with this sword;
> Be wise, or worse will follow; we are two
> Earth cannot bear at once. Resolve to do,
> Or suffer. (IV.v, 61-64)

To which Arethusa counteracts with:

> If my fortune be so good to let me fall
> Upon thy hand, I shall have peace in death. (IV.v, 65-66)

The two lovers agree on killing one another, for there will be "no jealousy in the other world." (V.v.8) However, no sooner does Philaster wound Arethusa than a *country fellow* prevents him from harming her further. As a result, Arethusa does not succumb to her wounds, but Philaster is imprisoned and sentenced to death. Eventually, and in great haste, the princess marries him. When the king threatens her with disinheritance for betraying his orders, she is saved by the angry mob of citizens who expose Pharamond's dishonesty: Bellario could not have been Arethusa's illicit lover, for he is, in reality, a woman, Euphrasia, in love with Philaster. The play ends with Philaster's restoration to his crown as he is now the rightful heir to the throne.

As previously stated, *Philaster* proved to be a great success. It was the most successful of Beaumont and Fletcher's plays as it was published in nine quartos in addition to the Second Folio of 1679.[111] Most of the attention it attracted in its earlier years had to do with its genre. Commentators cannot ascribe a precise source to *Philaster*, but it is clear that the play derives from pastoral romances: it is romantic in Philaster and Arethusa's hampered love, and romantic in Euphrasia' secret maiden-longing towards Philaster. It is finally reminiscent of *The Faithful Shepherdess* in that a third party tries to sabotage the lovers' relationship. However, the play cannot be considered a proper romance, for it lacks the traditional romantic elements of magic and woodland creatures and features

[111] Fletcher, Philaster, p. LXXI.

no song, dance, or masque, instead favouring a much more realistic and pseudohistorical world, albeit bordering on parodistic.

The play is tragicomic in its handling of pathos. Arethusa and Philaster are triumphant by the end: Arethusa's reputation returns unscathed as she proves her chastity and faithfulness, and Philaster regains his rightful title and position. However, before their happy denouement, the play takes us back to the way Guarini's villainous figures attempted at the well-being of Amarillis and Mirtillo in *Il pastor fido*: *Philaster*'s primary antagonists, whether the king, Pharamond or his mistress, are the epitome of an evil that, through its machinations, only serves to bring the two main protagonists down. On the one hand, the play introduces them in a manner that forebodes their unappealing disposition ("I cannot tell what you may call your knowledge, But th' other is the man set in my eye. O, 'this a prince [Pharamond] of wax." / "A dog it is." I.i, 234, 237). On the other, it never allows for a complete abandonment to pathos as it never presents its villains in a truly menacing light: e.g., the audience is never given any reason to doubt Arethusa's chastity and loyalty towards Philaster. There are no stakes to be wary of, and in the inconsistency between wicked intent and real-life consequences lies the expected happy outcome of the story. *Philaster*'s villains do not abide by the realistic rules of tragedies, where "earthly corruption is the only datum,"[112] but they are treated in a much romantic and parodistic way.

Philaster does not downplay its tragedy solely through the overt wickedness of its villains, but it does so through the handling of its main characters' fate as well, an interesting aspect that we will have to analyse later in *The Two Noble Kinsmen*. Lee argues that "whether through inexperience as collaborators […], or a temperamental

[112] Fletcher, *Philaster*, p. LXVIII.

incapacity for tragedy, Beaumont and Fletcher could not satisfactorily integrate comic dramatic structures and characters with the fatal punishments of an angry god."[113] In this regard, let's take the example of Arethusa's plea to the gods in I, ii. As I have previously stated, Philaster is the rightful heir to the Kingdom of Sicily, but his position was usurped, rendering him unable to be the next in line to the throne. Upon being introduced to Pharamond, he addresses the prince by calling him a "foreign man" (I.i, 174) and declares that before he may walk the earth that his "father's friends made fertile with their faiths" (I.i, 188) that very earth "shall gape and swallow Thee and thy nation." (I.i, 190-191) Arethusa responds to the men's dispute with a prayer begging for the gods' aid:

> You gods that would not have your dooms withstood,
> Whose holy wisdoms at this time it is
> To make the passions of a feeble maid
> The way unto your justice, I obey. (I.ii, 31-34)

Contrary to Emilia, Arcite and Palamon's in *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, Arethusa's prayer does not go unanswered, nor does it turn against its devotees as it does in Chaucer. She unironically appeals to the gods' "holy wisdoms," supposing that they would not have such a *feeble maid* withstand their ill intent. She anticipates the gods' "secret justice" that will later bring both her and Philaster their desired outcome and requests that they consider her plea into their dispending of rightful justice. Although never present on stage, Fortune is a lingering positive presence throughout the play,[114] a positive influence that is nowhere to be seen in *The Two Noble Kinsmen*.

As previously stated, to further comment on this last difference between the two tragicomedies, it is difficult to determine univocally what makes a tragicomedy. Elements that we might find in *Philaster* may be absent from *Pericles* or even *The Kinsmen*. In this regard, Waith argues that the term tragicomedy was overused in the

[113] Lee Bliss, "Three Plays in One: Shakespeare and Philaster", *Medieval & Renaissance Drama in England*, 2 (1985), pp. 153-170, p. 154.
[114] Fletcher, *Philaster*, p. LXVII.

Renaissance and used to group plays that did not resemble one another. Nonetheless, he adds that "Fletcherian tragicomedy remains something of an anomaly, almost another genre,"[115] as it was unprecedented and also rather unique. If, on the one hand, Sidney held that tragicomedies "match hornpipes and funerals,"[116] and propose nothing but "scurrility, unworthy of any chaste ears […] fit to lift up a loud laughter, and nothing else,"[117] Fletcher's personal flavour of tragicomedy adheres to Guarini's in that it does not condone a mechanical combination of the tragic and the comic, but features an assortment of said elements meant to create a play that was neither too grim nor too farcical. Even Shakespeare's *Pericles* combines an array of elements that climax in an uplifting ending. In the spirit of the subject of this dissertation, it is now clear why *The Two Noble Kinsmen* stands in stark contrast in both Fletcher and Shakespeare's production. The play does mix "hornpipes and funerals," its gods do not show the same clemency they show Arethusa in *Philaster*, Arcite is not spared his fortuitous death by the Deus ex Machina turn of fate that Pericles experiences upon casually meeting his daughter in Mytilene, the play does not end happily, it does not offer any consolatory conclusive speech, nor does it inspire the odd chuckle at the dissonance between men's perception of the gods' "wise purveyance" and the reality of their capricious nature offered by Chaucer.

While *The Two Noble Kinsmen*'s bitter disenchantment stands out among Shakespeare and Fletcher's tragicomedies, it does instead fit in with the plays of its time. Commentators have often argued that Jacobean tragic plays were more prone to portrayals of cynicism and "hectic portraits of vice and depravity,"[118] a pessimistic attitude that does not fit with the previous Elizabethan more humanistic temper. Indeed,

[115] Waith, p.43.
[116] Sidney, p. 112.
[117] Sidney, p. 112.
[118] Ornstein, p. 3.

Jacobean drama tends to deal with the antihumanistic, with the sceptical, with the uncertainty that governs the nature of Man and his Universe. Viewed in this light, *The Two Noble Kinsmen* is a deeply Jacobean work of literature, where both playwrights abandon the once-coveted representations of rational order and cosmic harmony proper of the Elizabethan Age in favour of a much bleaker view of life.

Chapter 2

2.1 Sources of "The Knight's Tale"

As I have already mentioned, what I intend to focus on in this dissertation is how and why *The Two Noble Kinsmen*'s genre diverges from its source material's, "The Knight's Tale." The latter is not a tragedy, nor it is a tragicomedy. However, the poem does draw elements from tragic sources, such as the fall of noble men mentioned by Boccaccio in his *De casibus virorum illustrium*, and the ordered yet mysterious and oftentimes deceiving rulership of Fate and the fortuitous turn of Fortune's Wheel discussed by Boethius in his *De consolatione philosophiae*. As the poem treats tragic elements but is far from being considered a tragedy itself, I would like to discuss its origin and why, albeit treating matters of fortuitous deaths and uncaring gods, it is more often ascribed to the genre of epic romances instead. Moreover, in the light of Chaucer's execution of tragic themes in "The Knight's Tale," I will then discuss the poet's handling of tragic themes, what inspired him and how he employed them in his writing as they lay the foundations for the much bleaker attitude of Shakespeare and Fletcher in *The Two Noble Kinsmen*.

2.1.1 Boccaccio's *Teseida delle nozze d'Emilia*

In the 17th and 18th centuries, scholars began searching for Chaucer's primary source for "The Knight's Tale,"[119] a quest that led Thomas Tyrwhitt, Chaucer's 18th-century editor, to identify it with the latter's *Teseida delle nozze d'Emilia*.[120] *Teseida* is a self-proclaimed epic poem over 10,000 lines long, presumably composed in the 1340s. Boccaccio's poem and Chaucer's are quite similar plot-wise: *Teseida*'s Theseus sets

[119] Anderson, David, *Before the Knight's Tale: Imitation of Classical Epic in Boccaccio's Teseida*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018, p. 194.
[120] Anderson, p. 194.

siege on Scitïa and fights against the Amazons. Upon winning the war, the king marries Hippolita and sets off to Athens with his party, his wife and her sister, Emilia. Suddenly, on their way back home, the company comes across a group of grieving widows who beg King Theseus to defeat Creonte, who refutes their late husbands a proper burial. The king complies with their request, leaves the women in his party behind and sets off to Thebes, where he defeats the tyrant and retrieves two barons, Arcita and Palemone, whom he locks away in his prison.

> Poi fra sè disse: i' fare' gran peccato,
> Nullo di loro essendo traditore:
> Ed in sè stesso fu diliberato
> Che gli terrà prigion per lo migliore:
> E tosto al prigioniere ha comandato
> Che ben gli guardi e faccia loro onore:
> Così da lui Arcita e Palemone
> Dannati furo ad eterna prigione. (II.98)[121]

The poem proceeds the same way it does in Chaucer. In their cell, Arcita and Palemone hear the gracious sound of Emilia's singing voice coming from the nearby garden and run to their shared window to get a glimpse of the blushing lady. At once, the two Thebans fall hopelessly in love with her ("E dicoti che già sua prigionia / M'è grave più che quella di Teseo." III.23),[122] and this sentiment ends up running so deep that it consumes them both as the weariness resulting from the long time spent awake spying on the woman start showing on their emaciated appearances. There are no hard feelings between Arcita and Palemone in Boccaccio's *Teseida*, not until Perito asks Theseus to free his good friend Arcita who is then sent into exile, far from Athens. It is here that the animosity between the knights begins to worsen: Palemone is at first saddened by his friend's departure, but he is nonetheless jealous of his newly found freedom, while

[121] Boccaccio, Giovanni, *La Teseide*, ed. by Ignazio Moutier, Firenze: Stamperia Magheri, 1831, p. 89. I will be using this edition throughout.
"He then said to himself "I would commit a great seen since neither of them is guilty of treason," and thus decided that it would be best to keep them in prison. Soon he ordered that the guard watches upon them well and with honour. Thus, he condemned Arcita and Palemone to eternal imprisonment." All translations from Boccaccio's *La Teseide* will be mine hereafter.
[122] "And I will tell you that this captivity is worse on me than Theseus'."

the latter "Quasi vicino fu a dir di volere / Innanzi la prigion che tale esilio"[123] (III.69), for exile meant that he could not see his beloved anymore.

Arcita cannot bear his exile for long, so he returns to Athenes as Pentoneo and becomes one of Theseus's servants. One day, Panfilo, one of Palemone's servants, hears Pentoneo lament his woes and recognises him as the long-gone Arcita. He informs Palemone that not only is his friend back in Athens but that he has become an appreciated member of Theseus's party. At once, Mars takes hold of the Palemone's heart, as he begins to suspect his former friend's intent towards Emilia and that "d'Emilia veramente / Il lieto amore egli abbia guadagnato."[124] (V.9) With Panfilo's help, Palemone escapes his prison and meets his cousin in the woods. Once again, we are shown how Boccaccio's Arcita and Palemone are moved by a deep sense of friendship, for Palemone finds his friend asleep under a tree but does not harm him. Instead, he wakes him up and reiterates his own feelings for the lady. However, neither man is willing to submit and renounce their claim over the woman. Eventually, they both resolve to combat in her honour. Theseus breaks the fight, finds Arcita's true identity and the reason behind their discord and decides how the two are to proceed. The king devises a tournament that will take place in his theatre where both men will don their armour and be accompanied by one-hundred men soldiers each.

A year later, before the tournament commences, Arcita and Palemone pray for their victory to Mars and Citrea's temples, respectively, and are both given reasons to believe their prayers will be heard. At the same time, Emilia prays Diana to help her protect her virginity or be granted the love of the most suitable man and who desires her the most. During the tournament, Emilia is distressed for she is "Perocchè io non son di

[123] "Almost confessed that he would prefer imprisonment to such an exile."
[124] "He had really acquired the love of Emilia."

tal valore, / Che per me si convenga ogni prodezza"[125] (VIII.97) and blames her beauty for the bloodshed of noble men she is to witness for the sake of her hand. Eventually, Arcita wins the tournament, but his fate takes a swift turn:

> Già s'appressava il doloroso fato
> Tanto più grave a lui a sostenere,
> Quanto in più gloria già l'avea levato,
> Il fe' vittorïoso ivi vedere:
> Ma così d'esto mondo va lo stato,
> Ch'allora è l'uom più vicino a cadere,
> E vie più grave cade, quando ad alto
> È più montato, sopra il verde smalto.[126] (IX.1)

Here Boccaccio employs a thematic element that he will later explore in much more depth in *De casibus virorum illustrium*, which was at the same time re-employed by Chaucer in his disquisition about the tragic: the higher someone stands, the harder they will fall. While basking in the glory of his victory, Arcita is crushed by the full weight of a falling horse. Despite his severe wounds, he does not die and marries Emilia while awaiting his full recovery. However, as the days go by, the man is told that his internal injuries are too severe, and he does not have much to live. On his deathbed, Arcita wishes Palamone to take Emilia as his bride upon his passing. Thus, Arcita dies, and Theseus builds a magnificent temple where his ashes will finally rest. The poem ends with Palamone and Emilia celebrating their wedding.

2.1.2 How *Teseida* influenced "The Knight's Tale"

Considering the significant number of Italian commentaries Boccaccio's *Teseida* inspired and the sheer number of translations in French, English, and Greek later produced, we can presume that *Teseida* enjoyed great popularity,[127] and it is possible that Chaucer came into contact with the poem after one of his business trips to Italy in

[125] "I am not so worthy that they should exhibit such valour [for me]."
[126] "The painful destiny began to draw near, and it was especially painful that it was him [Arcita] the one who had to bear its weight for his victory already had elevated him to glory. But such are the ways of the world: man is much closer to falling a great fall when he has risen higher above the enameled green."
[127] Anderson, p. 7.

the 1370s, and Anderson adds that the poet knew the poem so well that he was able to "run lines from distant parts together in a seamless English fabric."[128]

With *Teseida*, Boccaccio wanted to give Italy an epic vernacular poem composed *con bello stile* by mixing the ancient and the oftentimes autobiographical. [129] Indeed, as much as it is an attempt to respond to Dante's claims in *De vulgari eloquentia* that Italian literature lacked a poet of arms,[130] *Teseida* is also an allegorical narrative. In its prefatory statement, Boccaccio informs his beloved Fiammetta that the poem features them both and that he hopes this demonstration of love will rekindle the spent flame of her affection towards him:

> Ma se pure gravi vi fossono le dette cose, e vincesse la vostra alterezza la mia umiltà, in questo una cosa sola per supremo dono addomando, che dando ad essa luogo, il presente piccolo libretto, poco presente alla vostra grandezza, ma grande alla piccolezza mia, tegnate.[131]

This mismatch of narrative motifs that include elements from medieval romances, classical themes, and personal anecdotes was, for some, more akin to a parody,[132] and some critics believe that Boccaccio's attempt to have the *Teseida* achieve an epic status was in vain. With it deemed a failed epic, critics from the 19th century went as far as to point out that *Teseida*'s Palamon and Arcite are the core culprits of the "betrayal of the *Teseida*'s epic form and epic aspirations,"[133] because Theseus, the eponymous hero of the poem, is the only embodiment of a chivalrous warrior and stately sovereign deserving of a good epic work. Nevertheless, Theseus's sole purpose in *Teseida* is resolved swiftly in the first two books after his defeat of the Amazons and Creon,

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[128] Anderson, p. 8.
[129] *Teseida*, as a matter of fact, follows the pattern of Latin epics: it is split into twelve books, it features heroes, invocations, the intervention of pagan gods, descriptions of battles and of feasts. Anderson, p. 13.
[130] Correale, Robert M., *Sources and Analogues of the Canterbury Tales (II)*, Cambridge: DS Brewer, 2002, pp. 87-88.
[131] "But if what I am telling you proves to be too burdensome for you and your pride should overcome my humbleness, I ask but for a favour, that if your pride prevails, you should accept this little book of mine, [a book] that is small when compared to your greatness, but great one when compared to my insignificance."
[132] Anderson, p. 11.
[133] Anderson, p. 195.

rendering him a subservient character for the rest of the story. Thus, as "the romantic and heroic elements in the poem are juxtaposed, [yet] they almost nowhere coalesce,"[134] when we take the dignified and wise Theseus out of the equation, the amorous triangle that comprises the virginal Emilia and the valiant characters of Arcita and Palemone, *Teseida* is much better suited for a medieval romance than for an epic poem.

Despite having translated portions of Boccaccio's *Teseida* in *Anelida and Arcite*, mentioned and adapted it in *Troilus and Criseyde*, *The Parliament of Fowls*, "The Franklin's Tale," and *The Legend of Good Women,*[135] Chaucer abridged and only used half of the material provided by Boccaccio while composing "The Knight's Tale."[136] Several scholars have argued that Chaucer models his tale more closely on Statius's *Thebaid* than on *Teseida* as he employed and adapted several plot points from the former to establish a precise historical context. Composed between 80 and 90 AD, the *Thebaid* features Creon's tyranny and Theseus invasion of his kingdom and Eteocles and Polynices' brotherly rivalry over the Theban throne. Chaucer turned this brotherly rivalry into a love rivalry and created a story that parallels the *Thebaid*'s, where Arcite and Palamon's struggles parallel the fate of their city and the inner workings of the universe. Indeed, in begging Venus to let them escape prison or die according to an undisclosed godly plan, Chaucer's Palamon pleads "Of oure lynage have som compassioun, / That is so lowe ybroght by tirannye." (1110-1111) Palamon knows that the gods that will not allow him to express the full force of his love to Emelye are the same gods responsible for the fall of Thebes. In turning the political conflict from the *Thebaid* into a romantic one, Chaucer "made love the means whereby the cosmic and

[134] Pratt, Robert A., "Chaucer's Use of the Teseida", *PMLA*, 62 (1947), p. 603.
[135] Anderson, pp. 10-11.
[136] Correale, Robert M., p. 89.

political implications of the epic are conveyed."[137] Likewise, just as Polynices is sent into exile, Arcite too is sent "Frely to goon wher that hym liste over al" (1207) Theseus's territories lest he "lese his heed" (1215), and like Polynices embarking on a military campaign against his brother despite the exile, Palamon fears that such destiny may hurtle against him at any moment:

> Thou mayst, syn thou hast wisdom and manhede,
> Assemblen alle the folk of oure kynrede,
> And make a werre so sharp on this citee
> That by som aventure or some tretee
> Thow mayst have hire to lady and to wyf. (1285-1289)

Such parallelisms turn the amorous aspect of "The Knight's Tale" into a thinly veiled political analogy. If Palamon believes that Arcite will eventually lay siege on Athens, that is because he trusts the predisposition to war that runs in every Theban's blood to be true. Eventually, Chaucer does not bring these assumptions to a conclusion. However, he needs them to show the blindness of the two cousins' violent dispositions when it comes to their inability to realise that their present behaviour not only reflects the history of their city and the violence of their ruler but repeat it.

> But I moot been in prisoun thurgh Saturne,
> And eek thurgh Juno, jalous and eek wood,
> That hath destroyed wel ny al the blood
> Of Thebes with his waste walles wyde;
> And Venus sleeth me on that oother syde
> For jalousie and fere of hym Arcite. (1328-1333)

Despite the tight epic interconnections between "The Knight's Tale" and *Thebaid*, *Teseida* is often considered the primary and most prominent source for "The Knight's Tale." This relentless comparison to Boccaccio's poem resulted in "The Knight's Tale" being often formally ascribed to *Teseida*'s canon of medieval romances. For this very reason, author Robert S. Haller referred to Chaucer's tale as "an epic once removed."[138]

[137] Haller, Robert S., "The 'Knight's Tale' and the Epic Tradition", *The Chaucer Review*, 1 (1966), pp. 67-84, p. 68.
[138] Haller, p. 68.

2.2 Genre and Themes of "The Knight's Tale"

"The Knight's Tale" is a retelling of a failed epic and treats epic and political themes more thoroughly than its Italian counterpart. However, the reason why it could not free itself from the comparisons with Boccaccio's poem and was instead able to uphold its romantic status rests on its extensive treatment of chivalric themes and courtly love. In *Selections from Chaucer*, Greenlaw argues that most 13th and 14th-century literature referenced either popular sources, thus folktales, ballads and fabliaux, or chivalric ones. "The Knight's Tale" and *Teseida* belong to the latter. Often, popular Italian romances were based on classical subjects, whereas in Arcite and Palamon's story, there is no such a thing. They are heroes of the chivalry age, not the Greek heroic age and are classical only in name.[139]

When it comes to the tale's handling of chivalric love when analysed against, for instance, poems such as "The Miller's Tale," this treatment of courtly love stands starker in comparison. "The Miller's Tale" parallels some of the themes from "The Knight's Tale," in that both feature two young men pursuing the same woman. Indeed, despite angrily declaring that his too is a "noble tale for the nones" (3126), after the implication that he would not be able to narrate something akin to the Knight's story, the Miller tells his "harlotrie" about a carpenter's young wife, Alisoun, being pursued by two men in a manner that is too crass and undignified when compared to the tale of Emelye, Arcite and Palamon.

> "Myn housbonde is so ful of jalousie
> That but ye wayte wel and been privee,
> I woot right wel I nam but deed," quod she.
> "Ye moste been ful deerne, as in this cas." ("The Miller's Tale", 3294-3297)

If "The Knight's Tale" deals with the idealised concept of love, an emotion charged with dilemmas that abandons its subjects to philosophical disquisitions over the

[139] Greenlaw, Edwin A., *Selections from Chaucer*, Chicago: Scott Foresman, 1907, p. 252.

mechanisms of destiny and universal order, the sudden drop in speech, class and finesse in “The Miller’s Tale” makes the romantic elements from “The Knight’s Tale” stand out significantly. However, even though Chaucer employed a source material that, despite calling itself an epic, owes it all to popular Italian romances, he never referred to “The Knight’s Tale” as a romance.[140]

Just as what I have mentioned concerning *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, it is difficult to ascribe works of literature to a univocal literary genre. Indeed, as “The Knight’s Tale” cannot be considered a pure epic poem because it heavily features romantic elements from the chivalric tradition, the attitude of its author towards courtly love is an indication that it cannot be ascribed to the pure canon of chivalric romances either. Indeed, the tale cannot work as a simple romance as it includes features that do not abide by the genre's archetypal criteria. First and foremost, the tale can be read as a philosophical allegory thanks to its extensive use and great emphasis on Boethius’ disquisitions over the haphazard chance proper of fate and God’s Providence. Moreover, the tale’s characters themselves seem to embody Chaucer’s thinly veiled criticism of all that is courtly. For instance, Emelye shows the limitations of the chivalric ideal as she is too powerless to uphold a proper courtly role. Arcite and Palamon, albeit valiant and chivalrous, are both equal in their portrayal, and none of them has values or characteristics that single them favourably in the eyes of Emelye. Besides, Palamon and Arcite seem to be very aware of the low quality of their motives and their brute behaviour in the pursuit of Emelye, which makes them look, in Arcite’s words, as if they “stryve as did the houndes for the boon.” (1177) There is also a linguistic component that often lowers the register of the poem from a high epic romance. For instance, Chaucer employs several animalistic descriptors when referring to the two

[140] Anderson, p. 192.

cousins: he compares them to wild beasts, one a "wood leon" (1656) and the other a "crueel tigre" (1657), traits that are in direct contrast with the knightly virtues proper of chivalric romance. Chaucer's language can and is often elegant and befitting the romantic genre, however, it also borders on uncharacteristically ironic: when Arcite roams the woods, and his emotional state fluctuates between him singing "al the roundel lustily" (1529) to suddenly befalling a state of anxiety, his mood swings are described as going "Now up, now doun" just like a "boket in a welle." (1533) Such a ridiculous comparison seems to serve nothing but to poke fun at the seemingly elevated object of the subject matter.

In "The Knight's Tale," Chaucer plays with the romantic motifs and tropes of chivalric poems. Just as in *Teseida*, the tale does begin with the seeming climax of a medieval romance featuring the trope of a highborn knight, Theseus, king of Thebes, coming back home, victorious from battle and about to wed his royal bride, Yppolita.

> Whilom, as olde stories tellen us,
> Ther was a duc that highte Theseus;
> Of Atthenes he was lord and governour,
> And in his tyme swich a conquerour
> That gretter was ther noon under the sonne.
> Ful many a riche contree hadde he wonne;
> What with his wysdom and his chivalrie,
> He conquered al the regne of Femenye,
> That whilom was ycleped Scithia,
> And weddede the queene Ypolita,
> And broghte hire hoom with hym in his contree
> With muchel glorie and greet solempnytee, (859-870)

However, the triumphal homecoming is soon cut short by the insertion of the tragic element of the three weeping Theban widows. The joyous atmosphere from the beginning abruptly morphs into a battle sequence where King Theseus usurps the Theban tyrant Creon, seizes the two surviving sons of the Theban royal line and sentences them "to dwellen in prisoun / Perpetually," (1023-1024) with no chance of redemption nor ransom. Nevertheless, as soon as we feel as if the story had shifted into a bleaker, more tragic glimpse into the captive lives of the two knights and feel as if the

conventions of romance have finally been set aside, the scene opens on a sunny "morwe of May" where Emelye embodies the courtly heroine who gleefully celebrates the season in a luscious sun-kissed garden.

In "The Knight's Tale," Chaucer showcases his skilful handling of both romantic and tragic motifs. I have also mentioned that the tale can be read as a philosophical allegory. Indeed, Chaucer takes advantage of its setting and the heavy presence of the gods to explore the condition of men in regard to their free will. For instance, Palamon complains that it was Juno who brought Thebes to its feet, and in doing so he ignores the extent of the city's responsibility in that fate. Creon's own free will and tyranny caused Theseus to bring Thebes down, not Juno, and the perverse nature of the Thebans was the reason behind Theseus's decision to imprison two members of their royal household, not Saturn as Arcite wrongly assumes.

> Fortune hath yeven us this adversitee.
> Som wikke aspect or disposicioun
> Of Saturne, by som constellacioun,
> Hath yeven us this, although we hadde it sworn;
> So stood the hevene whan that we were born.
> We moste endure it; this is the short and playn." (1086-1091)

In the light of this analysis, it can be observed that despite being conventionally regarded as an epic, "The Knight's Tale" features elements that make it into something more. It is thinly political in its parallelism between the knights' fate and their city's, it is romantic in its handling of chivalric values and courtly love, and it is deeply philosophical in its disquisitions on fate. The latter plays a significant role in the poem perceived tragic output. As mentioned before, whereas "The Knight's Tale" might not be considered a straightforward tragedy, it draws from tragic sources such as Boethius' *De consolatione philosophiae,* and it implements a notion of tragedy that Boccaccio merely touched upon in his *Teseida*. The latter's, the notion that humanity is doomed to fall the harder the higher he stands, was later explored by the Italian author in a much

more articulate manner, and it was a great source of inspiration for the English poet in his own understanding of the tragic genre.

2.3 Chaucer's Tragedy

Geoffrey Chaucer was born in London around the year 1342,[141] worked under three consecutive English kings in various public service positions and travelled extensively around England and Europe until 1374.[142] During these formative years, Chaucer cultivated and refined his poetic craft, writing texts such as the "Knight's Tale," *Troilus and Criseyde*, and *Boece*, his translation of Boethius' *De consolationae philosophiae*.[143]

Chaucer's audience was diverse. Upon his return to London, he worked as a retainer of the king,[144] and his status as a courtly poet allowed him to address the nobly born and the socially privileged. Nevertheless, Chaucer's texts were read and sold in urban merchants' halls and inns alike,[145] meaning that the poet's readership did not solely depend on its levels of literacy. Chaucer's ease in gaining such a diverse audience stemmed from his clever and accessible use of the English language and the innovation typical of his writing. Indeed, when the poet settled back in London, he kept renovating his craft, writing in styles and genres that had not been cultivated in the English court for a long time. It is worth noting that Chaucer's was an era where English writers were very aware of their vernacular's past struggles at the hands of a formerly much more powerful language that had threatened it: French. By Chaucer's time, the English language had been subjected to the French hegemony for over three centuries and a half, ever since the Norman King William, I first ascended to the English throne in 1066.

[141] Turner, Marion, *Chaucer: a European* Life, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019, p. 12.
[142] Turner, p. 167.
[143] Turner, pp. 167-168.
[144] Turner, p. 13.
[145] Turner, p. 12.

However, slowly but steadily, French shifted from being the proud vernacular inherited from one's Norman ancestors to a formality preserved out of social and administrative conventions[146] until the English Parliament officialised English as the tongue of all legal proceedings[147] and stated in 1362 that "the French tongue, […] is much unknown in the said realm."[148]

The decline of French as a medium of literacy and the adoption of English by all classes allowed for a flourishing literature in English to emerge. Thus, Chaucer's was a period where the idea of writing in English had begun to gain momentum, and the promotion of one's own vernacular was of paramount importance. Chaucer, who in Book 2 of his *House of Fame*, writes, "Now herkeneth every maner man / That Englissh understonde kan" (509-510), [149] makes it clear that he intends to address his anglophone audience in their tongue and what he did with that tongue was to explore uncharted territories of literary possibilities. One of the poet's most significant innovations in English literature was the introduction of the concept of literary tragedy. Albeit mentioning tragedy in "The Monk's Tale" as well, which we cannot date for sure, Chaucer mentions the term in *Troilus and Criseyde*, the longest of his poems that he composed in the early 1380s, and the first self-declared tragedy in the English literary landscape:[150]

> Go, litel book, go litel myn tragedye,
> Ther God thi makere yet, er that he dye,
> So sende myght to make in som comedye! (V.1786-1788) [151]

[146] Baugh, Albert, *A History of the English Language*, London: Routledge, 2013, p. 123.
[147] Baugh, p. 137.
[148] Raithby, John (ed.), *The Statutes of the Realm Vol. 1*, Dawsons of Pall Mall: London, 1810-1828, p. 375.
[149] Chaucer, Geoffrey, "House of Fame", *The Complete Poetry and Prose of Geoffrey Chaucer*, ed. by John H. Fisher, New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1977, p. 591.
[150] Brewer, Derek, *Tradition and Innovation in Chaucer*, London: Macmillan, 1982, p. 139.
[151] Chaucer, Geoffrey, *Troilus and Criseyde*, ed. by D. S. and L. E. Brewer, London: Routledge, 1969, p. 98.

There was no clear definition for "tragedy" in the Middle Ages. In *Chaucerian Tragedy*, Henry Ansgar Kelly argues that scholars have long wondered whether the term was of widespread knowledge among intellectuals in the Middle Ages or not. Kelly argues that English writers could have been familiar with the term thanks to its equivalent, "tragedia." However, he adds that the theory presents a few flaws.[152] He argues that in its medieval usage, the term lacked a clear and univocal definition, and on the same subject, Strohm adds that Middle English writers lacked any terminology to describe genres altogether. Strohm argues that they would employ specific criteria to classify their works: if the literary work, for instance, was a transposition of actual events, then the text could be classified as a story or a fable; if instead the text followed a specific literary tradition, in that case, one would be talking about a romance or a legend. He mentions tragedy, and comedy, in regard to a "movement of the fortunes of the protagonist."[153] Thus, in lacking a specific English equivalence and a clear and univocal role in storytelling, Kelly proposes the example of translator John Trevisa to show just how much even intellectuals of the time struggled with the term. In 1387, Trevisa translated a history by14th-century chronicler Ranulf Higden, *Polychronicon*.[154] Hidgen, who was familiar with the term and correctly referred to ancient tragedy in its literal and metaphorical uses,[155] presents a challenge for the translator who is shown either to omit the word or entire sections featuring it altogether. His attempts at sidestepping the issue of English equivalence are evident in the passages where, for instance, Hidgen mentions how Emperor Titus would compose poems and tragedies in Greek, whereas he composes "poysies and gestes" in Trevisa.

[152] Kelly, Henry Ansgar, *Chaucerian Tragedy*, Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1997, p. 40-41.
[153] Strohm, Paul, "Storie, Spelle, Geste, Romaunce, Tragedie: Generic Distinctions in the Middle English Troy Narratives", *Speculum*, 46 (1971), pp. 348-359, p. 348.
[154] Kelly, *Chaucerian Tragedy*, p. 41.
[155] Kelly, *Chaucerian Tragedy*, p. 41.

Scholars commonly agree that Chaucer shaped his notion of tragedy through Boethius' disquisitions about Fortune in his *De consolatione philosophiae*, which I will later discuss in more detail. Here, Boethius' Fortune holds that "the clamor of tragedies bewails the unexpected overthrow of happy kingdoms,"[156] a concept that Chaucer will later employ in "The Monk's Tale" where he also provides his own definition of "tragedie":

> Tragedie is to seyn a certeyn storie,
> As olde bookes maken us memorie,
> Of hym that stood in greet prosperitee,
> And is yfallen out of heigh degree
> Into myserie, and endeth wrecchedly. (1973-1977)

"The Monk's Tale" is another of Chaucer's supposedly earliest productions, and it comprises 17 self-defined tragic stories that narrate the fall from good fortune to the wretchedness of prominent men and women. "The Monk's Tale" belongs to the literary genre of exempla, characterised by short, moralistic tales typical of sermons ad other didactic works.[157] Eventually, in the prologue of "The Nun's Priest's Tale," the Host thinks the Monk "clappeth lowde" (2781) and that his tales, which bear no *remedie* but sadness and pain, "anoyeth al this compaignye" (2789). In the Host's opinion, The Monk is ultimately not a good storyteller, his tales bear "no desport ne game" (2791), and he does not know how to execute a tragedy well. A tale of hunting would suit him better.

> For certeinly, as that thise clerkes seyn
> Whereas a man may have noon audience,
> Noght helpeth it to tellen his sentence. (2800-2802)

Likewise, the Knight interrupts the Monk's narration lamenting, "good sire, namoore of this!" (2767) for a tale about the fall of great men who "han been in greet welthe and ese" (2772) and who have strived for their fortune, is for him "is a greet disese." (2771)

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[156] Kelly, Henry Ansgar, *Ideas and Forms of Tragedy from Aristotle to the Middle Ages*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993, p. 171.
[157] Rossignol, Rosalyn, *Critical Companion to Chaucer: A Literary Reference to His Life and Work*, New York: Facts On File, 2007, p. 429.

2.4 The Role of Fortune in Medieval English Tragedy

It is worth noting that Chaucer's conception of tragedy is strictly interwoven with his conception of Fortune. Even though the Monk gives a rudimentary definition of the genre and does not introduce Fortune at first, Fortune is referred to several times throughout the sparse biographies he narrates. The core element of Chaucer's tragedy that sees great men who "han been in greet welthe and ese" and who are later pushed to the point of abjection and despondency is not new to the medieval mind. Whether it was considered a specific asset of tragedy or not, the idea of noble men falling from their "heigh degree / Into myserie" at the hands of the sudden turn of Fortune's wheel is not only at the core of the Monk's assessment of the genre, but also an essential aspect of two of Chaucer's most important tragic sources: Boccaccio's *De casibus virorum illustrium*, which will be discusses more thoroughly in the next chapter, and which laid the foundations for "The Monk's Tale," and the aforementioned *De consolatione philosophiae* by Boethius.

Even though Chaucer's tragedy can be read and understood through the perspective of both Boccaccio and Boethius, I intend to draw a few conclusions before delving into their contributions to Chaucer's tragedy. Firstly, I would like to draw a few similarities and point out the contrast between the Monk's definition of tragedy and Aristotle's. I would like to do so to point out a few contrasting elements with classic theory that will later recur in my discussion of Boccaccio's *De casibus*. It is generally assumed that Chaucer, alongside most of his contemporaries, Boccaccio included, was unaware of Aristotle's text, meaning that *Poetics* must not have come into play during the composition of their tragedies. Not only did neither Boccaccio nor Chaucer speak nor read Greek, but on the Continent, the late medieval interest in separating science from literature made it so that intellectuals would favour the study of theology and

philosophy over the study of letters and, thus, classic poets.[158] In *Ideas and Forms of Tragedy from Aristotle to the Middle Ages*, Kelly argues that in attributing a different worth to the classics, the "cognoscenti" left the "dilettanti" to deal with their study, to the detriment of the subject. Despite authors like Seneca and Horatio being widely appreciated in Italy, treatises like *Poetics* were also greatly neglected.[159] Thus, with it being ignored by what Kelly refers to as 14th century's "lectores diligentes," we can only assume that the similarities, parallels and differences between Aristotle's definition of tragedy in the *Poetics* and the Monk's are merely unintentional.[160]

In *Poetics*, Aristotle defines a good tragedy as a complex story that mimics real-life events. It comprises both the woeful and the terrifying. The tragic events must "happen unexpectedly and [yet] out of [inner] logic"[161] and should awake in the audience a sense of atonement, of catharsis through the arousal of sentiments such as pity and fear. Thus, the pathos that, according to the Host, the Monk's tragedies fail to arouse, is a significant element in Aristotelian tragedy, and it can be portrayed under the guise of any "murderous or cruel transaction, such as killings - [taken as] real- and atrocious pain and woundings and all that sort of thing."[162] A critical difference between the downfalls described by the Monk and Aristotle's, however, is found in the following passage:

[158] Kelly, *Ideas and Forms of Tragedy from Aristotle to the Middle Ages*, p. 170.
[159] Kelly, *Ideas and Forms of Tragedy from Aristotle to the Middle Ages*, pp. 70-71.
[160] Kelly, Henry Ansgar, "Aristotle-Averroes-Alemannus on Tragedy: The Influence of the "Poetics" on the Latin Middle Ages", p. 207.
[161] Aristotle, *Poetics*, trans. by George Whalley, ed. by John Baxter and Patrick Atherton, Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997, p. 85.
[162] Aristotle, p. 91.

> It is clear (a) that capable men should not be shown changing from prosperity to disaster because that is not terrible or pitiful but [simply] repulsive; and (b) dissolute men [should not be shown changing] from bad fortune to good, because that is the most untragic thing of all - it has none of the requirements [for tragic action] because it doesn't engage even 'sympathy' let alone pity or terror; and again [it is clear] (c) that the thoroughly evil man should not fall from good fortune into bad, for such a scheme would arouse 'sympathy' [perhaps] but not pity or terror (for the one [i.e. pity] is to do with the man brought to disaster undeservedly, the other [i.e. terror] is to do with [what happens to] men like us) and that way the result will be neither pitiful nor terrible. (d) There is still the man in among these, though - the sort of man who is not of outstanding virtue and judgment and who comes upon disaster not through wickedness or depravity but because of some mistake.[163]

In the Aristotelian sense, a tragic hero cannot be an upstanding man, for his downfall would be reprehensible, nor can he be vicious, for his tale might not engage the three paramount responses to tragedy: sympathy, pity, and terror. The loss of one's goodness cannot be the focal point of the tragic hero's journey. On the contrary, a tragic hero should be an average man whose disaster is a direct consequence of his misgivings. Such characters may naturally elicit fear in the audience, for the consequences of the hero's actions could be the consequences of their actions. Thus, Aristotle focuses on the humanity of the tragic hero, on the causes and effects of his deeds. The philosopher talks about *hamartia*, that sudden shift between one's "moral blindness,"[164] that ignorance that leads to the fortuitous reproachable action, and one's tragic outcome. Such innocent ignorance may arouse in the public the aforementioned sentiment of pity. Through Aristotle's eyes it is obvious, for instance, how, in a tale like the Knight's tale, the assessment of what makes a good tragedy is diametrically opposed to his, for in "The Knight's Tale" those who suffer are knights "of the blood roial" (1018), noble and virtuous men who eventually, in Arcite's case, do not fall due to reproachable misgivings. It could be argued that the build-up to Arcite's death is caused by the two cousins' blind passions, but it is not a direct consequence of his deeds on earth. Moreover, his death may arouse feelings of sympathy and pity, but they do not

[163] Aristotle, p. 95.
[164] Aristotle, p. 96.

eventually resolve into a cathartic experience for the reader. The reader will not be able to relate to Arcite's fall, for it is not to be attributed to the knight's moral blindness, but to a sudden turn of his fate, a turn of fate that comes as a surprise to the reader and to the characters of the tale alike. The status of Chaucer's tragic heroes differs from Aristotle's because English medieval tragedy was less concerned with morality and the mindfulness over one's own misgivings, given that humanity's whole existence is subjected to Fortune's constant watchful eye. That is, however, not to say that English tragedy was not concerned with morality at all.

Drawing from "The Monk's Tale," one could argue that Chaucer approached the subject of morality from a dual perspective: Fortune's capriciousness has mankind surrender to its mercy, thus whether one is virtuous or not, one will fall if Fortune calls for it. However, men and women still possess an agency and free will that will later be subjected to God's final judgment. Thus, one's virtue should always be cultivated for the Universe is governed by God and his precepts, not by Fortune.

> Lo, who may truste on Fortune any throwe?
> For hym that folweth al this world of prees
> Er he be war is ofte yleyd ful lowe.
> Ful wys is he that kan hymselven knowe!
> Beth war, for whan that Fortune list to glose,
> Thanne wayteth she her man to overthrowe
> By swich a wey as he wolde leest suppose. ("The Monk's Tale", 2136-2142)

Fortune and its fickleness have a long tradition that can be traced to the ancient Roman goddess Fortuna. Frakes argues that there used to be entire cults dedicated to the goddess in ancient Rome: she was at first celebrated as the patroness of merchants, of farmers, of men, and of women.[165] The adaptive nature of Fortuna's cult allowed for a multitude of "Fortunae" to rise and for the goddess' worship to spread further. However, the author adds that when the Republic fell, public life ceased to be a "res publica," thus

[165] Frakes, Jerold C., *The Fate of Fortune in the Early Middle Ages: the Boethian Tradition*, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1988, p. 12.

of public domain, turning it inwards into a private matter.[166] As a result to such a sudden shift in public and personal perception, the fortune of the state ended up resting on the shoulders of one man and the cult of multiple Fortunae turned into the cult of a single entity. Despite the religious information of her worship being later ignored by Boethius and post-Boethian commentators and translators,[167] Fortuna's appearance in Roman literature does not differ much from how she is later portrayed in the *De consolatione philosophiae*: Fortune was still regarded as the sole capricious controller of human affairs to which men must submit out of necessity.

Fortune is an ever-present force in "The Knight's Tale": it is, for instance, Fortune that "hath yiven / Victorie" (915-916) to Theseus against the Amazons, it is because of her "false wheel" (925) that the three widows are forced to beg for his aid against Creon, and, according to Arcite, it is Fortune that "hath yeven us this adversitee" (1086) concerning his and his cousin's captivity. Fortune was a core element of English medieval tradition. In its ruthlessness, Fortune is blind to the virtues, or lack thereof, of those who suffer by its hand. Thus, in the tale's prologue, after the Monk decides to embark on a tale about the "lyf of Seint Edward" (1970), he soon changes his mind. He says that when it comes to tragedies, not only does he have "an hundred in my [his] celle" (1972), but that they deal with the stories of those who "stood in greet prosperitee" (1975) and who wretchedly fell into misery at the hand of the Fortune's fortuitous machinations, for "whan that Fortune list to flee, / Ther may no man the cours of hire withholde" (1995-1996).

As mentioned before, there are instances where English tragedy does concern itself with morality. Indeed, even if, according to the Monk, "whan that Fortune list to flee / Ther may no man the cours of hire withholde," Chaucer's tragedy preserved a

[166] Patch, Howard R., *The Goddess Fortuna in Mediaeval Literature*, New York: Octagon Books, 1967, p. 13.
[167] Frakes, p. 11.

degree of Christian creed. The heretic-like notion that humanity is to submit to a force outside God's jurisdiction did not go unchallenged by the Church. The thought of an omnipotent force able to rule capriciously over human affairs prompted the Fathers of Christianity to condemn the goddess' blindness to the plights of humanity. Furtermore, Bushnell argues that traditionally the medieval notion of a tragedy that stemmed from and was caused by the capriciousness of Fortune clashed significantly with the truths of Christianity.[168] In *The City of God*, Augustine questions the goddess: how can humanity worship her when, unlike Felicity, Fortune cannot guarantee never to fail her believers? Why worship a fickle force when Felicity falls in the hands of those who genuinely deserve it?

> Felicity is she whom the good have by previous merit; but fortune, which is termed good without any trial of merit, befalls both good and bad men fortuitously, whence also she is named Fortune. How, therefore, is she good, who without any discernment comes both to the good and the bad? Why is she worshipped, who is thus blind?[169]

If, according to Christianity, a righteous God governs the Universe, it is reasonable to presume that humanity must abide by a specific moral code; thus, believing in the haphazard whims of Fortune is preposterous in a Universe governed under Christian morality. Indeed, if, according to traditional medieval notions on Fortune, men and women are bound to succumb to Fortune's sudden turn of the wheel, it is also true that Fortune cannot be the sole culprit for their misfortunes because such a notion would deny God's agency. As a matter of fact, "The Monk's Tale" is a collection of exempla. These moralistic tales showcase fortuitous falls from grace and real misgivings committed by those who fell to wretchedness. According to the Monk, if humanity only entrusts itself to Fortune, it assumes that a much more significant force outside God exerts his role instead. Sure enough, the Monk mentions Fortune plenty of times; however, several of his characters' downfalls can be chiefly ascribed to a causative

[168] Bushnell, Rebecca, *A Companion to Tragedy*, Malden: Blackwell, 2005, p. 140.
[169] Augustine, *The City of God*, ed. by William S. Babcock, New York: New City Press, 2012, p. 125.

factor, be it pride, an error in judgment or the simple sinful nature of their actions: e.g., Lucifer "fel he for *his synne* Doun into helle"[170] (2002-2003) for "Fortune may noon angel dere" (2001); Adam, a mortal man who had been held to the highest degree by God, "*for mysgovernaunce* dryven out of hys hye prosperitee To labour, and to helle, and to meschaunce"[171] (2012-2014).

2.5 Tragic Sources in Chaucer

2.5.1 Boccaccio's *De casibus virorum illustrium*

While he briefly mentioned tragedy in *Troilus and Criseyde*, in "The Monk's Tale," supposedly one of Chaucer's earlier works, Chaucer is shown to actively pursue the genre. The author composed "The Monk's Tale" in the early 1370s, probably after one of his trips to Italy, where he must have come into contact with one of the first released copies of Boccaccio's *De casibus virorum illustrium*, that Chaucer pays homage to in the tale's subtitle: "Heere bigynneth the Monkes Tale De Casibus Virorum Illustrium."

Born in Certaldo, near Florence, sometime between June and July of 1313, Giovanni Boccaccio was set to become a merchant, a career that he eventually set aside to study law and later pursue poetry. Nowadays celebrated as one of the "three crowns" of Italian letters,[172] Boccaccio was the author of the aforementioned epic romance *Teseida delle nozze d'Emilia* and of *Decameron*. The latter was Boccaccio's first major literary work and comprises a hundred novellas written during and inspired by the virulent plague outbreak that decimated the population of Florence in the second half of the 14th century, an outbreak whose destruction and tragedy Boccaccio himself experienced

[170] Emphasis mine.
[171] Emphasis mine.
[172] Smarr, Janet Levarie, Victoria Kirkham, Michael, Sherberg, *Boccaccio: a Critical Guide to the Complete Works*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014, p. 1.

first-hand.[173] At first, even though he had been touched closely by the escalating mortality of the plague, Boccaccio did not seem to show signs of severe grief in the *Decameron.* However, in the aftermath of what the author later calls "la mortifera pestilenza,"[174] his slow detachment from his earlier literature of idyllic love grew wider and the author's self-loathing peaked around 1362 when he was foretold his imminent death and eternal condemnation "unless he immediately renounced poetry and profane writing."[175] As a result, Boccaccio's strict moral impositions grew harsher and more pervasive.

Boccaccio reassessed his creative writing by embracing asceticism: it was through this renewed religious and spiritual vigour that he studied Dante, penned down letters, composed moral treatises, and devoted himself to intense scholarly activities. The author's quest for a higher and more dignified form of literature led him to the composition in the late 1360s of the *De casibus virorum illustrium*. It is a prose narrative framed in a dream-vision written in Latin. It comprises 56 cautionary tales compiled in 9 books that the author composes under the pretence of listening to the pleas of woeful ghosts who implore him to report their tragic stories. These tales are drawn from the Bible, Latin and Greek myths, literature and read as short catalogues of unfortunate characters whose stories Boccaccio comments through longer narrative analyses. Through these analyses, Boccaccio defines, condemns and chastises the obscene lewdness of princes, the sinful nature of their vices, their egotism, pride, and cruelty, all of which are detrimental to justice and virtue. In condemning these vices and sins, Boccaccio hopes to teach sinners to lead righteous lives again. Thus, the author sets to explore and celebrate examples of virtuous people to guide high ranking men and

[173] Meiss, Millard, *Painting in Florence and Siena after the Black Death: The Arts. Religion and Society in the Mid-Fourteenth Century*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1951, p. 158.
[174] "The deathly plague." Boccaccio, Giovanni, *Decameron*, ed. by Vittore Branca, Torino: Einaudi, 1956, p. 5.
[175] Meiss, p. 161.

women to the right path. Boccaccio imparts moral lessons that stress the importance of a life aimed at wiser pursuits, lest we incur in the wrath of God, and he does so through the graphic and horrid rendition of the abominable nature of sin and by showcasing his illustrious characters pleading and crying over the wretchedness that has befallen to them.

The lives of these illustrious characters are under the sovereignty of Fortune. In *De casibus virorum illustrium*, Boccaccio equates Fortune to divine justice, it is a set of "divine dispositions"[176] brought down by those who sin. Fortune's lingering and destructive presence in *De casibus virorum illustrium* serves to remind the reader that no power nor wealth can exempt the sinner from being subjected to the turning of her wheel. It is an omnipotent force that directs human affairs. In Boccaccio's case, Fortune is not treated as a capricious entity but as a predictable one because "her ways are the most predictable, almost mathematically certain, element in human life."[177] However, Fortune's predictability is not treated as a positive aspect of her nature. In being predictable, it will most certainly tear down all those that she has elevated in the past.

The characters of *De casibus virorum illustrium* reject the Aristotelian definition of what a tragic hero should and should not be, for Boccaccio's intent is not to arouse empathy but to arouse awareness: Aristotle held that we cannot speak of tragedy when virtuous men succumb to a miserable destiny, as that does not arouse fear nor pity in the audience, but in *De casibus virorum illustrium*, Boccaccio concerns himself with the misfortunes of illustrious men (and sometimes women) as his characters range from monarchs to clergy, to historical and legendary figures, and he does so to show how even those who have achieved greatness can fall if they do not follow an honest and righteous path.

[176] Boitani, Pietro, "The Monk's Tale: Dante and Boccaccio", *Medium Ævum*, 1 (1976), pp. 50-69, p. 51.
[177] Smarr, p. 247.

When it comes to Fortune, even if the two texts are similar in their treatment of the tragic hero, we can notice certain differences between *De casibus virorum illustrium* and "The Monk's Tale." When Chaucer's tragedy does not concern itself with morality, it emphasises Fortune's role in men's tribulations instead. The Monk ultimately warns his company that "in lordshipe is no sikernesse" (2240) because the moment Fortune decides to forsake a man, it will take away "his regne and his richesse" as well as friends. However, where Chaucer's idea of Fortune emphasises its role rather than the character it chastises, Boccaccio's ultimate goal has nothing to do with exploring Fortune's inner workings. As stated before, Fortune in Boccaccio is a predictable force meant to dispose of those who stand too close to her destructive path. With *De casibus*, Boccaccio aims to write a didactic treatise meant to relate and mirror behavioural models that may or may not lead to a virtuous path. While "The Monk's Tale" also embarks on moral examples, and both texts are likewise concerned with the notion that Fortune cannot be the sole cause of men's suffering, for this would reveal an incompatibility between God's all-encompassing piety and senseless human suffering, Boccaccio focuses on and celebrates those qualities that render noble aristocrats more or less liable to corruption and attempts to dissuade them from succumbing to evil ways. What distinguishes the Monk's advice to mistrust Fortune and Boccaccio's treatise against it is that in the *De casibus,* Boccaccio celebrates God's Providence, the only force that can control the outcomes of Fortune, for those outcomes are entirely man-made and avoidable through righteous living. In this regard, as Fortune is predictable and only brought down by what is earthly, God's Providence will inevitably transcend it. Thus, if the actions of men dictate the causes of Fortune, only those who are courteous and rightful may be guaranteed fair treatment in Heaven.

On its part, “The Monk’s Tale” is a miniaturised version of *De casibus virorum illustrium*. Whereas Boccaccio’s intent was heavily didactic and moralistic, Chaucer strips his exempla of any heavy and pedantic didactic purposes. The poet employs his biographies sparingly throughout the tale and introduces them as “ensamples trewe and olde” (1998). Thus, despite there being Christian truth in what Boccaccio claims, and albeit employing examples of sinners doomed by their own misgivings, the Monk ultimately wishes to show how unyielding the influence of Fortune in the world of men can be when they allow themselves to give in entirely to its cruel mercy.

2.5.2 Boethius’ *De consolatione philosophiae*

Chaucer’s constant concern with the ways of Fortune, men’s free-will, agency and predestination stemmed from the influence that Boethius’ *De consolatione philosophiae* had on his conception of said topics. In the late 1380s, Chaucer even translated *De consolatione philosophiae* in English under the title of *Boece*.

Roman statesman and philosopher Severinus Boethius composed De consolatione philosophiae in prison while awaiting his execution around the year 524. We do not possess a detailed account of the motives behind his arrest. Nevertheless, in Book 1, where Boethius informs that he had been "accused of having prevented an informer from delivering certain papers with which he intended to show the Senate guilty of treason.”[178] Despite his “attempt to prevent the informer was not continued,”[179] this “somewhat too willing support of the Senate” [180] is the reason behind the

[178] Boethius, *The Consolation of Philosophy*, ed. by Victor Watts, Baltimore: Penguin Classics, 1969, p. 43.
[179] Boethius, p. 43.
[180] Boethius, p. 45.

philosopher's arrest in Verona sometime in late 523 or early 524 and later imprisonment in Pavia. Boethius's imprisonment culminated in his execution in Milan in 524.[181]

De consolatione philosophiae did not benefit from an immediate success. There is no definite evidence of its influence before the 9th century, when it finally became a staple in medieval English philosophy and literature.[182] Scholars agree that it owes its sudden popularity to King Alfred the Great, who, in a country preoccupied with opposing the constant invasions of the Danes, developed "a great desire to proclaim verse to these [English] people"[183] to renovate the country's education. He translated all sorts of texts from Latin to English, hoping that his subjects would benefit from the small library he was providing. The king's translation of Boethius grew so popular that eventually its readership comprised teachers, scholars, and laypeople alike, and it continued to be acclaimed as a fundamental philosophical text throughout the Middle Ages.[184]

In his Introduction to the treatise, Victor Watts introduces another argument that justifies Boethius's rise in popularity. According to Watts, Boethius, who stood "at the crossroads of the Classical and Medieval worlds,"[185] owes his late popularity to how little technical his work was. *De consolatione philosophiae* is not a formal philosophical treatise, it is much more meditative, accessible, less concerned with the technicalities of the argument it intends to explore. Boethius wrote it to dissect, vent, and meditate over his life and tribulations through a fictitious dialogue between himself and a personified version of Philosophy.

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[181] Kaylor, Noel Harold, *The Medieval Translations of Boethius' "Consolation of Philosophy" in England, France, and Germany*, Nashville: Vanderbilt University, 1985, p. 36.
[182] Kaylor, p. 1.
[183] White, Kevin, "The Old English Boethius: With Verse Prologues and Epilogues Associated with King Alfred", *The Review of Metaphysics*, 68 (2014), p. 5.
[184] Kaylor, p. 35-36.
[185] Boethius, p. 7.

> I who once composed with eager zest
> Am driven by grief to shelter in sad songs.[186]

While Boethius bemoans his imprisonment in Book 1, he also wishes to find the right inspiration that will allow him to write elegies to describe his current state. Upon her sudden arrival, Philosophy, who is described as a beautiful yet imposing woman, dismisses the "Muses of Poetry" and disdains the aid that poetry tries to provide the man, for poetry carries no medicine able to ease his pain but only "sweetened poisons to make them worse."[187] She soon asserts herself as the prime means to Boethius's recovery.

> "It is nothing serious, only a touch of amnesia that he is suffering, the common disease of deluded minds. He has forgotten for a while who he is, but he will soon remember once he has recognised me."[188]

The overarching theme of *De consolatione philosophiae* has nothing to do, as I said before, with the formalities of the philosophical argument itself. Instead, it concerns the patient, Boethius: earthly matters have blinded him so that "To make it easier for him […] [Philosophy] wipe[s] a little of the blinding cloud of worldly concern from his eyes"[189] and takes the author through a journey of the mind. Philosophy suggests that the two talk. Through their dialogue, she will provide an answer to all those questions that keep troubling his ailing mind: is mankind free if Providence sees and foresees everything? Is there room for moral responsibility if one's fate is predestined? Why is humanity subjected to the whims of fickle Fortune?

Boethius' sorrow stems from his inability to comprehend how God can allow and "look on while every criminal is allowed to achieve his purpose against the innocent,"[190] but before proceeding with her healing aid, Philosophy performs an anamnesis of her patient: to better administer her cures, she challenges the man's

[186] Boethius, p. 35.
[187] Boethius, p. 36.
[188] Boethius, p. 38.
[189] Boethius, p. 38.
[190] Boethius, p. 44.

previous assumptions regarding God. She mentions Boethius's claim that “mankind is outside of God's care”[191] and asks how could the author hold such a belief when nothing is left to haphazard chance as God, in Boethius's own words, "watches over his creation.”[192] How can the two truths co-exist? When one blames Fortune’s ups and downs on a fortuitous design, their mind has already gone astray, for they have forgotten what indeed governs the Universe. It is solely through a thorough understanding of divine ideas and God's own goodness that Boethius can break away from his grief and finally heal.

Philosophy argues that Fortune is unreliable, fallacious, she can gift her subjects wealth, honours and health, yet she is free to retract her favour at her own will, for those gifts fall under her sole jurisdiction: they are hers to possess and hers to discard. A man's “querulous complaints” are the complaints of a man who embarks on a journey but refuses to submit to the rules of the wind. Anxiety over one's state is, of course, only human: a man who is both noble and wealthy might anguish over his lack of a wife and offspring. Greed, however, is imprudent, for Fortune’s favour does not belong to men by right. One cannot seek happiness within the realm of Fortune because happiness is the “highest good” one can aspire to, and the mutability of Fortune would by default corrupt its essence. Instead, happiness must be sought from within the self because seeking it elsewhere would mean seeking it in “inferior objects” (e.g., wealth, power, glory). If so, humankind, whom God created in his image, does not only lower itself to the same level as any other beast who is naturally unaware of the self but pursues earthly ambitions that the spirit would despise upon the demise of its mortal body.

Furthermore, Philosophy describes happiness as “a state made perfect by the presence of everything good, a state, which […] all mortal men are striving to reach […]

[191] Boethius, p. 50.
[192] Boethius, p. 50.

by different paths,"[193] and analyses its causes. She argues that no earthly mean (e.g., fame, wealth, position, pleasure, power, fame) can help attain true happiness, for that state will never resemble anything close to the perfection it guarantees.

Having stated that if one is willing to pursue happiness, happiness must be intrinsically good and that if God represents the highest good, then the concepts of unity, goodness and happiness are tantamount to God himself, Philosophy argues that if God represents all that is good, one must assume that he can only govern through goodness. If that is the case, how does evil find its way into the world? Philosophy reasons that mankind has freedom over its pursuit of happiness, and if men choose to do so out of unwillingness, ignorance or lack of self-restraint, one can deem their methods wicked compared to human virtue. Evil, therefore, exists because of men's error in judgement, and it cannot logically stem from God's design.

Philosophy later explains the difference between God's Providence and Fate. she describes Providence as God's unified whole, his all-encompassing vision of what has happened, what is happening and what will happen. A craftsman's project plan for all events. Fate is the execution of said plan. It is the force that draws from Providence's design to accomplish it in what humanity perceives as "certain things which come under Providence."[194] Men will thus experience chains of events that appear chaotic to their naturally flawed rationality because men are not privy to the inner workings of Providence and may fail to make sense of it all.

As the dialogue draws to its end and the analytical and logical conclusions established by Philosophy's arguments soothe Boethius' spirit, the reader does not know whether her therapy did indeed console the author. Nevertheless, Philosophy concludes that through his human ability to reason, Boethius can glimpse through the patterns of

[193] Boethius, p. 79.
[194] Boethius, p. 136.

godly design and eventually find a haven in God's hands where his prayers will not be in vain: through ascesis, man can transcend his earthily needs and overcome grief.[195]

As mentioned before, a great deal of Chaucer's tragedy draws from the role Boethius ascribes Fortune in the lives of men and the nature of her ways. Boethius, just like Arcite, was a man who "stood in greet prosperitee," he came from an aristocratic family, was considered an infant prodigy with a penchant for liberal arts;[196] became a statesman, a senator, but because he entered the world of politics to fulfil a moral duty and not to pursue a natural predisposition for the position or fame, just like her explained to Philosophy, Watts argues that Boethius's principles of conduct and his moral rectitude naturally brought him enemies that caused him to fall from grace. His fall, his wretched state at the beginning of *De consolatione philosophiae*, his criticism of Fortune's capriciousness and his uncertainty regarding God's dispositions parallels the tale in more ways than one. As he is forced away from Athens, Arcite too, albeit figuratively, feels as if he were trapped in a "prisoun." With him being deprived of Emelye's sight, he is doomed "eternally to dwelle / Noght in purgatorie, but in helle" (1225-1226), and recriminates with Fortune over his condition because her "chaungeable" disposition favoured Palamon over him. However, as Philosophy told Boethius, one cannot rely on Fortune to pursue happiness. Arcite, just like Palamon, has not only appointed a fickle force as the sole provider of his "paradys," but he has also appointed Emelye as his ultimate source of contentment ("Oonly the sighte of hire whom that I serve, / Though that I nevere hir grace may deserve, / Wolde han suffised right ynough for me" 1231-1233). In doing so, he has entrusted himself to Fortune, a force he cannot and will not control, and Emelye, an earthly means whose mortal nature cannot bring either man happiness for happiness cannot be found in the material world.

[195] Kaylor, Noel Harold, Phillips, Philip Edward, *A Companion to Boethius in the Middle Ages*, Boston: Brill, 2012, p. 27.
[196] Boethius, p. 10.

Philosophy states that Fortune does not owe men the destiny they desire, but she also argues that men are not mere subject to Divine Providence. On the contrary, humankind is equipped with free will, and even though Arcite and Palamon never consider themselves free agents of their own fate and resolve to blame outside forces for the chaos that eventually ensues, their actions and earthly human emotions are responsible for their fall. They were unfortunate in fighting alongside Creon in a battle he ultimately lost, but they decided to fight alongside a tyrant in the first place. They were unfortunate in meeting Emelye while imprisoned in Theseus's cell, but their blind passion and disregard for their knightly oaths drove them both to madness. They were unfortunate to be found duelling in the woods by Theseus, and later made to fight each other in combat, but their ire caught the king and his party's attention to their position. Arcite and Palamon are thus neither victims of chance nor destiny: each one is "a victim of his own failure."[197]

Finally, Philosophy carries out a disquisition about God, about how he governs through goodness and about the plan he set in motion through Providence. This passage parallels Theseus's own disquisition about the *Firste Moevere*. According to Philosophy, God has at his disposal a complete design of human affairs that he executes through Fate. This design might appear chaotic to a human eye, but it serves a clear purpose in the long run. Likewise, Theseus argues that God made a "faire cheyne of love" (2988), a *hool* from which every part of the human experience derives. God himself is the only one privy to the inner workings of his *Cheyne* ("Wel wiste he why, and what thereof he mente." 2990). Even though, as Philosophy argues, men perceive God's Providence as if it were a succession of chaotic events, men are at least aware that everything is destined to waste away just like the hard rock is destined to erode due to continuous

[197] Robertson, D.W., "Chaucerian Tragedy", *ELH*, 19 (1952), p. 4.

friction from passers-by. This is how Theseus decides to rationalise Arcite's death and how he means to console the still grieving Palamone and Emelye. One "dooth folye," he finally argues, if he complains against the godly design, for that would entail an intrinsic criticism of God's plan itself.

Chapter 3

Chapter 1 concludes with the statement that *The Two Noble Kinsmen* is a tragicomedy composed by William Shakespeare and John Fletcher whose source material is "The Knight's Tale," a chivalric romance written by Geoffrey Chaucer. Despite Shakespeare and Fletcher's additions of new characters and a few original scenes, the play and the tale share a very similar plot. However, *The Two Noble Kinsmen* is regarded as a much gloomier take on the story depicted by Chaucer. In this final chapter, I will finally explore the reasons that, in my opinion, render the play darker when compared to its medieval counterpart.

As introduced in Chapter 1 and 2, the play and the tale share the same overarching plot: on his way back from a victorious war against the Amazons, King Theseus of Athens is requested by three weeping widows to retrieve their husbands' remains from the King Creon of Thebes. Having defeated the tyrant, Theseus imprisons two of his loyal soldiers, the knights Palamon and Arcite. The two men are introduced as men of great nobility, both in social standing (as they are related to King Creon) and in courtesy. However, they both fall in love with the Amazon Emelye (or Emilia, in *The Two Noble Kinsmen*'s case) and end up disavowing their oaths towards one another and tragically fall out. Arcite is eventually let out of prison, while Palamon escapes with the help of a friend, and when they meet again in the woods, their heated duel draws the attention of King Theseus. The king, who at first orders to have them both executed, eventually devises a duel whose winner will obtain the Amazon's hand in marriage and put an end to the knights' blind rage. On the day of the duel, Arcite, Palamon and Emelye pray to their respective gods and plead to have their wishes granted: Arcite asks Mars for victory, Palamon prays Venus for Emelye's hand, and

Emelye pleads Diana to allow her to keep her chastity. Arcite and Palamon are both under the assumption they will both be granted their wishes (for, in "The Knight's Tale," they are both given direct signs from their gods), and indeed they do: Arcite wins the battle against Palamon but when he fortuitously dies, it is Palamon that will eventually marry the Amazon.

In the light of their shared plot and characters, in the first half of this chapter, I will explore the characters from the play compared to their counterparts in the tale. In my opinion, the characterisation of characters such as Theseus, Emilia, Arcite and Palamon in the play is a big component in the play's tragic reading. However, I will first explore the way Chaucer himself depicted these characters and how they differ from the tale's own source, Boccaccio's *Teseida*. Indeed, *Teseida* is a much lengthier text than "The Knight's Tale," and in it Boccaccio was able to depict sturdier and much better faceted characters than Chaucer was in the tale. Once established that what makes the tale's characters shallower when compared to their counterparts in *Teseide* is not Chaucer's inability to depict a believable cast of people but the nature of the tale itself, I will analyse the reasons why Theseus, Emilia, Palamon and Arcite seem to bear much more gravitas in the play than in the tale. I will then also dedicate some time to discuss the Jailer's Daughter, an original character introduced by Shakespeare in *The Two Noble Kinsmen* who, after having her romantic feelings neglected by Palamon, experiences an Ophelia-like descent into madness, another tragic aspect of the play that does not feature in "The Knight's Tale."

Finally, having discussed, in Chapter 2, the role of Fortune in Chaucer's tragedy, I will discuss the way the sudden turn of Arcite's wheel of Fortune shifts the public's perception from the tale's state of contemplation over men's passive

condition under the capriciousness of whoever is pulling their mortal strings, to a state of bewilderment and sorrow over its sudden, tragic turn in *The Two Noble Kinsmen*.

3.1 The Problem of Characterisation in "The Knight's Tale"

In his article "What Was Chaucer's Aim in the "Knight's Tale"?", Hulbert argues that the dramatic differences between "The Knight's Tale" and *Teseida* reside in the structure of the tale itself.[198] As noted in Chapter 2, "The Knight's Tale" is an abridged version of *Teseida* where Chaucer condenses the poem's twelve books in 2,250 lines. Being a speech delivered by the Knight to the pilgrims of his company ("Lete I this noble duc to Atthenes ryde" 873), "The Knight's Tale" is naturally much better suited to a narrative medium than a dramatic one. Indeed, even the Knight himself seems to be aware of the full length of its source material and of his inability to convey it properly, for he informs that "if it nere to long to here / I wolde have toold yow fully the manere." (875-876) The mediatic shift between Boccaccio's poem and Chaucer's tale thus results in a tale simpler in structure and faster in pace due to the natural omissions and modifications that befit the latter's medium best.

About characterisation, in *Selections from Chaucer*, Greenlaw argues that in "The Knight's Tale," "Palamon, Arcite, Emily, are all lay figures; we have no real acquaintance with them, no impression of individuality. One has only to contrast them with the living men and women who are so vividly portrayed in the Prologue […] to realize how far inferior the Knight's Tale is, in these respects, to

[198] Hulbert, J. R., "What Was Chaucer's Aim in the "Knight's Tale"?", *Studies in Philology*, 26 (1929), pp. 375-385, p. 377.

some of Chaucer's other work."[199] Indeed, in Boccaccio, there is a more thorough depiction of Arcita and Palemone as they are their own person with their own character arc. Even Emilia, who in Chaucer is a subservient presence, almost an afterthought neglected in the background of Arcite and Palamon's querulous dispute over her, is described in Boccaccio as a coquettish young woman who eventually requites Arcita's feelings. By the end of *Teseida*, before the poem's tragic denouement, Palemone, who, in Hulbert's words, when compared to Arcita, is characterised by "less heroic mould,"[200] occupies a secondary position and is almost overshadowed by the other knight, who embodies all the traits we might associate with the hero of a romance. Indeed, Arcita is portrayed as the most sensible between the two, and he is the one who eventually and effectively wins Emilia's hand. When he dies, in a sequence of wistful farewells and anguished disquisitions over life and death that occupy the entirety of Book 10, the reader has had the chance to centre their attention on his character and his arc, to care for his wishes, and to feel pity towards his fate. The reader sees Arcita rise to the highest of degrees, cheers as the knight rejoices in the resolution of his most ardent of wishes, and eventually witnesses as he plummets to his fortuitous death.

The necessity to omit and modify aspects from the poem, allowed Chaucer to coarsen the courtly material from it, rendering many of the tragic stakes from *Teseida* shallower in comparison. For instance, in Chapter 2, I mentioned how in *Teseida* the animosity between the two knights is not as strong as it is in its English counterpart. An example of this difference can be found in the scene where Palemone escapes prison and meets Arcita in the woods. In *Teseida*, Palemone does not attack him, for Arcita is asleep. He waits for his fellow knight

[199] Greenlaw, p. 254.
[200] Hulbert, p. 378.

to wake up, and when he does, the two reconnect over the time spent apart. It is only when Palemone hints at his love for Emila and asks Arcita to let him pursue the woman freely that the latter responds in anger. In Chaucer, instead, Palamon overhears his cousin pitifully lamenting his love for Emelye and attacks him without a second thought for his own right of possession over the woman. This lack of stronger and deeper motivations, or at least, of a proper build-up to the men's eventual outbursts, could have played a much more tragic role in "The Knight's Tale" had it not been for the poet's need to convey his message within the constrictive walls of a short tale. Indeed, with Arcite and Palamon being blood-related, the stakes of their fall-out could have been much higher. The shallower characterisation makes the animosity between two cousins and formerly sworn brothers bear less gravitas. Indeed, if the shift between kinship to rivalry had been portrayed with the characterisation proper of a much better suited literary means, it could have emphasised the utter tragedy of a bond disrupted by a love that is able to "cut the ties of friendship with hardly any trouble."[201]

When comparing *Teseida* to *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, it appears that a better-faceted characterisation plays a significant role in their handling of the story's dramatic material. Indeed, in Chapter 1, I mentioned that one of the central aspects of tragedy in *The New Noble Kinsmen* resides in the more robust and thorough way Shakespeare decided to handle the inner world and motivations of his characters compared to Chaucer's.

In Chapter 1, I introduced the issue regarding the play's joint authorship. Shakespeare and Fletcher's combined authorship resulted in a motley assortment of contrasting tendencies within the play, tendencies that have been deemed

[201] Hulbert, p. 380.

problematic by scholars who identified, within them, inconsistencies that ill fit the gravitas of the story at hand. Indeed, to better carry out my analysis on why, in my opinion, the portrayal of the play's characters plays a significant role in *The Two Noble Kinsmen*'s much gloomier transposition of "The Knight's Tale," I will first need to introduce the generally agreed-upon division of scenes that scholars have attributed to either Shakespeare or Fletcher. In this way, it will be easier to analyse just how much the two authors differed from each other and what each proposed differently from Chaucer's tale. According to the subdivision, the first and the last acts of *The Two Noble Kinsmen* are generally attributed to Shakespeare, while most of the middle three are Fletcher's. The subdivision reads as follows:

> Shakespeare: I. i-v; III. i; ii, V.i, iii-v; probably II.i; IV.iii.
>
> Fletcher: II.ii-vi; III.iii-vi; IV. i, ii; V.ii.[202]

3.1.1 The Characterisation of Theseus and Emilia

3.1.1.1 Theseus

Act I, scene I, attributed thus to Shakespeare, opens on a gleeful day where Theseus's party is merrily dancing, singing and celebrating the king's victorious return from his battle against the Amazons and his soon to be officialised marriage to Queen Hippolyta. The light-heartedness of the scene is soon disrupted by the cries and wails of three widows donned in black veils. This scene differs from "The Knight's Tale" where Theseus is the first one who addresses "the eldest lady of them alle" (912), which does not allow for any other woman to speak her anguish. Indeed, in the tale, the eldest queen is the only one who voices

[202] Thompson, p. 167.

her concerns about Creon's tyranny. She appeals to Theseus's honour as a king and a conqueror and speaks on behalf of her companions when she beseeches his mercy and understanding for their plight. She paints the picture of three wretched women, forced to succumb to the tyranny of a cruel king who is not only indifferent to their suffering but who denies their husbands the respect that their status commands, that is, the proper burial of their remains. Upon acknowledging that these women are "pitous and so maat" (955), Theseus leaps off his horse, embraces them comfortingly, swears an oath of vengeance on their behalf, and departs for Thebes. He does not confer with his wife or the rest of his party. No other character is given emphasis, and the Amazons Ypolita and Emelye are only ever mentioned regarding their defeat against Athens.

The previous scene in the play provides a more profound characterisation than the tale does in the span it takes for the same event to occur. Indeed, each of the three queens in *The Two Noble Kinsmen* requests to be equally acknowledged by Theseus, Hippolyta and Emilia respectively.

> I QUEEN [to Theseus]
> For pity's sake and true gentility's,
> Hear and respect me.
> 2 QUEEN [to Hippolyta]
> For you mother's sake
> And as you wish your womb may thrive with fair ones,
> Hear and respect me.
> 3 QUEEN [to Emilia]
> Now, for the love of him whom Jove hath marked
> The honour of your bed and for the sake
> Of clear virginity, be advocate
> For us and our distresses. (I.i, 25-32)

Eventually, Theseus asks one of the queens to speak up, and the first queen explains how Creon will not let them retrieve their husbands' remains for a proper burial and asks for the king's aid and vengeance on their behalf. As mentioned in Chapter 1, the Theseus from *The Two Noble Kinsmen* is a much more thoughtful character than his counterpart in the tale. In the tale, no sooner does the queen

cease to share her torment, that "right anoon, withouten moore abood" (965) Theseus sets off to Thebes. Instead, in the play, Theseus listens carefully while the second and the third queen make their requests and is indeed angered by the tyrant's actions and sympathetic to the women's plight. He does, however, resist them at first. "Troubled I am" (I.i, 86) he sighs woefully as he walks off the stage.

Here, I would like to introduce the issue of Hippolyta. I will not dedicate to her character its own section since Hippolyta does not have an arc of her own neither in the tale nor in the play. However, her role in the play seems to complement her husband's (and often her sister's later) and highlight certain aspects of Theseus's characterisation that I will need to address in this analysis. Thus, when Hippolyta and Emilia are introduced alongside Theseus, their answers to the widows showcase qualities proper of their social standing. Here we can see a Hippolyta, Queen of the reign of *Femenye*, sole head of the Amazonian matriarchal community, and former soldieress, who does not shy away from being addressed by the second queen and is in stark comparison with her quiet and quasi non-existent counterpart from the tale. She is portrayed as confident and employs a firm imperative that contrasts with her husband's much more cautious and decorous request for the kneeling widow to rise.

> THESEUS
> Sad lady, rise
> HIPPOLYTA
> Stand up. (I.i, 33-34)

No sooner does Theseus disappear from the stage after having declared that he is torn in the face of the three queen's request, that Hippolyta is addressed as the "most dreaded Amazonian" (I.i, 88) and is asked to take advantage of her role as Theseus's wife to positively influence his final assessment of the widows' condition.

> Speak 't in a woman's key, like such a woman
> As any of us three; weep ere you fail.
> Lend us a knee; (I.i, 94-96)

The scene that follows, which depicts Hippolyta walking off stage to coax her husband into accepting their plea, in my opinion, highlights even further just how wise and pondered Shakespeare's Theseus is. In the tale, when he offers Emelye's hand to the tournament's winner, he embodies an analytical authority figure who does not consider the feelings or desires of his sister-in-law. He needs a solution and finds one that befits the current situation. Indeed, we never see the tale's Theseus in any private capacity: he is a ruler, a conqueror, the "expounder of a divine, hierarchical order."[203] His very introduction presents him as a man marked by his triumph over women, thus reducing the possibility that he might adopt "womanly" qualities such as empathy and compassion.

In *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, Theseus is depicted as more human. He is troubled indeed in his indecision on whether to abandon his soon-to-be wife and embark on a war against Thebes or not and has given Hippolyta reason to believe that she can influence his final judgment, enhancing the depiction of a man who is not as immovable and stuck in the ways of a warlord like he is in the tale. The interaction between Hippolyta and Theseus prompted by the queens takes place behind closed doors, and as the audience, we are not privy to the content of Hippolyta's request to her husband. Nonetheless, while not being able to witness their conversation, the mere concept of Theseus and Hippolyta openly discussing such a delicate matter clashes significantly with a much later scene from the tale. In the latter, when Theseus finds Arcite and Palamon warring in the woods, upon realising that Arcite, who was supposed to be in exile, has returned, and Palamon, who was supposed to be in prison, has managed to escape, he calls for their

[203] Samson, Anne, *The Knight's Tale by Geoffrey Chaucer*, London: MacMillan, 1987, p. 34.

execution. Upon his command, the women in his party, Hippolyta and Emelye included, begin to wail:

> "Have mercy, Lord, upon us wommen alle!"
> And on hir bare knees adoun they falle
> And wolde have kist his feet ther as he stood;
> Til at the laste aslaked was his mood,
> For pitee renneth soone in gentil herte. (1757-17611)

In my opinion, whereas in the tale women are depicted as a homogeneous entity that bears no individuality and whose femininity is utilised in public displays of maidenly pitifulness, for "they wepen evere in oon" (1771), in the play Hippolyta and Emilia are introduced as characters who have a clear personality and whose voice is worth listening to. Thus, while in the tale Theseus accepts Emelye and Hippolyta's request to spare Arcite and Palamon out of benevolent pity, with him being willing to heed to his wife's request, or at least to listen to her reasons, the play showcases a strong and healthy bond between the pair that highlights a much more human element in the king's character that is absent from the tale. This bond is rendered even more believable when we consider that, upon his return, King Theseus declines the widows' request. "Forward to th' temple," he commands. "Leave not out a jot." (I.i, 130) He declares that before he can deal with Creon, he must finalise his wedding ceremony:

> This is a service whereto I am going
> Greater than any war; it more imports me
> Than all the actions that I have foregone,
> Or futurely can cope. (I.i, 171-174)

Theseus does not dismiss Hippolyta the same way he does in the poem. He values the "service […] / Greater than any war" that is their marriage and is unwilling to postpone it for the sake of a later commitment. He does, however, yield to his queen's petition when she kneels in front of him and asks to delay the ceremony anyway. She requests his understanding for the widows' plight because her own

compliance in dismissing it would "pluck / All ladies' scandal on me" (I.ii, 191-192):

> As I shall here make trial of my prayers,
> Either presuming them to have some force,
> Or sentencing for aye their vigor dumb,
> Prorogue this business we are going about, and hang
> Your shield afore your heart, about that neck
> Which is my fee, and which I freely lend
> To do these poor queens service. (I.i, 193-199)

According to Lois Potter, in this passage, Hippolyta is weighing whether her voice has any bearing on Theseus's final decision,[204] and it eventually does, but not before the king, upon having ordered his men to prepare for their departure, bids his queen farewell:

> Since that our theme is haste,
> I stamp this kiss upon thy currant lip;
> Sweet, keep it as my token. Set you forward,
> For I will see you gone. (I.i, 215-218)

What Shakespeare did in act I, scene I, without introducing any new character to Chaucer's tale was to flesh out pre-existing characters rendering their following interactions reasonable under the characterisation he provided at the very beginning of their arc. Theseus is a just king, willing to listen to reason and unwilling to renege on previous commitments. Indeed, just as he is hesitant to postpone his wedding ceremony, he will be likewise unyielding at first when faced with the reality of Arcite and Palamon in the woods. "By Castor, both shall die," (III.vi, 136) he will bellow, swearing by Mars the fate of the two cousins. "I have sworn," (III.vi, 157) he will continue, defending a firm position that will later tremble at the hands of Hippolyta, Emilia and Perithous' request for the men to live. Such complexity on Theseus's part clashes with the reality of his character from the tale.

[204] Shakespeare, *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, p. 155.

In “The Knight’s Tale,” the reader only knows King Theseus through his unwavering demeanour. He is introduced and treated as a ruler and a conqueror whose concessions to others are allowed merely out of compassion rather than pondered consideration. He will spare Arcite and Palamon’s lives for “his herte hadde compassioun / Of wommen, for they wepen evere in oon,” (1770-1771), and despite having vowed to keep the two imprisoned forever, with no chance or ransom, he is only willing to let go of Arcite because Perotheus, his life-long friend, asked him to. Ultimately, I would argue that in the tale, Theseus is more concerned with formality, rank and with hierarchy. He is only willing to allow concessions out of patronising pity or when his own interests are concerned. Even when, at the end of the tale, he attempts to comfort the still grieving Palamon and Emelye, he does not necessarily do so out of human concern. The underlying motives of this scene, I would argue, showcase another aspect of the king which seems to be absent from the play: his calculating side. Indeed, the king needs for Palamon and Emelye to overcome their grief so that they can finalise an alliance through marriage. Whereas Theseus’s comforting speech takes place years after Arcite has died, in the play, it follows Arcite’s death closely (“Let us look sadly, and give grace unto / The funeral of Arcite.” V.iv, 125-126) Theseus appears torn between happiness and sadness, for Arcite’s death resulted in Palamon’s victory, the same Palamon “for whom an hour, / But one hour since, I was as dearly sorry / As glad of Arcite, and am now as glad / As for him sorry.” (V.iv, 127-131) He attempts to give what has occurred a meaning, and in doing so he argues that the gods have been most equal to Palamon who saw Emilia first and who has now been restored her by right. Nevertheless, his astonishment at the sudden turn of

Arcite's wheel feels genuine when he eventually calls upon the gods to wonder at the chaotic nature of human affairs:

> O you heavenly charmers,
> What things you make of us! For what we lack
> We laugh, for what we have are sorry, still
> Are children in some kind. (V.iv, 131-133)

In the tale, Theseus resists the chaos brought down by Arcite's death, and he does so by reinterpreting it to accommodate his view of the world. However, in the play, the torn nature of a humane ruler makes another appearance. Here, Theseus does not accuse Palamon and Emilia of being foolish for not accepting God's way. He accepts their grief and makes it his own. This king, this conqueror whose role on earth is to parallel the divine order from the heavens, ends up asking the gods "What things you make of us," highlighting how even kings are not privy to the inner workings of the heavens, and while doing so he likens himself to a child in the hands of an authority greater than he is. Thus, in a story where Theseus is meant to represent divine order, where he is to portray an unyielding model of rulership, his ultimate bewilderment at the gods' sudden turn of Arcite's wheel results in a chaos that stems from hopeless passivity to the whims of fate.

To conclude, in introducing a more compassionate and humane side of Theseus, Shakespeare has him shape the underlying tragedy of the world the play's characters inhabit. Theseus does not have wise words of comfort meant to lead Palamon and Emilia's disoriented souls back home, for he himself is lost as well. In this regard, not only does the audience relate to him better and sees him as a complex man whose motivations stem from pondered consideration, but the sturdy lynchpin of reliability and good sense embodied by the tale's Theseus, in the play steps down from his high stool and joins his subjects on an equal plane of

existence, which makes sense when we consider how less concerned the play's Theseus is with upholding absolute authority than his medieval counterpart.

3.1.1.2 Emilia

Emilia, the later object of courtly love, does not show the same firmness as Hippolyta does in the play either. Shakespeare and Fletcher rarely address her status as a former soldieress, favouring a mellower and gentler representation of womanhood. Nevertheless, Emilia does not fall victim to her femininity as she does in "The Knight's Tale." In I.i she takes advantage of it to better address and relates to the three widows' pain:

> EMILIA
> No knees to me!
> What woman I may stead that is distressed
> Does bind me to her. (I.i, 35-37)

Her character is more thoughtful, empathetic, able to acknowledge others' pains and relate to them:

> Being a natural sister of our sex,
> Your sorrow beats so ardently upon me
> That it shall make a counter-reflect 'gainst
> My brother's heart and warm it to some pity,
> Though it were made of stone. Pray have good comfort. (I.ii, 125-129)

To me, Emilia's mere acknowledgement of the three widows' plea renders her a character one can appreciate fully and whose later acknowledgement of others' pain to the detriment of her own befits the scope of her character. Emilia is an empathetic person and, while being more amiable and less curt than her sister, she is no less individualised. Indeed, a significant difference of her character from her medieval counterpart, is her strength and assertiveness. When Hippolyta kneels in front of her husband on account of the three widows, Emilia, who is prompted to "help now, / Our cause cries for your knee (I.i, 198-199), soon kneels as well and beseeches the king's approval by stating:

> If you grant not
> My sister her petition in that force,
> With that celerity and nature which
> She makes it in, from henceforth I'll not dare
> To ask you anything, nor be so hardy
> Ever to take a husband. (I.i, 200-204)

Contrary to what one has come to expect from her character in "The Knight's Tale," where, amid a grandiose contest of arms, Emelye speaks out only once and is dismissed soon after, in *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, Emilia is a woman with her own agency who resorts to almost threatening the king with disobedience. Her stubbornness is new, and her assertiveness is acknowledged and considered when, for instance, King Theseus asks her how to proceed when neither Arcite nor Palamon are willing to relent in their pursuit of her. Instead of being bargained the way she is in the tale, where Theseus decides that he will "speke as for my suster Emelye" (1833), in the play, her feelings are respected, and she is even asked if she can devise a new plan other than their execution:

> If you desire their lives, invent a way
> Safer than banishment. Can these two live,
> And have the agony of love about 'em,
> And not kill one another? (III.vi, 217-220)

Emilia's agency plays a key role in the tragic outcome of her arc. She is a woman who is subjected to the blind passion of two men willing to kill their most treasured friend or die for the sake of her hand. Whereas Emelye expresses her desires once, when she prays Diana to let her keep her chastity for she "Desire to ben a mayden al my lyf" (2305), Emilia, who, like Emelye, wishes never to marry, has instead much better articulated and driven motivations. Indeed, Shakespeare dedicates the entirety of act I, scene iii to Emilia's wishes. Hippolyta and Emilia are bidding Pirithous farewells before he reunites with Theseus on the battlefield. As Pirithous exits the stage, Emilia notes with how much "longing / [he] follows his friend," (I.iii, 26-27) and recollects a time when she herself had a playfellow

she loved dearly named Flavina. The girl died at age eleven, and Emilia argues that whereas Pirithous and Theseus's friendship is more seasoned, more mature, "More buckled with strong judgment," (I.iii, 57) hers and Flavina's was much more innocent and gentler. She embarks on a series of sweet and nostalgic recollections that leave her breathless and have her realize that "the true love 'tween maid and maid may be / More than in sex dividual." (I.iii, 81-82). Her sister's gleeful recollections amuse Hippolyta, who wonders whether her words mean that she "shall never, like the maid Flavina, / Love any that's called man," (I.iii, 84-85) and Emilia is confident in her reply. "I am sure I shall not," (I.iii, 85) she assures.

The question that I would like to answer here is, how can a conflict like Emilia's be more tragic than Emelye's when they share the same desire and are both equally dismissed by the end of their story? In Chapter 1, when I spoke of Guarini's *Il pastor fido*, I used a quote by its editor Casella which I think features well in the argument I want to make here. Casella argued that "the scope of idyllic life […] is too narrow because it does not make way for the shepherds' actions and sentiments," and to keep Emelye caged in the "idyllic" and simple frame of a soft-spoken and courtly heroine is to diminish her depth and desires as a multi-faceted character. Emelye's wish stems from a desire for freedom. Just like Diana, to Emelye wishes to never marry. She wishes to relate to Diana fully and share with her her love for *huntynge* and *venerye* and *walken in the wodes wilde*. However, there are only 46 lines between Emelye's first appeal to the goddess ("[I] Desire to ben a mayden al my lyf." 2305), and Diana's dismissal of it ("Thou shalt ben wedded unto oon of tho." 2351), meaning that Emelye's request is never truly given the same weight that Arcite and Palamon's request to Mars and Venus is

given instead, since the two cousins have been at odds for their entire arc. In my opinion, a certain degree of melancholy comes into play while reading about Emelye's wishes being readily dismissed by both Diana and Theseus because, albeit short and concentrated in a small portion of the tale, her plea to the goddess is heartfelt and genuinely hopeful:

> Chaste goddesse, wel wostow that I
> Desire to ben a mayden al my lyf,
> Ne nevere wol I be no love ne wyf.
> I am, thow woost, yet of thy compaignye,
> A mayde, and love huntynge and venerye,
> And for to walken in the wodes wilde,
> And noght to ben a wyf and be with childe.
> Noght wol I knowe compaignye of man. (2304-2311)

However, as stated before, the overall setting and structure of the tale stops the audience from feeling any further. Once again, the scope that Casella mentioned is too narrow for any of Emelye's inner world to influence the gravitas of her character. As a maiden reduced to the coveted object of two noble knights, the assumptions the reader has concerning the codes and conventions of courtly love render her wishes unobtainable by default.

> "Doghter, stynt thyn hevynesse.
> Among the goddes hye it is affermed,
> And by eterne word writen and confermed,
> Thou shalt ben wedded." (2348-2351)

Unlike her medieval counterpart, Emilia is made to share her desires in the very first act of the play and in a much more articulated manner. Emilia wishes never to marry because she would not find fulfilment in the sacrament. In her argument against marriage, she gets to discuss her love for her childhood friend Flavina, gets to share the sweet memories of a loving relationship long gone that she does not believe she will ever be able to recreate with "any that's called a man." Furthermore, her unwillingness and lack of desire to marry anybody after the utter fulfilment she drew from the time spent with Flavina challenges the patriarchal social structure that both Amazonians are now subjected to in

Theseus's kingdom. Though vehement in her argument, Hippolyta questions her sister's intentions. The queen patronisingly dismisses her sister's concern regarding marriage ("I must no more believe thee in this point, / Though in 't I know thou dost believe thyself." I.iii, 100-101), but teasingly wonders whether her sister's "persuasion" could compel her to refuse Theseus's hand as well:

> If I were ripe for your persuasion, you
> Have said enough to shake me from the arm
> Of the all-noble Theseus. (I.iii, 91-93)

In her teasing her "weak sister," Hippolyta is perhaps foreshadowing what is to come. The audience is made to get a glimpse into Emilia's life and is captivated by her childhood stories, the unadulterated affection towards her childhood best friend that still dwells in her heart. While engrossed by the light-heartedness and levity of a scene that succeeds two war-themed ones, the audience is nonetheless made to connect the introduction of Arcite and Palamon in act I, scene ii, and Hippolyta's remark that she does not believe that her sister will be able to persevere in her desires.

Despite her vehemence and agency however, in my opinion Emilia's tragedy does not stem from Diana's refusal of her ardent wish. In *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, Emilia is made to experience great guilt in her unwittingly acquired role in Arcite and Palamon's lives. She has been pushed into a spotlight she never asked for and becomes the catalyst for the two cousins' deathly fall-out ("O, better never born / Than minister to such harm!" V.iii, 65-66). Emilia is made to feel guilty when, for instance, Hippolyta demands that the woman holds herself accountable for the two men's fate following Theseus's request for their execution because:

> "That face of yours
> Will bear the curses else of after ages
> For these lost cousins." (III.vi, 186-188)

Even if, at first, Emilia rejects any responsibility for "The misadventure of their own eyes kill 'em," (III.vi, 190) she is constantly associated with Arcite and Palamon's fall from grace. "You have steeled 'em with your beauty" (IV.ii, 149), will later accuse her of Theseus. Emilia will even be associated with the disputed throne of Thebes from *Thebaid* by Hippolyta, who wishes that her sister was but a simple title and not a woman object of a love that proves to be so tyrannous ("I wish it, But not the cause, my lord. / They would show Bravely about the titles of two kingdoms; 'Tis pity love should be so tyrannous." IV.ii, 143-146). Eventually, Emilia internalises this guilt and succumbs to it. "The title of a kingdom may be tried / Out of itself" (V.iii, 33-34) she will later argue while resisting Theseus's request that she attend the tournament, for two men can prove their right over an object even in its absence. In doing so, Emilia finally submits to her destiny, likening herself to the aforementioned bone of contention fought over by Oedipus's two sons.

In conclusion, Emilia is, likewise, a nuanced character. She is driven, motivated, maidenly and assertive. Her assertiveness, however, clashes with her deep empathy. While she is forced into a marriage in the tale, she is rendered more aware of what her dismissal of the two knight's fate will entail in the play. "I am bride-habited / But maiden-hearted," (Vi, 159-160) she woes, and in my opinion the reality of a woman who is forced to decide which of the men who claim to love her must die and who acknowledges that the responsibility has fallen on her shoulders, despite her unwillingness to take part in such a dispute, transpires with much more gravity in the play rather than in the tale.

3.1.2 The Characterisation of Arcite and Palamon

Arcite and Palamon are, both in the tale and in the play, two knights who share a similar fate until Arcite's wheel of Fortune takes a deathly turn. Since they are introduced alongside each other and rarely figure on their own, Chaucerian scholars have often argued over whether they are to be considered two different characters or two indistinguishable entities. The issue is too great and faceted to be covered *in toto* in this dissertation, but I will discuss some of the main arguments that lie at the crux of their characterisation. Regarding those who support the former view, that is, Arcite and Palamon as two entirely different characters, Fairchild, in his article "Active Arcite, Contemplative Palamon," argues that in *Teseida* Arcite and Palamon are depicted "as alike as two peas,"[205] whereas in "The Knight's Tale" Chaucer's keener sense of dramatic values had him differentiate their character more sharply than Boccaccio did. Indeed, despite maintaining that "The Knight's Tale" is far from being "an elaborate, Dantesque allegory" worthy of in-depth character driven analysis, the author puts at the crux of his own analysis Arcite and Palamon's prayer at Mars and Venus's temples before the tournament. Fairchild argues that both men's attitude towards their goal is inherently different and that, when seen from this perspective, proves to be a recurring theme throughout the tale: Palamon is more concerned with winning Emelye, he cares not for the means through which he can achieve her hand but only to be able to do so:

> I kepe noght of armes for to yelpe,
> Ne I ne axe nat tomorwe to have victorie,
> Ne renoun in this cas, ne veyne glorie
> Of pris of armes blowen up and doun;
> But I wolde have fully possessioun
> Of Emelye, and dye in thy servyse. (2238-2243)

[205] Fairchild, Hoxie Neale, "Active Arcite, Contemplative Palamon", *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 26 (1927), pp. 285-293, p. 285.

Arcite instead prays for victory so vehemently that Emelye does not even figure in his plea to Mars:

> Thanne help me, lord, tomorwe in my bataille,
> For thilke fyr that whilom brente thee,
> As wel as thilke fyr now brenneth me,
> And do that I tomorwe have victorie.
> Myn be the travaille, and thyn be the glorie! (2402-2406)

Palamon thus, in Fairchild's words, thinks of ends, for him arriving is more important than going, whereas Arcite thinks of instruments, he thinks of the process that will take him to his prize. A key passage that exemplifies this differentiation better, is the two men's first glimpse of the woman from their cell in Athens. When Palamon sees Emelye for the first time, he does not consider her an earthly woman, he contemplates her as if she were a goddess, Venus to be more precise. He invokes her forgiveness and asks her to be freed of his imprisonment. Arcite instead reveals to be a far more active agent in his destiny, for he sees Emelye as a woman and himself as a lover:

> "The fresshe beautee sleeth me sodeynly
> Of hire that rometh in the yonder place;
> And but I have hir mercy and hir grace,
> That I may seen hire atte leeste weye,
> I nam but deed; ther nis namoore to seye." (1118-1122)

Thus, as soon as the two men begin quarrelling over the woman, despite admitting that Palamon saw Emelye first, Arcite has him realise that he did no love her first. The differentiation at the core of Fairchild's analysis thus stems from Arcite and Palamon's attitude towards their goal. Palamon is indeed often regarded as the more contemplative between the two, the less active, whereas Arcite is a man of action rather than ponderation.

Following Fairchild's analysis, in his Master's Thesis, William Hamilton argues that the critical consensus that supports an equal reading of Arcite and Palamon stems from a misreading of the Knight's own misunderstanding of his

own tale.[206] Indeed, Hamilton disagrees with the claim and argues that the Knight, in his role of re-teller, condenses and edits his story in order to befit "the demands of time and occasion" proper to the pilgrimage just as Chaucer did with *Teseida*,[207] and in doing so, he attempts to flatten two personalities that are, in the author's words, "as different as night and day." Indeed, according to Hamilton, the overall Boethian moralization of "The Knight's Tale" can only be justified when we treat Arcite as an independent entity from Palamon. According to the author, only Arcite truly loved Emelye, and Palamon was but proud in his likewise pursuit of her. When we read the tale from this perspective, Arcite becomes a tragic and innocent hero instead of a youth who is merely dealt a bad hand by fate.

In support of an equal reading of the two characters, in *Artistic Ambivalence in Chaucer's "Knight's Tale"*, Thurston argues that those who support a differentiation of the characters do so relying on mere details rather than fundamental differences consciously implemented by Chaucer.[208] He argues that it is true that Chaucer took Boccaccio's Arcite and Palamon and distributed their characteristics unevenly between his own knights, but he did so while reducing the differences that were much starker in *Teseida* to surface-level attributes. Indeed, Thurston continues, there are theories whose analysis paints the picture of an Arcite who is more realistic and intellectually superior than Palamon, and that consider the latter more emotional, idealistic and less introspective than his cousin. Whether these depictions are truthful or not, Thurston argues, when considered

[206] Hamilton, William, "As Different as Night and Day: Palamon and Arcite Reconsidered", Western Michigan University, 1999, p. 177.
[207] Hamilton, p. 123.
[208] Thurston, p. 18.

cumulatively, they do not affect the ultimate interpretation of the tale at all.[209] An aspect from "The Knight's Tale" that would support this last claim can be found in the introduction of the knights itself: Arcite and Palamon are introduced "in terms of balance and symmetry"[210] as two men "of the blood roial" (1018) and "of sustren two yborn" (1019). This depiction alone, which treats them as one entity, renders them entirely one dimensional. This levelling could be justified through Emelye's eyes. Indeed, similarly to the woman being reduced to nothing but a prize for the two kinsmen, Arcite and Palamon are vague characters which embody similar values and personalities. They represent an emotional quality, abstractions that do not need to be perceived as flesh and blood. Since "The Knight's Tale" is a romance, characterisation is not perceived as of paramount importance:

> Romance is in many ways the exact opposite of its successor, the realistic novel of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. […] The romancer is consequently little concerned with providing realistic motivations for the actions; […] There is little attempt at creating lifelike characters: the invariably noble heroes and heroines are more types than individuals, and their actions, manners, emotions, and speech represent an ideal of aristocratic conduct. […] Some of the individual parts of romance may be realistic, direct representations of the actualities of chivalric life, but the effect at which the romancer aims is not that of a convincing representation of life but rather of an ideal image of what life might be if all behaved as nobly as the heroes and heroines of the romance.[211]

In considering the equalization of Arcite and Palamon, it comes as no surprise that the reader would find it hard to sympathize either with the hero or care which one wins Emelye. Thus, I would argue that whether Chaucer consciously made Arcite and Palamon alike or not, the two men's characterisation in *The Two Noble Kinsmen* has a clear purpose. Here Arcite and Palamon are crafted in a way that warrants a reaction from the audience, whether it be of amusement or sorrow.

[209] Thurston, p. 18.
[210] Hamilton, p. 1.
[211] Chaucer, p. 7.

Indeed, here the two knights are more thoroughly explored than their medieval counterparts and have a better depicted backstory that renders their fallout more severe and abrupt in comparison. Their first handling is attributed to Shakespeare, for they are introduced in I.ii, an original scene that does not feature in the tale. We are met with Palamon and Arcite, who discuss their prospects in Thebes. Arcite suggests they both leave the city and escape "the temptings in 't" (I.ii, 4) and Palamon agrees, for he cannot bear to witness the decadence of a city that has changed so much since his youth. As I mentioned in Chapter 1, both cousins wish to stop fighting alongside Creon. They want to leave his court so that they "may nothing share / Of his loud infamy." (I.ii, 84-85). However, no sooner are they able to bring their discussion to an end that they are informed of Theseus's arrival and decide to stay. "Our services stand now for Thebes, not Creon" (I.ii,113) declares Palamon, which highlights an attribute they both lack in the tale. In Chapter 2, I argued that whereas in "The Knight's Tale" the two cousins fault Fortune and her capriciousness for their adversities, they fail to consider their active role in said adversities, their free will. Here, Arcite and Palamon decide to fight alongside Creon in the first place; thus, theirs is the responsibility of the outcome that such a decision brought down on them. However, in the play, Palamon and Arcite do not fight alongside a tyrant, they fight for the people who are subjected to said tyrant. To me, this is a significant aspect in their characterisation. The audience is shown, not just told, from their very first scene, that these two men are men of honour, two *noble* kinsmen at that. At the beginning of "The Knight's Tale," Arcite and Palamon embody complete powerlessness, for they are introduced as having been found "by and by" (1011) in a heap of dead bodies. They are bloodied, wounded and unconscious. Their

agency is stripped away from their very introduction. In the play, Arcite and Palamon are likewise found unconscious on the battlefield and are brought to Theseus on top of biers. However, I would argue that Shakespeare's inclusion of a proper introduction, fleshing out their tenacity and nobility pre-imprisonment, deepens and improves the audience's overall perception of them and aggravates their later folly. In *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, Arcite and Palamon are not just two unknown soldiers who pledged fidelity to a heinous monarch and who have been rightfully imprisoned by the Athenians. Here, albeit being still prisoners of war, they are able to preserve a degree of dignity in the eye of the audience because in their capture lies their conscious decision not to flee Thebes and abandon its innocent citizens.

The strength of Arcite and Palamon's characters in the play is provided, in my opinion, by the respect and even endearment that the two men can rouse in the audience. They feature again in II.ii, which was supposedly written by Fletcher. Fletcher, as I have mentioned in Chapter 1, had a penchant for levity and humorous depictions of characters and situations. Indeed, he is notably less sombre than Shakespeare and adheres to the source material more closely, and this scene, like I.ii, is an excellent example of how much more faceted the two cousins are compared to their medieval counterparts. The scene opens with the two cousins discussing their captivity. They wonder about the destiny of their city, of their friends, of their kindreds. They bemoan the loss of a youth destined to go to waste in the confinement of their cell but decide that, at the end of the day, what truly matters is that they are still together. Arcite suggests they both consider their prison their "holy sanctuary" and hilarity ensues when he suggests that they

consider one another each other's wife, for they are not only each other's companion, but each other's family as well.

> We are an endless mine to one another;
> We are one another's wife, ever begetting
> New births of love; we are father, friends, acquaintance;
> We are, in one another, families;
> I am your heir, and you are mine. (II.ii, 86-91)

To me, the humour in this scene enhances the characters' individuality in the audience's mind. Arcite and Palamon proceed to justify their newly found acceptance of their state, stating how much solace they find in each other's presence:

> PALAMON: Is there record of any two that loved
> Better than we do, Arcite?
> ARCITE: Sure there cannot.
> PALAMON: I do not think it possible our friendship
> Should ever leave us.
> ARCITE: Till our deaths it cannot. (II.ii, 112-115)

Here, the two swear eternal loyalty to each other, and they do so in such superlative terms that their high idealisation of each other's bond will parallel Emilia's fond account of hers and Flavina's in a later scene. This sentimental outburst would have been familiar to early modern audiences thanks to cultural values cultivated through classical texts such as Cicero's *De amicitia*, one of the founding texts of the early modern obsession with the obligations and privileges of male friendship which celebrates male bonds, often presented as the noblest of all human relationships.[212] Ideal male friendships between elite men (such as Achilles and Patroclus's or Theseus and Pirithous's) paralleled early modern misogyny in their depiction of intimate male friendships as the highest form of human relationships, often considered superior to "more formalised alliance systems such as marriage."[213] It is thus amusing how, in her believing that her

[212] Tosh, Will, *Male Friendship and Testimonies of Love in Shakespeare's England*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016, p. 32.
[213] Tosh, p. 7.

friendship with Flavinia could never be outmatched by anyone "that is called a man," Emilia is ready to stand by her word when Palamon and Arcite instead do not. Indeed, upon seeing the woman for the first time, her apparition serves to rearrange the two kinsmen's priorities at once. The first who succumbs to blind passion is ironically Palamon who, after having spent the first half of this scene painting the picture of an idyllic, quasi-romantic bond between himself and his most precious of friends, proceeds to forfeit his and Arcite's friendship at once:

> PALAMON: Have I called thee friend?
> ARCITE: Yes, and have found me so; why are you moved thus?
> Let me deal coldly with you: am not I
> Part of your blood, part of your soul? you have told me
> That I was Palamon and you were Arcite. (II.ii, 185-189)

This sudden turn of events comes as a shock and a surprise. In the tale, statements such as Palamon's "Thus artow of my conseil, out of doute, / And now thow wouldest falsly been aboute" (1141-1142), do not possess the same level of build-up that *The Two Noble Kinsmen*'s Palamon and Arcite's betrayal does. To me, this is the most tragic aspect of their characterisation.

In "Cutting Words and Healing Wounds: Friendship and Violence in Early Modern Drama," Jennifer Forsyth argues that "despite their reputation as great friends originally, Arcite and Palamon [from *The Two Noble Kinsmen*] serve as a negative example of friendship and violence."[214] Not only do they reject the early modern privileging of male friendships over their love for a woman, rejecting at the same time their nobility, but their actions towards each other do nothing but foment their animosity and nurture their folly. To me, the subversion of both the farcical comedy and the noble lenses through which Arcite and Palamon are introduced in the play is a key aspect of their gravitas compared to their

[214] Forsyth, Jennifer, "Cutting Words and Healing Wounds: Friendship and Violence in Early Modern Drama", *Violent Masculinities: Male Aggression in Early Modern Texts and Culture*, ed. by J. Feather, C. Thomas, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013, p. 74.

counterparts in Chaucer. If fate could have been at fault for their imprisonment (for Theseus attacked Thebes before they could leave), neither fate nor Fortune are at fault for Arcite and Palamon's tragic denouement, for that is to be blamed solely on their own doing. Even the mere acknowledgement of a bond that made them so alike at the beginning of the play, a bond so strong that they might have shared the same blood and soul, serves to justify, in each other's eye, not the illogicality of forfeiting their friendship, but the other's claim over Emilia.

> ARCITE: Am not I liable to those affections,
> Those joys, griefs, angers, fears, my friend shall suffer?
> PALAMON: You may be. (II.ii, 190-191)

This blind pursuit of Emilia to the detriment of their friendship will occur once again in the woods. As soon as they meet, lingering respect and nostalgia still permeate the air. Indeed, not only will Arcite refer to his lifelong friend as "Sweet Palamon" (III.i, 93) but he will bring him meat, wine, "garments and / Perfumes to kill the smell o' th' prison" (III.i, 85-86) so that they may battle on equal footing. When the time to fight comes, the two cousins lose themselves in reminiscences from their youthful, and somewhat base, dalliances. These interactions bring back the audience to pre-Emilia Arcite and Palamon. Their real-life bond is rendered tangible through depictions of a life spent blithely together. However, the conviviality of the moment is soon disrupted by their own self-destructiveness. Upon reminiscing about a young maid from his youth and sighing wistfully, Arcite is accused by Palamon of being traitorous for "That sigh was breathed for Emily (III.iii, 44).

> ARCITE: You are wide.
> PALAMON: By heaven and Earth,
> There's nothing in thee honest.
> ARCITE: Then I'll leave you.
> You are a beast now.
> PALAMON: As thou mak'st me, traitor. (III.iii, 45-47)

The shift between friendship and rivalry, albeit as swift as it is in the tale and as abrupt, creates in the play a sense of loss for a bond that promised to be as solid and enduring as a marriage could be, the same marriage that, ultimately, provides Palamon and Emilia with their perceived happy ending. Indeed, another aspect that proves the tragic nature of *The Two Noble Kinsmen* is the handling of Arcite and Palamon's destiny regarding marriage. Often Shakespeare's comedies would be handled with what Griffiths refers to as "marriage-based economies of comedy."[215] For instance, in a comedy such as *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, where the two male protagonists, Valentine and Proteus, move from Verona to Milan and fall in love with Silvia, resulting in Proteus's betrayal of his friend's trust that has the latter banished from the city, the play, being a comedy, is resolved with Silvia rejecting Proteus's advances and marrying Valentine, and with Proteus reigniting his love for Julia, whom he had loved dearly before leaving the city. When compared, Arcite and Palamon do not possess the same privilege of overcoming a tragic fallout by adding a new love interest. Indeed, even though the Jailer's Daughter falls in love with Palamon, she is never considered a serious love interest for the knight who hardly ever interacts with her on stage.

The genre of "The Knight's Tale" allows for Fortune and her capriciousness to have a tangible saying in Arcite and Palamon's bond and its subsequent disruption. Her intercession suspends the audience's belief and the tragic aspect of Arcite's destiny is much more rooted in philosophy than in his and Palamon's self-destructive behaviour towards each other. I would argue that one of the tale's ultimate goals is to leave the reader ponder over human chaos, it is,

[215] Griffiths, p. 21.

once again, not tragic at heart. Indeed, whereas in the tale "Arcite wins, but at the moment of victory, in a supernaturally inspired accident, he is thrown from his horse and thereafter dies,"[216] *The Two Noble Kinsmen* is much more steeped in concrete reality rendering the intercession of Fortune unbelievable. When we look at the play from this perspective, the level of characterisation and backstory provided for Arcite and Palamon makes it so that every interaction pushes them further against a precipice of their own doing; no outer force it at fault for their downfall. In inhabiting "a world plagued by dangerous and inescapable desires, one in which friendship disintegrates in the face of an inexorable drive toward marriage and procreation,"[217] the two knights will only be able to mend their chasm on Arcite's deathbed.

3.1.3 The Jailer's Daughter

Introduced by Shakespeare in II.i, the Jailer's Daughter is a nameless young woman romantically pursued by the Wooer. Despite the man's efforts, however, the Jailer's Daughter, who was tasked by her father with the care for the two imprisoned knights, is smitten with Palamon, who does not love her back. Her unrequited love will drive the girl to madness by the end of the play. Megan Snell argues that, in a play that models itself around a classic such as Chaucer's, the Jailer's Daughter "seems an uneasy fit, a provincial diversion from its canonical tale."[218] Indeed, the Jailer's Daughter is a character of her own, with her own scenes, even monologues and personal subplot, but not only does she hardly

[216] Muscatine, Charles, *Chaucer and the French Tradition: A Study in Style and Meaning*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1957, p. 176.
[217] Stretter, Robert, "Flowers of Friendship: Amity and Tragic Desire in The Two Noble Kinsmen", *English Literary Renaissance*, 47 (2017), pp. 270-300, p. 271.
[218] Snell, Megan, "Chaucer's Jailer's Daughter: Character and Source in The Two Noble Kinsmen", *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 69 (2018), pp. 35-56, p. 36.

feature in "The Knight's Tale" (as she embodies the unexplored *freend* who helped Palamon escape prison), but in the play itself she is more of a choric figure than an active agent of its overall outcome: her plot rarely interconnects with the rest of the cast's.

In the tale, the narrator acknowledges that he is not being thorough in his depiction of Palamon's escape, for only *olde books* are able to tell the whole story of certain events. On their part, Shakespeare and Fletcher decided to expand upon this loose end, leaving scholars wondering about their choice. As I mentioned in the previous subchapter, at a first glance, the Jailer's Daughter might be perceived as an apt solution to the amorous triangle involving the two knights and Emilia. However, Snell argues that Shakespeare and Fletcher implemented elements from the Miller and the Reeve's tales by positioning the Jailer's Daughter "as an irreverent answer to Theseus's governing of Palamon's and Arcite's desire."[219] Indeed, her status as the the lowly daughter of the local jailer scarcely befits the play's much more courteous counterpart, meaning that she is never truly considered a suitable replacement for Emilia in Palamon's heart who appears to be either oblivious or indifferent to her feelings.

> THE JAILER'S DAUGHTER: What should I do to make him know I
> love him?
> For I would fain enjoy him. Say I ventured
> To set him free? What says the law then?
> Thus much for law or kindred! I will do it,
> And this night, or tomorrow, he shall love me. (II.v, 29-33)

When Palamon fails to properly adhere to the Jailer's Daughter's romantic expectations proper of a courtly pursuit of love ("And yet he has not thanked me / For what I have done; no, not so much as kissed me, / And that, methinks, is not so well;" II.vi, 21-23), the girl experiences a lovesickness that almost parallels the two knights'. Indeed, after having freed the man who failed to acknowledge romantically her involvement in his

[219] Snell, p. 38.

escape, the Jailer's Daughter cracks under the heartbreak: she fails to return home and instead abandons herself to the woods, risking to be attacked by local wolves. She forgoes food, water and sleep and instead invokes death for "The best way is the next way to a grave; / Each errant step beside is torment." (III.ii, 33-34)

Aside from her actual counterpart in the tale, an almost perfect equivalent of her character in "The Knight's Tale," I would argue, is Arcite. Upon having been banished from Athens, the man is a shambles: he is unable to sleep, barely eats, has lost weight, his skin looks palely sick and his eyes sunken as he bemoans the distance that keeps him from his beloved Emelye. Chaucer describes his condition as if it were a "loveris maladye," or better even, a "manye" which is "Engendred of humour melencolik / Biforen, in his celle fantastik" (1374-1376) and has him lose any sense of rationality toward himself and the people around him. Snell argues that the displacement of symptoms of lovesick *manye* from the aristocratic Arcite to the Jailer's Daughter in the *Two Noble Kinsmen* reflects how love-driven madness experienced a downwards trajectory from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance. Indeed, if in Chaucer this mania is to be found *biforen*, in the front lobe, according to textbooks contemporary to Shakespeare, "the primary location of *amor heroes* descended in the hierarchy of the body from the brain to the sexual organs."[220] Thus, as hysteria was thought to be generated by a malfunction of the womb, men ceased to be seized by it. The decline from brain to womb is, in the play, paralleled by a decline in a social hierarchy that downgrades from a high knight to a lower-class woman. Madness gave women the emotional scope not usually expected in conventional feminine roles. As I have mentioned in Chapter 1, we can find echoes of the Jailer's Daughter's in much more faceted characters such as *Hamlet*'s Ophelia. "Ophelia is the prototype of a great many

[220] Snell, p. 39.

madwomen,"[221] argue Maurice and Hanna Charney in their exploration of madwomen in Shakespeare's writing. In their drawing of patterns that seem to recur often in the Renaissance depiction of the madness of women they conclude that Ophelia is close to nature, "a nature full of folklore perils, especially the danger of self-annihilation,"[222] her speech is childlike, so that it may arouse pity in the audience, she is shown singing old ballads, her syntax is broken. Likewise, the Jailer's Daughter experiences the full weight of her descent into lovesick madness when Palamon abandons her in the woods to go look for Emilia. Now that she is one with nature, from which she refuses to detach, her speech runs in circles. Hers becomes a quasi-unhinged stream of consciousness that has her conjure up visions that give her nightmares: Palamon torn to pieces by wolves she cannot see, her father hanged for the sins she committed behind his back. Her imagination takes the quality of childlike fables as she begins to, in her father's words, dream "of another world and a better" (IV.iii, 5), where she imagines sailing away on a "carack of a cockle shell" (III.iv, 14) after having received news "from all parts o' th' world" (III.iv, 13) by a frog. She even loses herself to an almost maniacal refrain she sings till exhaustion:

> For I'll cut my green coat a foot above my knee,
> And I'll clip my yellow locks an inch below mine eye.
> Hey nonny, nonny, nonny.
> He's buy me a white cut, forth for to ride,
> And I'll go seek him through the world that is so wide.
> Hey nonny, nonny, nonny. (III.v, 19-26)

The Jailer's Daughter's madness will turn her into the eventual object of derision in V.ii: consumed by madness, the girl falls victim to a scheme arranged by the Doctor who, amid crass comments and sexual innuendos, has the Wooer impersonate Palamon to convince her he finally requites her love. The scene is not charged with the gravitas befitting her plight as the play fails to explore any of the psychological nuances proper

[221] Charney, Maurice, Hanna Charney, "The Language of Madwomen in Shakespeare and His Fellow Dramatists", *Signs*, 3 (1977), pp. 451-460, p. 456.
[222] Charney, p. 456.

of her state which was conventional of the madwoman motif of the period. Indeed, the key difference between the tragedy of Ophelia and the tragedy of the Jailer's Daughter is the context and the purpose of their characters. Ophelia belongs to *Hamlet*, one of the highest forms of tragedy in the Shakespearean canon, whereas not only does the Jailer's Daughter belong to a tragicomedy, but she does also lack the privilege of belonging to a social class that would warrant a better faceted handling of her suffering. Ophelia dies because her mental stability, that has been slowly worn out by Hamlet's cold treatment of her, finally cracks when he murders her father. The Jailer's Daughter becomes mad because, in her naivety and vain hopefulness, she made up a scenario that failed to become reality. While Ophelia descends into a man-driven madness and dies a tragic death that immortalises her as a tragic heroine, the Jailer's Daughter descends into a madness of her own naïve doing and must submit to the low motifs of her class. Indeed, instead of dying a noble death, the Jailer's Daughter is prescribed, unbeknownst to her, a cure by "coition," a traditional folk motif that plays into the views about the powers of sex:[223]

> Please her appetite
> And do it home: it cures her *ipso facto*
> The melancholy humor that infects her. (V.ii, 35-37)

Having explored the role of madwomen on the Elizabethan stage, I would argue that my look at the tragedy of the Jailer's Daughter is but a modern one. Charney argues that madwomen "provided [playwrights] a sanction for witty sexual innuendo and outright bawdy, since love melancholy could be pathetic, pretty, and sensual all at the same,"[224] which exemplifies how much social norms regarding the representation of madness in literature between then and now has changed. In the light of all this, despite her conclusion being portrayed as a bittersweet happy ending (the woman ends up being

[223] Charney, p. 458.
[224] Charney, p. 459.

taken care of by a man who appears to love her dearly), to me there is tragedy in a character doomed to being taken advantage of while in the clutches of love driven madness.

3.2 Satire and the Disconsolation of Philosophy

In "The Knight's Tale," one year after being spared from sure execution, Arcite and Palamon return to Athens to settle their score and decree which knight will finally obtain Emelye's hand in marriage. Theseus had a theatre built for such an occasion and placed three chapels alongside its walls where one could honour the gods Venus, Diana and Mars, respectively. We are first shown Palamon, who approaches Venus's temple to beseech the goddess not for "veyne glorie" (2240) nor for fame, but for the full possession of Emelye. He does not care how he will come to be in that possession and leaves the decision in the hands of the goddess. As soon as he is done talking, Palamon sees Venus's statue shake and give him a sign that he interprets as a good omen in his favour. Likewise, following Emelye's prayer at Diana's temple, Arcite enters Mars's chapel. He, too, requests the god's aid in his pursuit of the woman. Arcite's is a much more heated plea as he appeals to Mars's desire for Diana to request a satisfaction of his own desire for Emelye, and as soon as he is done paying his respects to Mars, he hears a faintly murmured "Victorie!" (2433) which he too interprets positively.

When the two knights prepare for their duel, they are both secure in the outcome of their tournament as they believe they have both been granted victory by their gods. However, when Palamon is eventually "caught, / By force and eek by composicioun" (2650-2651), Arcite is declared the rightful winner of Emelye's hand from high above, Venus is distraught. "I am disgraced, doubtless," (2667)

she cries, as she failed to keep her promise to Palamon. Upon seeing his daughter in such a state, her father, Saturn, promises he will not allow Mars's knight to have his "boone," nor the god himself to get away with his "wille." Saturn, thus, requests Pluto to release an "infernal sterte" (2684) on earth which startles Arcite's horse that, stumbling to the side, unsaddles his ride. Arcite, who falls to the ground and hits his head, falls unconscious, securing Palamon's victory in the process.

At first glance, "The Knight's Tale" is a tale about courtly love and the fading tradition of the age of chivalry, but it can also be interpreted as a satire of societal order. The tale is indeed characterised by a thread of thinly veiled satire that weaves one event into the other, a satire that, ultimately, not only softens the final, tragic blow of Arcite's death, but the lack of which overshadows the often crass and foolish comedy from *The Two Noble Kinsmen* rendering it more tragic in comparison. Chaucerian humour, Thurston argues, is here rooted in social satire, [225] whether against the strict conventions of chivalry or the human preoccupation with man-made social ideals regarding the divine order of things. For the medieval mind, Halverson argues, "the orderly patterns of nature and the hierarchical character of society are both reflections and manifestations of the all-embracing, universal order of divinity."[226] Indeed, as Theseus is a manifestation of divine order on earth, he is ready to condemn Palamon and Emelye for grieving for Arcite's death. Grief, in this context, translates into a non-acceptance of God's design and, in doing so, Emelye and Palamon "dooth folye," for they naturally cannot rationalise the divine planning that went into the knight's fate. Theseus argues that in failing to understand that earthly things are doomed to waste away,

[225] Thurston, p. 110.
[226] Halverson, John, "Aspects of Order in The Knight's Tale", *Studies in Philology*, 57 (1960), pp. 606-621, p. 616.

that there is a natural order in everything that is mortal, Palamon and Emelye are refusing to accept that the world has its own ways that they have no control over nor say in. This latter argument is Boethian at heart as *De Consolatione Philosophiae* discusses at length how wrong men would be if they tried to assume God's design because their notion of the world is constantly subjected to human fallacy.

Boethius's treatise means to uplift the philosopher through the realisation that he must be rid of all that is base and earthly (false friends, greed, intellectual error, self-pity etc.) and seek God's ultimate good in order to be truly free. The philosopher will only be able to do so through a long meditation aided by Philosophy, through which he accepts the ways of the universe and its natural order, trusts divine Providence and abandons himself to faith. In Chapter 2, I argued how there is an analogy Boethius and Arcite's, that is, their state of captivity, physical in Boethius's case, mental in Arcite's. Halverson likens this condition of captivity to Plato's cave, where Boethius and the knights (Palamon included) are forced to dwell in the confinement of their own ignorance. "The significant freedom they lack is spiritual,"[227] he continues. Indeed, throughout the tale, Arcite and Palamon refuse to accept that they cannot but perceive a small percentage of the divine design that dictates their lives. In refusing to accept that they cannot fully understand the ways of the gods, they lash out, comparing their struggles to the likes of drunk men who cannot find their way back home ("We witen nat what thing we preyen heere; / We faren as he that dronke is as a mous. / A dronke man woot wel he hath an hous, / But he noot which the righte wey is thider." 1260-1263), or by assuming that the gods themselves are unable to

[227] Halverson, p. 618.

provide appropriate divine justice to their subjects ("Allas, I se a serpent or a theef, / That many a trewe man hath doon mescheef, / Goon at his large, and where hym list may turne." 1325-1327).

One could argue that Theseus's role in the tale is the same as Philosophy's in *De Consolatione Philosophiae*, in that both embody wise rulers, one of Athens, the other of human affairs. Theseus's wisdom is both practical and theoretical, the latter clear in his final speech to Palamon and Emelye. Whether it be a speech dictated by his genuine care for the two grieving young people or to carry out his own agenda, in his justification of the wise ways of the "Firste Moevere" (2987) and in his discouragement to question God's wise design, he attempts to give Palamon and Emelye what Philosophy gave Boethius: consolation in the eye of tragedy. Theseus argues that God's will is pervasive of the human condition, and what interconnects all events is a fair chain drawn by him. In the context of the tale, the *First Moevere*'s plan is set in motion by his "heigh entente," through which he has pre-emptively contemplated the death of Arcite. Failing to accept Arcite's death is failing to accept the gods' will.

As mentioned before, one aspect of comedy in Chaucer's writing is to be associated with his take on social satire and on the ways men try to rationalise what they cannot understand through man-made lenses that are fallacious by default. What I find bitterly amusing in Theseus's final monologue is the privilege the readers have over the rest of the cast since they are privy to what the characters are not. Indeed, as soon as Theseus claims that "That thilke Moevere stable is and eterne" (3004), the reader knows that the reason Arcite was faced with death has nothing to do with Jupiter's *wise purveiaunce*. The reader is aware that, behind closed doors, Arcite's demise was caused by the Athenians gods'

almost human capriciousness, and since the presence of pagan gods is more prevalent in "The Knight's Tale" than in *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, I feel like their absence from the play plays a significant role in the ultimate tragic outcome of the latter.

I have argued, in Chapter 2, how Chaucer's tragedy stems from his representation of Fortune and the state of men under her wheel. The higher one stands, the harder they are destined to fall. Upon his victory, Arcite stood in the highest of degrees. He had been pursuing Emelye for years up to the moment of his victory and was finally able to revel in his glory with no outer preoccupation. Here, the unpredictability of Fortune struck and had him fall, both figuratively and literally. As I have argued in Chapter 2, the reason Fortune is so prevalent in medieval tragedy has to do with her unpredictability. Men never know when she will turn against them and are constantly wary of her presence in each aspect of their lives. The uncertainty of her ways is scary, her often ruthless nature keeps men in mortal fear. In this light, we could argue that Chaucer's social satire is expository,[228] and in "The Knight's Tale" resides the author's attempt to expose social folly concerning its relationship with the divine. In *Chaucer and the Imagery of Narrative*, Kolve points out how, in "The Knight's Tale," Chaucer decides to include pagan elements in a collection of tales recounted by Christian pilgrims on a Christian pilgrimage.[229] Indeed, such clashing of themes was not new nor controversial in Chaucer for, throughout his career, he often explored ancient gods and goddesses' role in the lives of mortals without having to challenge Christian dogmas. To me, an aspect of satire in "The Knight's Tale" is found in Chaucer revealing a further layer of God's *wise purveiaunce*, that is, the

[228] Thurston, p. 111.
[229] Kolve, V. Arnold, *Chaucer and the Imagery of Narrative: The First Five Canterbury Tales*, New York: W. W. Norton, 2005, p. 86.

layer that conceals that element of fortuitousness that is obscure to mankind. In revealing that what caused Arcite's demise was not a wise godly design, but almost human behaviour enacted by Venus and Saturn, Chaucer reveals just how much men are ignorant in the face of the divine. To me there is satire in Theseus faulting Palamon and Emelye for not accepting the divine while at the same time presuming to understand it in their stead. When he argues that "heigh was his entente" (2989), that God "parfait is and stable" (3009), and that "of his wise purveiaunce, / He hath so wel biset his ordinaunce," (3011-3012) he is revealing to the reader that, despite enacting divine order on earth, Theseus is but a man who cannot be privy to the full spectrum of divine Providence.

While Theseus's final speech to Emelye and Palamon figures both in the tale and in the play, in the tale, I believe that in the tale his role as Philosophy fulfils its function despite the king speaking of godly matters without having much practical knowledge on them:

> What may I conclude of this longe serye,
> But after wo I rede us to be merye
> And thanken Juppiter of al his grace?
> And er that we departen from this place
> I rede that we make of sorwes two
> O parfit joye, lastynge everemo. (3067-3072)

By the end of his speech, Palamon and Emelye seem to have finally overcome their debilitating grief, for the tale ends in their marriage where "Emelye hym loveth so tendrely, / And he hire serveth so gentilly" (3103-3104).

This overall aspect of the tale, the social satire over one's presumption over the ways of the Universe, the presence of pagan gods who reveal the chaotic element which prompted Arcite's demise, and Theseus's final consolatory speech, are elements that do not feature in the play, or at least, not fully and not in the right context, in Theseus's case. In *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, Arcite, Palamon and

Emilia pray to their respective chapel, but they do not receive any answer from their gods. When Arcite plummets to his death, not only is the audience not allowed to witness the scene of his demise but is later told that a random sparkle, which darted from the pavement, startled the knight's horse, throwing it into an uncontrollable fit that not even his rider could manage. In a chaotic and unchivalrous scene where Arcite's horse "Forgets school-doing, being therein trained" (V.iv, 68) and "pig-like he whines" (V.iv, 69), Arcite's victory wreath slides over his eyes, almost foreshadowing his own imminent fall, and the knight is later crushed under the weight of his steed. Arcite's death is here violent, accidental and unprompted by any higher godly design. Kolve argues that "[in "The Knight's Tale"] Whatever moral uncertainty we may feel about those higher agents in the heavens (the question of justice, be it noted, is never raised in the heavens), Arcite's death has an intentional and explicit cause,"[230] whereas in the play it does not.

As mentioned before, the characterisation in the play makes for more believable reactions. When Palamon beseeches his friend's *brave soul* to seek Elysium, bidding him farewell and wishing to find peace in the afterlife, his pain feels genuine. The audience knows of their friendship, has felt and experienced it through its ups and downs, has experienced the knights' bitter descent into madness and has glanced through those moments of clarity, sparsely interspersed throughout the play, dictated by age-old brotherly affection that had them nod in respect at one another. Likewise, when Emilia closes Arcite's eyes and cries over a man she deems good, her pain, too, feels genuine. She never wished for either of these noble folks to suffer by her hand, and yet they have. In the play, Theseus

[230] Kolve, p. 145.

tries to give Palamon and Emilia the comfort he gave them in the tale, but his speech here feels different, almost hollow. Indeed, while ignorant on matters that only the narrator and the reader are privy to, the tale's Theseus speaks from within his human condition and can convey a consolation befitting the human mind. While his speech may quench Palamon and Emelye's grief in the face of a reality that on the surface looks so arbitrary but that does, in their opinion, possess an underlying thread of godly provided meaning, there is no satisfying closure to Arcite's death in *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, neither for the characters, nor for the audience. Whereas in the tale the reader was allowed to come to terms with the Arcite's departure, to look behind the curtains of fateful Providence, they are not allowed such a privilege in the play. Both the audience and its cast of characters fall victims to the inherent chaos of human experience.

While still standing next to Arcite's corpse, Theseus advises Palamon to be thankful, for Venus allowed his day to be lengthened, and Emilia to finally become his; his consolatory tone feels hollow. Even though the king still holds that the gods provided Palamon with justice, for he was the one who saw Emilia first, and his was the right to the woman all along, Palamon's victory still feels like a terrible and meaningless loss. Even Theseus agrees that "Never Fortune / Did play a subtler game" (V.iv, 112-113), highlighting the final aspect of the "disconsolation" that his speech provides. King Theseus, the earthly manifestation of divine order, acknowledges that divine order is chaotic, that he has been played by its cunning. In acknowledging that Providence (for the chaos men perceive on earth is but brought upon them by a design instituted by Providence and carried out by Fate according to Boethius) is subtle, and referring to the gods as "Heavenly charmers," Theseus is acknowledging, in my opinion, what his

counterpart in the tale does not, that is, his own ignorance in heavenly matters. In my opinion, the greatest and most severe tragic aspect of *The Two Noble Kinsmen* resides in this final aspect of the play: in not providing a counterview to Arcite's demise, the play does not provide any closure nor argument to his turn of fate. Thus, while in "The Knight's Tale" both audience and characters experience diametrically different reactions to the knight's passing (one of understanding and the other of bittersweet submission to the will of the gods), not only does the play not console either party, but it highlights how even King Theseus, perceived as the most reliable and sturdy source of rulership and protection by everyone involved, is only human and, like everyone else, subjected to the chaotic, and oftentimes ruthless, nature of human affairs.

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