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The Figure of Saturn in the Knight's Tale

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Foreword

This thesis is meant to analyse the role of Saturn in the Knight's Tale, written by Geoffrey Chaucer and inserted in the *Canterbury Tales*.

In order to understand the significance of the pagan deity, I developed a comparison between the Knight's Tale and its literary source, that is, the *Teseida*, written by Giovanni Boccaccio. In the first chapter, I underline the fact that both the literary works start with an epic beginning, more specifically with the military deeds accomplished by Theseus, duke of Athens, who marries the queen of the Amazons, Hippolyta, and brings her and her sister Emelye to Athens. Subsequently, he avenges the slain husbands of the Theban widows, defeating and killing Creon, king of Thebes. In the heap of corpses who died during the battle, Theseus finds two knights, Arcite and Palamon, who are cousins. Subsequently, the literary genre of the two works shifts from epic to chivalric romance: the two knights are condemned in a prison, from which they see Emelye. The typical elements of courtly love are presented: the two cousins consider Emelye a goddess, whose beauty and grace are the causes of their joy and pain. Once they are out of prison, they fight to win Emelye's heart; however, they are discovered by Theseus, who organises a tournament inside an amphitheatre: the winner shall marry Emelye. Above in the sky, Venus (to whom Palamon is devoted) and Mars (to whom Arcite is devoted) argue: in Chaucer's version, Saturn is the character who solves the quarrel, letting Arcite win the tournament but at the same time, making him die, and allowing Palamon to marry Emelye. On the contrary, Boccaccio does not include Saturn in his work: his literary purpose in writing the *Teseida* is to praise the love he felt for Fiammetta, comparing Arcita to himself and Emelye to Fiammetta, whereas Chaucer's literary purpose in writing the Knight's Tale is to deal with philosophical, existential and political issues, through the figure of Saturn.

In the second chapter, I present the myth of Kronos (the Greek equivalent of Saturn) so as to understand Saturn's meaning in the Knight's Tale. Kronos evirates his father Ouranos in order to release the other children: but he is dethroned in turn by his son Zeus for his tyranny (Hesiod's *Theogony*): in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Saturn, after his ousting, flees to the Underworld, while in

Ovid's *Fasti*, he flees to Italy. In *Works and Days*, Hesiod narrates that Kronos's golden age was a prosperous period among men. These versions of Kronos' myth reveal his duality: he is the wise god of agriculture but also the deity of time, who ruthlessly spares nobody, as time does. His duality can also be found in the astrological considerations regarding the homonymous planet: according to the Ptolemaic system, Saturn is the slowest and coldest planet, characterised by a retrograde motion and for this reason, it was considered a negative planetary influence for human beings. At the same time, according to Neoplatonism, planets were considered as mediators between the godly sphere and the earth, Saturn represents wisdom. Furthermore, melancholy, one of the Four Humours, was thought to be an effect of Saturn's influence because of its links to maturity, autumn and the colour black.

In the Knight's Tale there is a strong presence of Saturn's influence: some of the characters are considered "Children of Saturn". For instance, Arcite, once released from prison, is presented as a pale man affected by melancholy (illness associated to Saturn), whereas Palamon displays a wiser attitude, as the pagan deity does. Chaucer makes use of these elements to represent humans struck by planetary influences, that is, human passions, desires and vices.

In his speech, Saturn says that prisons are under his negative influence. In the Knight's Tale, the harsh prison in which Arcite and Palamon are condemned, compared to the beauty of the garden, is a reference to the characters of the tale, influenced by the "ups and downs" of the Wheel of Fortune, with a weak morality based on fate and passions. The second prison is the prison of love: once Arcite is released, he is deeply and emotionally deranged to the point that he considers Palamon's imprisonment as bliss because he still manages to see Emelye, forgetting that he is not only free from the physical prison but also from the influence of the Wheel of Fortune. The third prison is the amphitheatre built by Theseus, whose geometrical shape reminds readers of the zodiac: this building shows that the attitude of the characters of the tale towards Fortune and influences is a characteristic of all humankind. Through his prisons, Saturn embodies human beings influenced by planetary movements and thus, struck by their desires and vices, mirroring Kronos' escape to the underworld.

Inside the amphitheatre, Arcite asks Mars to give him victory, while Palamon, though he is struck by his passions at the beginning of the tale, asks Venus to love Emelye unconditionally. Palamon's change of attitude reveals that he understands Boethius' moral lesson: real happiness is self-sufficiency, thus, not desiring earthly things, and the unity of all good elements. Saturn epitomises Boethius' idea because through his decision to make Arcite perish, he demonstrates that the people who moderates their passions and cut off the superfluous of life are the happiest and the most virtuous human beings.

Since Saturn was represented in several ways by mythographers, for instance, as a prelate, a philosopher, a baleful planet, the god of time and agriculture, he also represents the members of the society in which Chaucer lived. He metaphorically represents humankind cutting off the bonds of medieval superstitions and limits, following their individuality, and shaping themselves and their future, since he makes his decision "agayn his kynde". However, this interpretation implies that Chaucer was in favour of the social changes occurring in fourteenth century. Thus, "agayn his kynde" could be interpreted as "against his profit": this implies that Chaucer was aware of the social changes, and for this reason, he admonishes the pilgrims through the figure of Saturn to follow their individuality, but at the same time, pursuing the communal good, attaining the moral values of the past.

In the third chapter I analyse the figure of Saturn from a political and societal point of view. In his speech, he makes a list of catastrophes brought by his malevolent planetary influence. The pestilence which he recalls is a clear reference to Black Death (1348-1350); "the falling of the towers" could be seen as the Hundred Years' War between England and France and "the murmure and the cherles rebelling" a possible reference to the Peasants' Revolt (1381). Thus, Saturn embodies the political disorder caused by these historical facts occurring in fourteenth-century England, producing drastic social changes. As for his moral message, Saturn offers a "key" of wisdom in order to interpret the historical and societal events: his proverbial wisdom is used by Chaucer to urge his audience to

weigh up the advantages and disadvantages of social changes, cutting off the superfluous in life, so as to understand what morals are still valid in his society, struck by a constant change.

In the fourth chapter, I briefly present the main topics of the Pardoner's, the Wife of Bath's, the Franklin's and the Clerk's tales: Saturn's moral and social message in the Knight's Tale seems to be helpful in order to interpret some elements of these tales. I consider the topics present in the Merchant's Tale quite similar to the topics of the Knight's Tale and embodied by Saturn. Januarie's blindness is a metaphor which represents human beings blinded by their desires and May's cleverness offers a new consideration of the role of women in marriage: in the Knight's Tale, the figure of Saturn suggests to ponder on the social changes, weighing up their advantages and disadvantages.

In the conclusion, I posit that the Knight's Tale could be seen as an astrological allegory. In *Troilus and Criseyde*, Chaucer alludes to the conjunction between Jupiter, Saturn and the Moon: according to astrology, planetary conjunctions between Jupiter and Saturn are epochal. In the Knight's Tale there is no mention of this conjunction but there is the presence of Saturn and Theseus, who is compared to Jupiter by some scholars. There is justice at the end of the tale (justice is an element of Jupiter's influence) but it is not affected by Theseus' courtly and aristocratic final speech, but rather by Saturn's harsh and moral meaning, which is the real meaning of the tale. Thus, Saturn and Jupiter appear to be metaphorically in conjunction and Chaucer might have used this allegory to underline the changes of values occurring in the fourteenth-century society, wishing the saturnian golden age, made of wisdom and prudence, for England.

Chapter 1. The Knight's Tale, its sources and the figure of Saturn

1.1. Geoffrey Chaucer's Knight's Tale: themes

The Canterbury Tales, written by Geoffrey Chaucer, is a sequence of tales told by several narrators who are going on a pilgrimage to Canterbury, in order to reach the shrine of the martyr Thomas Becket. In the General Prologue, there are the descriptions of the spring landscape and weather and the gathering of these pilgrims in an inn in Southwark. The group of pilgrims is composed by people of different social classes: for instance, there are a knight, a friar, a miller and so forth, and they are all described individually. At the end of the General Prologue, the host of the inn proposes to tell each some tales. He promises that everyone will pay a dinner to the pilgrim who is able to tell the best tale.

The first pilgrim presented is the Knight, whose tale is essential for the topic of the current dissertation. He is a knight who has the central chivalric virtues, such as courtesy, honour and fidelity. He is kind and "as meke as is a mayde".[1] His military ability is also presented through a list of places, both Christian and pagan lands, in which he fought. At the end of the description, he is described as a shabby man, because "Of fustian he wered a gipoun, Al bismotered with his habergeoun" (ll. 75-76). His son, in contrast, the squire, who is the second pilgrim described, is a young man, with curly locks of hair and dressed up: "Embrouded was he, as it were a mede, Al ful of fresshe floures, whyte and rede" (ll. 89-90).

After the description of the other pilgrims, the knight is the first pilgrim who starts narrating his tale, set in Ancient Greece, more specifically in Athens and Thebes. V. A. Kolve writes concerning the setting of the tale: "it is, for all that, a strange choice of tale to begin a Christian pilgrimage".[2] I

[1] Chaucer, Geoffrey, *The Canterbury Tales, Seventeen Tales and the General Prologue*, ed. by Kolve, V. A., Olson, Glending, New York: Norton, 2018, l. 71. This is the edition that I use throughout.
[2] Kolve, V. A., *Chaucer and the Imagery of Narrative: the First Five Canterbury Tales*, London: Arnold, 1984, p. 86.

believe that through this choice, Chaucer wants to use this setting as a symbol. I find evidence for this reasoning in what David Anderson asserts on this topic:

> Statius' Thebes takes place in the Orosian vision of ancient history, which sees the wars and miseries, vices and sins of the pre-Christian world as results of the Fall. […] Because of the city's proverbial misfortune due to divine vengeance, the prevalence of the fraternal strife, and the city's reputation for adultery and incest, Thebes vividly elaborates the Babylonian archetype.[3]

This archetype relates to human sins, which suits the Christian context of the pilgrimage. Furthermore, I am also encouraged to think that behind Chaucer's choice of using Ancient Greece as setting of the Knight's Tale there is a hidden meaning, possibly linked to philosophy, or more simply, his intention to set this tale in the epic tradition. The beginning of the tale, in fact, belongs to the epic genre, precisely because it is related to the history of Thebes, presented through Theseus, the first character who appears in the tale, and his military deeds. There is a clear reference to the fact that the source of the tale comes from ancient authorities: "Whylom, as olde stories tellen us" (l. 859): the plot of the tale refers to *Teseida*, written by Giovanni Boccaccio. However, there is no mention of Boccaccio throughout the Knight's Tale: Anderson underlines that Chaucer mentioned directly Publius Papinius Statius,[4] "In Stace of Thebes and thise bokes olde" (l. 2292), the Roman author of the *Thebaid*, Boccaccio's primary source for his *Teseida*.

Specifically, Theseus, duke of Athens, conquers Scithia, the country of the Amazons and marries their queen, Hippolyta, who is brought with her sister Emelye to Athens. The story continues with a group of lamenting women, "Ech after other clad in clothes blake" (l. 899) who demand to avenge their husbands, slain in Thebes by their king Creon. The Theban women's request is the catalyst to create and develop the plot of the whole tale. When Theseus defeats Thebes, he finds in the heap of the Theban corpses after the battle two wounded knights, Arcite and his cousin Palamon, "of the blood royal Of Thebes, and of sustren two y-born" (l. 1018-1019), and he decides to imprison them in a tower and spare their lives because of the royal origin. Another reference to epic genre is

[3] Anderson, David, *The Legendary History of Thebes in Boccaccio's "Teseida" and Chaucer's "Knight's Tale*, Ann Arbor: University Microfilms International, 1984, pp. 57-58.
[4] Anderson, David, *Before the Knight's Tale: Imitation of Classical Epic in Boccaccio's Teseida*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1988, p. 207.

the presence of the pagan deities, as mentioned by Anderson, who states that "Chaucer himself points us towards the epic tradition […] by his mixing of "human" and "divine" characters in the narrative".[5] Arcite is, in fact, devoted to Mars, while Palamon to Venus and Emelye to Diana, and the three gods influence directly the lives of the three characters.

Nevertheless, the literary genre varies after these initial pages: the main topic shifts from war to love, more precisely, from epic genre to chivalric romance. From the tower in which the two cousins are imprisoned, Palamon is the first who sees Emelye. There are descriptions of Emelye's physical appearance and the effects on the two Theban knights caused by their love for her, linked to courtly love and knighthood. Medieval romance deals with these topics, more specifically with knights who are required to display their honour, not only in the battlefield, but also in front of their ladies, who are generally idealised by the knights as divine creatures, or better, mistresses to whom the knights offer their whole devotion. In addition, as stated by Thorlac Turville-Petre, "The lover as humble servant of the imperious lady is an essential character in the world of romantic love".[6] He also argues that it is only through the use of the 'terms of noble talking' that a man is defined as 'courtly lover',[7] that is, he needs to use the language of courtly love. In the passage from the imprisonment to Palamon's first glance at Emelye, there is a description enriched with the typical features of courtly love: the fact which is to be told begins in a morning of May, the month related to the rebirth of nature and thus, of love, "The sesoun priketh every gentil herte, And maketh him out of his sleep to sterte" (ll. 1043-1044). Furthermore, there is the description of Emelye, fairer than the flower she has in her hand:

> That Emelye, that fairer was to sene
> Than is the lilie upon his stalke grene,
> And fresher than the May with floures newe
> For with the rose colour stroof hire hewe. (ll. 1035-1038)

[5] Anderson, *Before the Knight's Tale: Imitation of Classical Epic in Boccaccio's Teseida* p. 193.
[6] Turville-Petre, Thorlac, *Reading Middle English Literature*, Malden, Mass., Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006, p. 179.
[7] Turville-Petre, p. 181.

This is a clear courtly description of the beloved lady who is idealised in her beauty and dignity, "Y-clothed was she fresh, for to devyse: Hir yelow heer was broyded in a tresse" (ll. 1048-1049). She is also compared to an angel who sings "hevenysshly" and gathers white and red flowers, walking "up and doun" (ll. 1052-1055). There are also references concerning the process of the diffusion of love, which is achieved through the eyes, which catch the image of the lady, arriving directly to the heart:

> But I was hurt right now thurghout myn yë
> Into myn herte, that wol my bane be.
> The fairnesse of that lady that I see
> Yond in the gardin romen to and fro
> Is cause of al my crying and my wo.
> I noot wher she be woman or goddesse,
> But Venus is it soothly, as I gesse. (ll. 1096-1102)

These are words uttered by Palamon, who is describing what he sees from the window of the prison in which Arcite and he are imprisoned. Palamon suggests that the moment in which the image of the woman is caught by the eyes and reproduced inside his heart is the beginning of both love and pain. This is an evident connection to the medieval love theory according to Kolve: "erotic love enters the soul through the eyes".[8] A similar process occurs to Arcite, who is urged by Palamon's speech to look at Emelye: she is so beautiful that he longs to see her day by day (ll. 1118-1122). This is the moment in which the strife between the two cousins begins: both Arcite and Palamon claim they love Emelye best. Through Palamon's speech, there is a change of perspective of their familial bond: they are cousins but also brothers, because they took an oath which prevents from hindering each other in love and in other issues. However, this oath seems to be broken at this point and it brings them to the love conflict. Readers can see the change in their relationship: as pointed out by Anderson, the sequence which identifies them as cousins (sons of two sisters), Palamon as son of a king's brother (Polynices, whose brother Eteocles became king after Oedipus) and finally brothers (in a broader sense) is a reference to the history of Thebes, which Chaucer borrows from Statius' *Thebaid*.[9] This sequence of familial terms is in fact a link between Chaucer and the epic sources he uses in the tale. Nevertheless, I posit that the author adds these details not only to develop the plot of the tale and its

[8] Kolve, *Chaucer and the Imagery of Narrative: the First Five Canterbury Tales*, p. 90.
[9] Anderson, David, *Before the Knight's Tale: Imitation of Classical Epic in Boccaccio's Teseida*, pp. 210-212.

outcome, but specifically to underline the fact that such a strong relationship is broken because of a sudden passion. Their fraternal bond is ruined by their love for Emelye, thus, it is conditioned beyond their brotherhood. I can find evidence of this reasoning in the way Arcite and Palamon's personalities are presented in the passage of the prison-tower. They do not appear just as two knights endowed with courtesy, fidelity and ready to serve their lady: they seem influenced by another conditioning which destroys the intimate familial bond. Once Arcite realises that his cousin becomes pale and worried when he sees Emelye, he asks him to explain the reason and to speak without hurry, because they are condemned inside that prison:

> Oure prisoun, for it may non other be,
> Fortune hath yeven us this adversitee.
> Some wikke aspect or disposicioun
> Of Saturne, by sum 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 pleyn. (ll. 1085-1091)

These lines indicate Arcite's interpretation of their captive situation, which is affected by fortune, more specifically by a negative disposition of the planet Saturn in the sky, not only in the moment in which he is speaking, but also during their birth. Moreover, when he is released from prison thanks to his friend Perotheus, Theseus' fellow, Arcite starts complaining: even though he is out of prison, he is exiled from Athens, therefore, he cannot see Emelye anymore, while his cousin can still do it. Palamon, in contrast, laments the fact that he stays inside the prison. Arcite replies that "Wel hath Fortune y-turned thee the dys" (l. 1238), meaning that fortune, because of its fickleness, affects their existence with a reversal of situation. They seem at the mercy of fate.

In the first part of the tale, the two Theban knights are briefly described only through their chivalric virtues and some of their considerations concerning life and fortune which shall be discussed in the following chapters, while Emelye is only described in her physical appearance, according to some courtly values. On the contrary, at the beginning of the second part, Arcite is in Thebes, and for the first time in the tale, his physical traits are mentioned: he is extremely thin, his eyes are horrible and hollow, his face pale (ll. 1362-1364). Once Mercury, the pagan god, appears in his dreams and

admonishes him to come back to Athens, he looks at himself in a mirror and he realises how his face has changed because of the distance from Emelye (ll. 1384-1404). After this godly apparition, he comes back to Athens, under the name of Philostrate, and becomes the page of Emelye's chamber. His virtues and courtesy are immediately recognised by Theseus who decides to raise his degree and make him a squire. Palamon, instead, is still imprisoned, however, one of his friend helps him escape from prison: he gives the jailer a glass of wine in which there are opiate and anodyne that make him sleep. Palamon hides in a grove, awaiting Theseus' arrival in order to make war against him. Subsequently, Arcite passes through the same wood in which there is the grove, and he starts singing about the reversal of his situation. Once again, we readers can find some courtly elements in Arcite's song: "Love hath his fyry dart so brenningly, Y-stiked thurgh my trewe careful herte […] Emelye! Ye been the cause wherefore that I dye" (ll. 1564-1565 and ll. 1567-1568). Palamon hears the song and recognises his cousin, and the two knights decide to provide themselves weapons and armour and fight for Emelye. During the battle, they are described as fierce animals, "Thou mightiest wene that this Palamoun, In his fighting were a wood leoun, And as a cruel tygre was Arcite" (ll. 1655-1657): I think that this passage displays the change from the courtly attitude of the two cousins to their brutality, in order to gain Emelye's heart. They are showing the limits of humankind when it is struck by passions: however, in this disorder, Theseus appears to solve the situation. He is accompanied by Hippolyta and Emelye during a hunting and they find the two knights fighting. Palamon reveals their true identities and the love reason of their strife, thus, Theseus' first reaction is to condemn them to death. However, Hippolyta and Emelye start weeping because of Theseus' decision: they ask him to spare Arcite and Palamon's lives, underlying the fact that they acted in that way for love. I believe that this passage is worthy of note, precisely because it is the first time in which readers have the perspective of the two main female characters: as yet, Hippolyta and Emelye have remained silent. There is also a change in Theseus' attitude: at the beginning of the tale, he was presented under military qualities, associated to the pride and ferocity of a typical conqueror. Through the women's reaction, he ponders on love and its effects and decides to build an amphitheatre where is the grove:

Arcite and Palamon are to fight inside it with a hundred knights each, and the winner shall marry Emelye. The change of courtly attitude of the two knights seems to be restored in an apparent solution, or better, order: according to Kolve, the decision to build expressly an amphitheatre for the tournament is a manner to establish order in an existence affected by chance.[10]

At the beginning of the third part of the tale, there are elaborated descriptions of the amphitheatre: "Round was the shap, in manere of compas" (l. 1889) and it is so well-constructed that:

> For in the lond ther was no crafty man
> That geometrie or ars-metrike can,
> Ne purtreyour, ne kervere of images,
> That Theseus ne yaf him mete and wages
> The theatre for to maken and devyse. (ll. 1897-1901)

Theseus builds an altar and an oratory devoted to Venus in the eastern gate of the amphitheatre, and he does the same in order to worship Mars in the western gate, while northward, he builds an oratory devoted to Diana. As mentioned previously, these pagan gods are the deities to whom Arcite, Palamon and Emelye are devoted. Chaucer may have developed these long descriptions of the altars and oratories to establish a reference to the ancient sources and to show explicitly the rites and the uses of Ancient Greece. Furthermore, Arcite and Palamon have lost their courtly attitude and humanity, thus, the presence of religious altars may serve as admonishment to retrieve the spiritual side of life and leave any kind of earthly and material conditionings. The day before the tournament, Arcite, Palamon and Emelye go to the altars of their respective pagan deities, to ask for grace for the following day. What is worthy of note is the different perspectives of the three characters in praying their deities. Palamon seems to restore his initial courtly attitude: he asks Venus to have fully Emelye and die at her service, he wants neither victory nor vainglory (ll. 2239-2243). Emelye, in contrast, in front of Diana's altar, asks to remain a virgin. This is the second time we witness Emelye's feelings: her will is clearly stated in her prayer. Nevertheless, as we shall see at the end of the tale, she is constantly at the mercy of other characters: even Diana denies her this desire and tell her "Thou shalt

[10] Kolve, *Chaucer and the Imagery of Narrative: the First Five Canterbury Tales*, p. 105.

ben wedded unto oon of tho" (l. 2352). Arcite, on the other hand, asks Mars for victory: he is more focused on his own glory, in military terms, rather than on love. Thus, Palamon shows a wiser attitude than Arcite, as discussed by Douglas Brooks and Alastair Fowler.[11] The strife between Venus and Mars begins when they confirm what their worshippers have asked: Venus intends to give Palamon the love he craves, but at the same time Mars wants to give the promised victory to Palamon. In this moment, another deity appears in the tale: the cold Saturn, who is described as a pagan god provided with wisdom and great experience which allow him to satisfy each party involved. Through his speech, readers have also the description of his bad aspects as planet: while the planet dwells in the constellation of Leo, it brings misfortune (l. 2462). At the end of his speech, he decides that Palamon shall have his lady, whereas Arcite shall be helped by Mars somehow.

The fourth and last part of the tale is devoted to the tournament and its outcome. The two Theban knights are accompanied by two characters whose physical appearance is described in the previous part. Palamon is accompanied by Lycurgus, king of Thrace: this man is strong and muscular, he has black hair and beard, there is a wreath set of diamonds and rubies on his head, his eyeballs glow of a red and a yellow, his arms are long and big. He is presented standing on a chariot pulled by four white bulls, and the chariot is surrounded by muzzled hounds: behind him, there are the other hundred men. Arcite, in contrast, is accompanied by Emetreus, king of Ind, who is riding his steed like Mars (l. 2159). He has crisp, curly and blond hair, high nose, few beard and the colour of his eyes are like a yellowish gemstone. There are some freckles on his face and his lips are described as "sanguine". He is a young man, no more than twenty-five years old. He wears a cloak "Bret-ful of rubies rede as fyr sparklinge" (l. 2164), and a green-laurel garland on his forehead and he bears an eagle on his wrist. A hundred men are behind him and they are described like pride lions and leopards. I am focusing on these descriptions because Lycurgus and Emetreus are the only two characters, apart from Emelye, who are fully physically described. They are contrasted because Emetreus is presented

[11] On Palamon's wiser attitude than Arcite's attitude, see Brooks, Douglas, Alastair Fowler, "The Meaning of Chaucer's Knight's Tale", *Medium Aevum*, 39 (1970), pp. 123-146.

full of energy and pride, described through bright terms and adjectives, while Lycurgus has dark traits and he is older than Emetreus. Furthermore, Lycurgus' chariot is pulled by bulls, which are not the typical animals used during battles. I think that this is Chaucer's choice to represent Arcite and Palamon's attitude towards the battle, because Arcite is more focused on victory and Emetreus, who accompanies him during the tournament, is described with specific traits related to Mars, to whom Arcite is devoted. The slow bulls of Lycurgus' chariot may represent the delay of Palamon's escape from prison and his longer captive situation through Lycurgus' black physical traits as well. However, I shall repropose subsequently the theme concerning Palamon, Arcite, Lycurgus and Emetreus pointed out by Douglas Brooks and Alastair Fowler.[12]

The day of the battle is a Monday in May in Athens. Theseus modifies his purpose for the tournament: he asks the knights to fight without mortal weapons, so that nobody can die. The winner shall be the one who is able to bring the other knight to the barrier. This is another aspect which characterises the change of Theseus' personality throughout the tale: he shifts from an initial military attitude to a wiser behaviour. The outcome of the fight is that Palamon is brought to this barrier, despite his strength and struggle to prevent it. Venus, who is weeping for this result, is admonished by Saturn who tells her not to cry, precisely because Mars gave Arcite victory, and now, it is her turn to give Palamon what he asked. The winner is Arcite who takes off his helm and looks at Emelye, who looks back at him with "freendlich yë" (l. 2680). However, Emelye's gaze seems to be fickle and under the whims of fortune, according to Chaucer (ll. 2681-2683): this might be an authorial consideration related to women's nature, even though it would appear misogynous. Under Saturn's decision, Pluto sends a fury, who frightens Arcite's horse, which begins to turn aside, making the knight fall, and eventually he is fatally wounded. Before his death, Arcite appears to change his mind: when he is taking his leave from life, the two cousins reconcile because Arcite recognises that Palamon is able to show the right virtues, such as kindness, humility, generosity; he also serves

[12] On this point, see Brooks, Douglas, Alastair Fowler, "The Meaning of Chaucer's Knight's Tale", *Medium Aevum*, 39 (1970), pp. 123-146.

Emelye courtly. I believe that Arcite's acknowledgment shows him a different person from what he used to be: victory is no more his main purpose. After his death, Emelye shrieks and mourns Arcite: this is another example of her feelings presented in the tale. Chaucer describes her feelings through a generalised consideration on women:

> For in swich cas women have swich sorwe,
> Whan that hir housbondes been from hem ago,
> That for the more part they sorwen so,
> Or ells fallen in swich a maladye
> That at the laste certainly they dye. (ll. 2822-2826)

I think that this is another moment in which Emelye's perspective is not presented in its entirety: it seems that she has no power in her decisions and she cannot fully express herself. Chaucer may describe her in these terms because she is basically the cause of the fraternal strife between the two Theban cousins: Emelye herself might be seen as the main obstacle to the strong familial bond.

The city is in mourning for Arcite's death: at this point, another character appears in the tale, that is, Egeus, Theseus' father, whose apparent function is to soothe this communal grief:

> This world nis but a thurghfare ful of wo,
> And we ben pilgrims, passinge to and fro:
> Deeth is an ende of every worldly sore. (ll. 2847-2849)

Theseus decides to make a pyre for Arcite's funeral and he takes the floor to conclude the story. He elaborates a kind of cosmology in which he explains how the world has been created: in this creation, the "First Moverer" gave his creatures a limited existence and no one can oppose it. In holding this speech, Theseus conveys a philosophical massage, in admonishing his audience to live in a worthy manner, avoiding to offend and harm other people. This thought appears to suit also the Christian context in which the other pilgrims, who are listening to the Knight, live. Theseus seems to be one of the characters of the tale who improves the most: readers have seen him under a military perspective but also in his magnanimous attitude of changing the conditions of the tournament and now he looks like a preacher or philosopher who attempts to soothe human pains. Moreover, at the end of the story, he decides that Palamon shall marry Emelye, and the lovers remain silent in front of this decision.

The purpose of the current dissertation is to analyse the figure of Saturn, the god who seems to play an essential role in the Knight's Tale. He is the character who decides the final outcome of the love conflict. Apparently, he serves to justify what happens towards the end of the tale, but I believe that he is not added by Chaucer only to develop the plot of his tale.

Arcite and Palamon are two characters who apparently seem at the mercy of fate and their passions, influenced by external factors. The description of Saturn together with his speech are revelatory in this sense because he is represented as both the grandfather of all other pagan deities, whose experience precedes him but also as "bearer of misfortune and calamities". There could be possible meanings expressed by this figure throughout the tale, especially what conditions human beings, but also philosophical and political approaches. Not by chance, Saturn is not present in Boccaccio's *Teseida*, and I believe that the main reason is the fact that his version conveys another message. Thus, a reference to the primary source of Chaucer may be useful. The following section shall not provide the whole similarities and differences between the Knight's Tale and the *Teseida*, but rather those which could be relevant for the main topic of the current dissertation.

1.2. Giovanni Boccaccio's *Teseida* as primary source: similarities and differences

Before analysing more specifically the similarities and differences between the Knight's Tale and Boccaccio's *Teseida*, I would like to mention the Italian literary influence in England during Chaucer's period. There is some evidence that Chaucer had been influenced by some Italian works, such as Dante Alighieri's *Divina Commedia*, as asserted by Nick Havely, who underlines "the presence and reception of Dante in late medieval Britain",[13] stating that "books of this sort could have arrived by similar means even earlier – for example, through merchants from Italian towns as Lucca,

[13] Havely, Nick, *Dante's British Public: Readers and Texts, from the Fourteenth Century to the Present*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014, p. 4.

who had been trading in London around Chaucer's time".[14] I believe that Chaucer learnt about Boccaccio in the same way, and readers could find evidence of this literary connection, if they compare *The Canterbury Tales* to the *Decameron*. Peter Beidler concludes that the two works comprise a variety of similarities, such as the enigmatic language and the representation of reality from different perspectives.[15] Another similarity between the two works is the presence of several narrators who tell stories, concerning different topics. However, the reason which leads the narrators to gather and tell stories is different: the *Decameron* presents a group of well-off citizens who are escaping from fourteenth-century Florence, devasted by the plague (1348). Chaucer borrows the narrative structure of the *Decameron*, but at the same time, he adapts it under the perspective of the pilgrimage and the difference between the social classes of the pilgrims. Adler Gillian points out that "From Boccaccio, Chaucer learned how to adapt popular traditions and a multitude of source-texts":[16] there are, in fact, some stories in *The Canterbury Tales*, borrowed from Boccaccio's narrative, for instance the Clerk's Tale and the Knight's Tale. Chaucer takes from Boccaccio's work the structure and the plot of the story, and he adapts it under a different perspective. I shall provide a brief comparison of themes (related to the current dissertation) between the two works in the following lines.

Although the plot of the two works is similar, Chaucer's version is abridged. The English author directly expresses his intention to cut specific passages of Boccaccio's work: for instance, he says that "But it were al to longe for to devyse" (l. 994), referring to the description of the burial of the slain husbands of the Theban lamenting women. I think that Chaucer overtly omits some passages of the *Teseida*, because his intention is to focus on another kind of details. Thomas Tyrwhitt suggests that he might have composed initially the Knight's Tale as a translation of Boccaccio's *Teseida*, and

[14] Havely, *Dante's British Public: Readers and Texts, from the Fourteenth Century to the Present*, p. 4.
[15] Beidler, Peter G., "Chaucer, Boccaccio, and the Debate of Love: a Comparative Study of the Decameron", *Medium Aevum*, 65 (1997), pp. 331-332. Beidler reviews N.S. Thomson's work *Chaucer, Boccaccio, and the Debate of Love: A Comparative Study of the 'Decameron' and the 'Canterbury Tales'*.
[16] Adler, Gillian, "Chaucer's Decameron and the Origin of the Canterbury Tales", *Medium Aevum*, 90 (2021), pp. 353-354. Adler reviews Frederick M. Biggs' work *Chaucer's Decameron and the Origin of the Canterbury Tales*.

subsequently decided to give the current form of the poem to place it as the first tale of his work.[17] This abbreviation also concerns the subdivision of the two works: Chaucer divides the Knight's Tale in four main parts, while Boccaccio in twelve books, "on the pattern of the Latin epics".[18] Furthermore, Boccaccio begins each book with a fourteen-line sonnet, which contains the general topic of the entire book[19], absent in Chaucer's work. Each stanza of the *Teseida* is composed by eight verses, with rhyme scheme ABABABCC, that is, Boccaccio's *ottava rima*. Chaucer, in contrast, uses rhyming couplets for the text of the Knight's Tale.

The beginning of the *Teseida* could be considered epic for two reasons. The first is the invocation to the Muses and the pagan deities, that is, Mars and Venus, both present in Chaucer's version: Boccaccio is invoking them to enable the writer to compose his verses. Inasmuch as the story deals with love and war, he chooses the invocation of the specific pagan gods who govern these scopes and are the "movers" of the story. The second reason is, like Chaucer's work, the presentation of Teseo's military deeds. However, Boccaccio develops this part of the tale in two books, while Chaucer in a couple of pages. In Book I, there is the description of the preparation of the war between Teseo and the Amazons, who expelled men from their country because of their independent nature. They are described like cruel women, who do not allow men to come to their country. Because of their brutality, Teseo decides to make war against them. The Amazons are ruled by Ipolita, presented as a beautiful and proud queen. In Chaucer's work, only the fact that Theuses makes war against them and eventually wins the battle and marries Hippolyta is mentioned. What is different in Boccaccio's work is the queen's courage and endurance in defending her people. She urges the Amazons to fight bravely in order to save their independence and win the battle: at the beginning of the conflict, they seem to defeat the enemy thanks to their aggressiveness, however, Teseo's men manage to make the Amazons retreat and hide inside a fortress. The epic genre is also present in Book II, where Teseo

[17] Quoted in Anderson, *Before the Knight's Tale: Imitation of Classical Epic in Boccaccio's Teseida*, p. 194.
[18] Anderson, *Before the Knight's Tale: Imitation of Classical Epic in Boccaccio's Teseida*, p. 15.
[19] Boccaccio, Giovanni, *Teseida*, ed. by Salvatore Battaglia, Firenze: G. C. Sansoni, 1938, p. 9. This is the edition that I use throughout.

makes war against Thebes: the lamenting widows' request is the catalyst of the war also in the *Teseida*. After the battle, Teseo finds Arcita and Palemone, who are not cousins here, but just kinsmen, more specifically, Cadmus' grandchildren (with some allusions to their royal origins, borrowed from the *Thebaid*).

We see a change of literary genre, from epic to chivalric romance, in Book III, where the two knights are in prison, which is not a tower, as in Chaucer's version, but it is on the side of the garden in which Emilia appears. There are references to courtly love in this passage, such as the unattainable fulfilment of lovers who attempt to gain the attention of the beloved lady, who is the only person in their thoughts. An important difference between the two works is the fact that in the Knight's Tale, the two cousins argue because each of them claim to love Emelye best, while in the *Teseida*, the two knights do not argue in prison, but only successively in Book V, when they claim their love for the same lady. Moreover, in the *Teseida*, we can observe directly Emilia's behaviour, unlike Chaucer's version: she blushes (Book III, stanza 18) and subsequently, the author writes that "non che a ciò amor la costringesse, ma per veder se altri la vedesse" (Book III, stanza 28). Here Boccaccio wants to underline that she shows up in the garden only because she knows they like her, and for this reason, she delights in singing and making herself visible to the unlucky knights (Book III, stanza 29). Therefore, we can say, as asserted by Guglielmo Volpi, that "A love story makes up . . . the substance of the poem […] this is the skeletal outline, one more suited to a novella than to a long poem",[20] like the Knight's Tale.

Despite the change of genre, present in both works, and the similar plot, Boccaccio and Chaucer have different literary purposes. Readers can easily understand that Boccaccio dedicates his *Teseida* to Maria d'Aquino, recognised as "Fiammetta", king Robert of Naples' illegitimate daughter, for the initial dedication, but also for his identification with Arcita. Throughout the work, we observe that Arcita is the real protagonist of the story, because he is fully described: there are detailed

[20] Quoted by Anderson in *Before the Knight's Tale: Imitation of Classical Epic in Boccaccio's Teseida*, p. 1.

descriptions of his love for Emilia (he is the first knight who sees her) and his desire to win the tournament, unlike Palemone. Furthermore, in Book XI, Palemone dedicates a temple to Arcita. Initially, this temple could be interpreted as the "monument" to his memory and his chivalric values. Nevertheless, if readers consider Boccaccio's possible identification with Arcita and the outcome of the battle, they may conceive this temple as the "monument" of Arcita's strained love for Emilia, thus, Boccaccio's love for Fiammetta. Venus, unlike in the Knight's Tale, is the goddess who sends the fury to frighten Arcita's horse, making him fall and die: I think that this is a metaphor of love, which is not only beauty and harmony, but also pain. Before his death, he marries her, unlike in the Knight's Tale. At the end, she is finally in love with Arcita and she mourns his death.

The setting of the *Teseida* is more intimate for all the considerations which have been developed hitherto: the setting of the Knight's Tale is completely different because, as Kolve affirms:

> Chaucer's narrator offers his story of Palamon and Arcite to a company of pilgrims on the road to Canterbury – The Knight's Tale is from the beginning a public poem.[21]

I think that this difference between intimate and public setting of the two works is essential in order to understand Chaucer's possible aim in composing the Knight's Tale. The author often addresses his audience throughout the tale, as in the scene of the prison, as mentioned previously, through his question on who is the happiest knight between Arcite and Palamon. Another example is provided by J. R. Hulbert, who suggests that "Chaucer indicates early in the story the problem he is laying before his reader: who is to win Emelye":[22] in Boccaccio's *Teseida*, the author identifies himself with Arcita, who is expected to win the tournament. The scholar continues by writing that Chaucer's idea is that Palamon should win because he is devoted to Venus, thus, love, and Chaucer's audience was aware of the principles of courtly love.[23] Even though I agree with these lines, I also believe that Chaucer's intention is not only to please his audience and deal with courtly love, for a simple reason. In the previous section of this chapter, I underlined the fact that Saturn is the character who resolves the

[21] Kolve, *Chaucer and the Imagery of Narrative: the First Five Canterbury Tales*, p. 132.
[22] Hulbert, J.R., "What Was Chaucer's Aim in The "Knight's Tale"?", *Studies in Philology*, 26 (1929), p. 382.
[23] Hulbert, pp. 381-382.

quarrel between Venus and Mars with Arcita's martial victory but also with his death, and there are several allusions of how human beings are easily conditioned by external factors, such as fortune, the disposition of the planets, human passions and so forth. Thus, I posit that Saturn helps both Chaucer's medieval and today's audience to ponder on who is to win Emelye, not only from the point of view of the courtly principle, but also under a philosophical perspective, that is, human freedom, which seems to be influenced negatively throughout the tale. We need to remember the setting of *The Canterbury Tales*: it is a pilgrimage towards the holy shrine, and I think that it is not only the allegorical pilgrimage from life to death, in order to reach God. It is, in contrast, the pilgrimage of life of each human being, who seeks to find their own individuality and "build" their fate. Not coincidentally, the pilgrims come from different social classes, with different ideas and beliefs of "shaping" their lives. Thus, in the following chapters, Saturn shall be presented both in his mythological and astrological characteristics, so as to understand his possible moral and political message in the Knight's Tale.

Chapter 2. Saturn and the disorder of human life

2.1. Saturn as pagan deity and planetary influence: astrology during the Middle Ages

Saturn is the Roman equivalent of the ancient Greek Kronos, deity of time, as the name suggests. The main source to mention is Hesiod and his *Theogony*, in which Kronos' myth is narrated.[24] Kronos is Ouranos and Gaia's son: the former symbolises the sky and the latter, the earth. Ouranos decides to imprison his children (Hecatoncheires), probably because of his fear of being dethroned. One might consider this decision as a reaction to his children's proverbial monstrosity: I think that the most acceptable reason is Ouranos' fear of losing power, since Kronos shall display the same attitude once he becomes king of all ancient Greek gods. His mother Gaia gives him a sickle, so as to evirate his father and free the other children: Kronos cuts off Ouranos' genitalia and the remains are thrown into the sea. Aphrodite emerges from the foam created by the fall of these remains.

Warned by his mother of his future defeat through his son Zeus, Kronos decides to swallow his children. Subsequently, his sister and spouse Rhea spares Zeus' life: she gives Kronos a stone and makes him believe that it is his son.[25] Once Zeus has grown up, he defeats his father Kronos. There are two versions of the outcome of his dethronement: in *Metamorphoses*, Ovid writes that Kronos runs away and find refuge in the underworld,[26] while in *Fasti*, he writes that Kronos flees to Italy.[27] In *Works and Days*, Hesiod narrates that Kronos's golden age was a prosperous period among human beings.[28] The versions of the myth of Kronos show a double nature in the deity's personality: he is

[24] Hesiod, *Theogony and Works and Days*, trans. and ed. by Catherine M. Schlegel and Henry Weinfield, Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2006, pp. 26, 27, 28, 29, 37, 38.
[25] Davidson, John, "Zeus and the Stone Substitute", *Hermes*, 123 (1995), pp. 363. The scholar is pointing out that we cannot know precisely whether it is Rhea or Gaia to give Kronos the stone: the passage of the account is not clear.
[26] Naso, Publius Ovidius, *Metamorphoses*, trans. and ed. by A.D. Melville and E.J. Kenney, Oxford, New York: Oxford Univeristy Press, 1986, p.4, vv. 112-113.
[27] Naso, Publius Ovidius, *Fasti e Frammenti*, ed. by Fabio Stok, Torino: Unione tipografico-editrice torinese, 1999, pp. 112-115, vv. 235-254.
[28] Hesiod, pp. 60-61.

the son who rebels against his father's tyranny and at the same time, he is a tyrant with his children and he is defeated by filial rebellion. Even the sickle, given by his mother, embodies his duality: it symbolises both the crime committed against his father and the harvest, since he is also considered the god of agriculture.[29] Thus, we can easily understand why Saturn is depicted through opposites by mythographers and writers: he is represented as a wise god, because he is the grandfather of the ancient Greek deities, creator of everything and endowed with divine intelligence, but he also devours his children, as ruthlessly time passes and spares nobody.[30]

We can find the double nature of Saturn also in the astrological aspect of the homonymous planet. Because of its slowness (as it is in the Ptolemaic system), its coldness (due to the distance from the sun and its cold nature) and its frequent retrograde motion, Saturn is considered a malevolent star, whose influence affects earthly life negatively.[31] However, Neoplatonism affirms that planets are, for their position, "mediators" between human beings and the godly sphere. Thus, they cannot be considered "evil influences", precisely because they are "metaphysical symbols through which the various degrees in the structure of the All became visible": thanks to this positive interpretation, Saturn's planetary influence is believed to represent Intellect and the power of thought.[32] Not by chance, he is also depicted by mythographers as an old veiled men (mythographers represented philosophers in the same way), as if he admonished us to follow his example to protect ourselves.[33] Thus, maturity can be seen as one of the properties brought by its planetary influence.

Before analysing the presence of the mythical and astrological elements related to Saturn in the Knight's Tale, I want to discuss Chaucer's use of astronomy and astrology in his work, in order to understand the connection between the two during the late Middle Ages. We find different instances of planetary influences throughout the *Canterbury Tales*: for example, the Wife of Bath

[29] Klibansky, Raymond, Erwin Panofsky, Fritz Saxl, *Saturn and Melancholy: Studies in the History of Natural Philosophy, Religion and Art*, London: Nelson, 1964, pp. 134-135.
[30] Tinkle, Theresa, "Saturn of the Several Faces: A Survey of the Medieval Mythographic Traditions", *Viator*, 18 (1987), pp. 299-300.
[31] Tinkle, p. 294. The scholar is citing Fabius Planciades Fulgentius and Alberic of London's astrophysical interpretations regarding the planet Saturn.
[32] Klibansky, Panofsky, Saxl, pp. 151-153.
[33] Tinkle, p. 294. The scholar is referring to Alberic of London.

justifies her lustful inclination because her rising sign and Mars are in Taurus during her birth; Taurus is inclined to sexual desire and is under Venus' domain. (ll. 611-616). We also read passages concerning specific planetary positions, as in the General Prologue: Chaucer writes that the sun has passed his half-course in the sign of Aries (ll. 8-9). I believe that these are not mere examples of authorial beliefs in astrological lore; rather, Chaucer uses astrological allegories in a literary and decorative sense to describe what happens in his tales: in the second case, he writes that the sun has passed the half of Aries' constellation, meaning through a literary device that the action takes place towards mid-April. As J.C. Eade points out, "the audience is imagined to have the familiarity with the subject that will expand what is said into what is meant":[34] readers understand that medieval people were familiar with astrology and could understand the astrological allusions which Chaucer and other writers made in their works. The astronomical and astrological references in Chaucer's writings suggest that he observed directly the movements of the planets and made astronomical calculations. He was able to accomplish this activity through the tools used during the late Middle Ages for astronomical observation, like astrolabes, *equatoria*, almanacs and so forth.[35] J.D. North writes that Chaucer might rather have made use of calendars.[36] In the late Middle Ages, they were used to provide information regarding astrology, astronomy and medical advice. Astrology and astronomy cannot be divided during the late Middle Ages:

> In essence, astronomy was the theoretical component and astrology the practical aspect of the same body of knowledge concerning the movement of the heavenly bodies. Given that the same astronomical information was required to calculate Easter as to make astrological predictions, it was only natural that astrological and astronomical material should be kept together in the calendar.[37]

As Cornelius O'Boyle points out, physicians of that period checked the movements of the sun and the moon because they were believed to influence the causes and the outcomes of illnesses; therefore,

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[34] Eade, J.C., *The Forgotten Sky, A Guide to Astrology in English Literature*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984, p. 133. The scholar refers to another astrological allusion, present in the *Canterbury Tales* (Merchant's Tale, ll. 2219-2224).
[35] North, J.D., "Kalenderes Enlumyned Ben They: Some Astronomical Themes in Chaucer", *Review of English Studies*, 20 (1969), pp. 130-132.
[36] North, p. 130.
[37] O'Boyle, Cornelius, "Astrology and Medicine in Later Medieval England: The Calendars of John Somer and Nicholas of Lynn", *Sudhoffs Archiv*, 89 (2005), p. 2.

astrology was used to foretell the course of an illness, or to plan the horoscopes of courtiers and make predictions of any kind of event, such as the right moment to marry.[38]

Inasmuch as astronomy and astrology went at the same pace during the late Middle Ages, we need to consider the theory of the four humours. Besides the mythological and planetary meanings, Saturn was also related to melancholy, a physiological and psychological state caused by an excess of black bile, which is one of the four humours. The theory of the four humours comes from Ancient Greece and it had been used during the Middle Ages and the Renaissance to explain natural phenomena. According to this theory, the four humours are blood, black bile, yellow bile and phlegm: the combination of these elements affects human personality and bodily disposition.[39] An excess or lack of one of these four humours might determine the qualities of a person, conferring four different temperaments, that is, sanguine, phlegmatic, choleric and melancholic. For their strong link to the human body, the four humours were used for empirical medicine from Ancient Greece to the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, establishing some associations with seasons and the ages of man: blood is associated to childhood, spring and warm and moist qualities, yellow bile to youth, summer and warm and dry qualities, black bile to manhood, autumn and cold and dry qualities, phlegm to old age, winter and cold and moist qualities.[40] Considering the classical myth, the planet Saturn is associated to melancholy for its links to the wise stage of life, that is, manhood, and cold qualities, for its planetary distance from the sun and the pagan god's escape to the underworld. Astrology used the theory of the four temperaments to justify the relation between human beings and the stars, which directly influence and determine human behaviour and physical appearance: someone born under Saturn's influence, inevitably acquires its qualities, such as wisdom and prudence. But they are also affected by an excess of black bile, which makes them melancholic, prone to depression, anxiety, misanthropy:

[38] O'Boyle, p. 12 and p. 17.
[39] Klibansky, Panofsky, Saxl, pp. 3.
[40] Klibansky, Panofsky, Saxl, pp. 9-10.

there is a Greek root in the word melancholy meaning "black", and for this reason, it has been always related to what is obscure and malevolent.[41]

This notion helps us to understand the tradition of the "Children of the planets", which is commonly accepted during the late Middle Ages. We can easily find its presence in the Knight's Tale, which shall be discussed in the second section of this chapter. More specifically, my intention is to underline the presence of the children of Saturn, predominant in this tale. I think that this presence underlines Chaucer's knowledge of the topic but it also can be the premise to understand some of the meanings which the figure of Saturn expresses in the tale.

2.2. The notion of "Children of Saturn" and its presence in the tale

In the first chapter, I mentioned the amphitheatre in which Arcite, Palamon and Emelye pray their respective gods the day before the tournament. I focus again on this amphitheatre because the walls of the three temples are decorated with images representing people with specific traits. I take as example the temple dedicated to Venus. We read that:

> The fyry strokes of the desiringe
> That loves servaunts in this lyf enduren;
> The othes that hir covenants assuren;
> Plesaunce and Hope, Desyr, Foolhardinesse,
> Beautee and Youthe, Bauderie, Richesse,
> Charmes and Force, Lesinges, Flaterye,
> Dispense, Bisynesse, and Jalousye,
> That wered of yelwe goldes a garland,
> And a cokkow sittinge on hir hand;
> Festes, instruments, caroles, daunces,
> Lust and array, and alle the circumstaunces
> Of love, whiche that I rekned and rekne shal,
> By ordre weren peynted on the wal. (ll. 1922-1934)

We can say that these people are Venus' worshippers: they are described according to the typical characteristics of the goddess of love and beauty. In the previous section, I dealt with the notion of

[41] Klibansky, Panofsky, Saxl, pp. 15-16.

the four temperaments and the influence on human beings caused by the stars, which affects directly human personalities: we find this planetary determinism represented on the walls of the temples inside the amphitheatre. For instance, in Venus' temple, her worshippers are depicted as lustful people, prone to love, beauty and flattery. Kolve writes that this representation of people influenced by pagan gods comes from an artistic medieval tradition, that is, "the Children of the planets", which comes in turn from the Arabic astrological texts written by Abu Ma'sar and Alcabitius between the ninth and tenth centuries: this tradition started from the translation of these Arabic texts into Latin in the twelfth century and their first artistic reproductions, occurring at the end of the fourteenth century.[42] This tradition does not include only the planetary influence on the human body and personality, but also the type of activities that people affected by the specific planets are inclined to. For example, there are also descriptions of the wall paintings of the "children" of the other two gods, with allusions to the malevolent influence of Mars, such as a victim of suicide, a tyrant, fierce animals, but also a butcher and a blacksmith (ll. 2005-2025), and hunters and modest people for Diana (ll. 2054-2055). I think that Chaucer metaphorically describes the three characters' attitudes through this artistic tradition: Arcite, devoted to Mars, is aiming at glory, without considering its cost, while Palamon, influenced by Venus, suffers for love and he asks to have only his lady; Emelye, portrayed as a virgin who is outside the sphere of desire, asks for her independence. Moreover, Chaucer wants to describe them at the mercy of the stars, thus, of their own desires, as if they did not have the choice and freedom to act.

Saturn is absent in the amphitheatre: there are neither temples, nor altars devoted to the pagan god. Nevertheless, we can find the presence of his "children" throughout the tale. Before analysing the specific passages with their presence, I want to propose some considerations regarding them and Saturn, according to the tradition of "the Children of the planets". As previously mentioned, this tradition comes from the early Middle Ages, and initially, it comprises a variety of personal features

[42] Kolve, *Chaucer and the Imagery of Narrative: the First Five Canterbury Tales*, London: Arnold, 1984, p. 115.

and activities, but in the late Middle Ages, it undergoes a reduction of the various categories brought by the planetary influences:

> Jupiter must illustrate the nature and the way of life of men blessed with culture and property, Mercury that of scholars and artists, Mars that of warriors, and Saturn that of poor and oppressed peasants, beggars, cripples, prisoners and criminals.[43]

Kolve also indicates the presence of hanging, executions, hermits, agricultural labour under Saturn's malevolent influence.[44] Through Kolve's words, we can identify the duality related to the classical myth of Kronos which the planetary influence acquires. Illnesses, deformity, death, executions are all representations of his escape to the underworld once he is dethroned, but also of his cruelty in devouring his sons; on the other hand, hermits and agricultural labour underline his wisdom brought to men during the golden age. We can find this duality also in the presentation of Saturn in the Knight's Tale. Chaucer shows not only his knowledge regarding the classical myth, but also the knowledge related to the astrological notions of the period:

> Til that the pale Saturnus the colde,
> That knew so manye of aventures olde,
> Fond in his olde experience an art
> That he ful sone hath plesed every part.
> As sooth is sayd, elde hath greet avantage;
> In elde is bothe wisdom and usage;
> Men may the olde atrenne and noght atrede.
> Saturne anon, to stinten stryf and drede,
> Al be it that it is agayn his kynde,
> Of al this stryf he gan remedie fynde. (ll. 2443-2452)

When Saturn starts speaking, he reveals his malevolent planetary influence on his "children" and the baleful aspect when the planet is in specific zodiacal signs:

> Myn is the drenching in the see so wan;
> Myn is the prison in the derke cote;
> Myn is the strangling and hanging by the throte;
> The murmure and the cherles rebelling,
> The groyninge and the pryvee empoisoning
> I do vengeance and pleyn correcioun
> Whyl I dwelle in the signe of the leoun.
> Myn is the ruine of the hye halles,
> The falling of the toures and of the walles […]
> And myne be the maladyes colde,
> The derke tresons, and the castes olde;
> My loking is the fader of pestilence. (ll. 2456-2464, ll. 2467-2469).

[43] Klibansky, Panofsky, Saxl, p. 205.
[44] Kolve, *Chaucer and the Imagery of Narrative: the First Five Canterbury Tales*, p. 123. He is referring to a series of drawings made ca. 1480 for a German *Hausbuch*, in which there are representations of the Children of the planets.

Saturn's speech appears at the end of the third part of the tale; however, this influence is present from the beginning.[45] The typical disorder associated to Saturn can be found in the war made to Thebes by Theseus and in its reason, the slaughter of the Theban widows' husbands by Creon. We see another trait of Saturn's influence in the imprisonment of Arcite and Palamon: the former, in fact, accuses Saturn of their captivity. He also makes reference to a specific disposition of the planet during their births: "So stood the hevene whan that we were born. We moste endure it; this is the short and pleyn" (ll. 1090-1091). This is a reference to the Babylonian archetype that I have already discussed in the previous chapter: it seems that they are doomed to this negative situation because of their Theban origin.

Death is another inevitable element of Saturn's influence: when Arcite dies, there is general grief among the other characters and the spectators of the tournament: as Peter Brown and Andrew Butcher point out, black is Saturn's colour and also the colour used for the arrangements of Arcite's funeral.[46] Saturn also influences the physical traits of the characters, who become his "children". In the previous chapter, I wrote that Arcite and Palamon are not physically described: Chaucer, in contrast, writes about Arcite's physical change once he leaves Athens. The knight is deprived of sleep, appetite, he is pale (like Saturn) and affected by melancholy, which is the disease caused by Saturn's influence (ll. 1361-1376). The association to Arcite's new occupation as a squire is significant: he is a water bearer, which is related to the zodiacal sign of Aquarius, one of the two signs (with Capricorn) under Saturn's domain.[47] We can find another reference to Saturn in Lycurgus, who is old and whose hair is as black as crows (ll. 2142-2144): thus, also Palamon is indirectly under Saturn's influence, since he is accompanied by Lycurgus during the tournament.[48] The two knights embody the double nature of Kronos: Arcite, affected physically and psychologically by Saturn,

[45] On this point, see Brown, Peter, Andrew Butcher, *The Age of Saturn: Literature and History in The Canterbury Tales*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991, pp. 212-223.
[46] Brown, Peter, Andrew Butcher, *The Age of Saturn: Literature and History in the Canterbury Tales*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991, p. 217. The authors are citing John Trevisa's Middle English translation of the encyclopedia of Bartholomaeus Anglicus, *De Proprietatibus Rerum*.
[47] Brown, Butcher, p. 216.
[48] On this point, see Brooks, Douglas, Alastair Fowler, "The Meaning of Chaucer's Knight's Tale", *Medium Aevum*, 39 (1970), pp. 123-146.

personifies the escape to the underworld of the pagan deity, while Palamon is accompanied by Lycurgus, who does not have the typical martial traits of a warrior (old age, chariot pulled by bulls); therefore, he can be considered the knight who shows prudence (Saturn's wisdom). The former is subjected to the negative aspects of Saturn as a planet, while the latter to its positive influences.

At this point, one might ask the reason for such a dominant presence of Saturn in the tale, to the extent that the main characters are affected in their actions by the planet and the pagan deity. From Kronos' myth, Chaucer borrows the typical wisdom, prudence, hard labour in agriculture and time associated to the deity, and uses them through the figure of his Saturn in order to give a "key" for reading, not only the Knight's Tale, but the entire work. Planetary influences are literary elements to show how human beings are fragile, struck by their own passions, which derange them from real happiness, that is, human freedom. In the following section of the current chapter, I shall provide some evidence of this personal opinion.

2.3. Saturn's decision and the consequent debate

After his speech, Saturn comforts Venus, asking her not to weep: he decides that Arcite should have victory, as Mars promised him, and Palamon his lady, as the goddess confirmed after his prayer (ll. 2470-2473). The outcome of his decision is Arcite's victory in the tournament but also his death and Palamon and Emelye's marriage. This happy ending, coming after the sorrowful event, is typical of romances[49]: both knights fight courageously during the tournament for the beloved lady, but one dies and is praised as a worthy knight during his funeral, while the other manages to marry Emelye.

I believe that the happy ending is not the real message of the tale: there is a speech, given by Theseus before celebrating the marriage between Palamon and Emelye, characterised by a variety of

[49] Chaucer, Geoffrey, *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. by Larry D. Benson, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988, p. 7.

patterns, both religious, philosophical and courtly. At the beginning of his speech, he draws a cosmology, in which he explains how everything began: he mentions "the Firste Moevere", that is god, or more specifically in this case, Jupiter, who created the "cheyne of love", mixing the four elements, air, water, fire and earth in a single unity which could hardly be broken (ll. 2987-2993). Besides this creation, the "First Mover" included a limited number of days for everything generated on earth, establishing an eternal and unchanging order: nature was originated by something perfect and stable, and eventually it became corruptible (ll. 2994-3010). Then, Theseus provides some examples of limited earthly duration: he mentions the oak (the long-living tree), the hard stone, the river and the great towns which seem undestroyable because of their long existence, but they eventually decay, as human beings do (ll.3017-3023). After this cosmology, he exhorts his audience to be happy and not weep for Arcite's death. He says there is no reason for mourning, precisely because we all need "to maken vertu of necessitee" (l. 3042), that is, accept this divine plan, order (ll. 3043-3044). He continues by saying that people who try to rebel against this perfect scheme are fool: they should safeguard their honour before their death, even before when their names are forgotten and lose their fame (ll. 3045-3056). What is worthy of note is Theseus' last consideration: he believes that the general mourning for Arcite's death is unreasonable, because life is like a prison and he is free now from any earthly influence (ll. 3058-3061). He concludes his speech by saying that Arcite is in a better position now and urges Palamon and Emelye to be happy for him (ll. 3062-3066). Theseus' speech is a longer and more consoling version of his father Egeus' speech. We read that Egeus, who makes his speech before Theseus, does not appear comforting and his words are harsher than Theseus. He basically focuses on the fact that life is just a woeful passing back and forth, and death is the end of any sorrow (ll. 2847-2849). He also says that nobody has ever died without living for a limited period on earth and nobody has lived without dying sooner or later (ll. 2843-2846), without specifying the divine order explained by his son.

At this point, one might ask why the final part of the Knight's Tale is packed with philosophical and existential allusions to life, death and courtly behaviour, since at the end of the tale

a marriage is celebrated. My intention is to analyse Theseus' speech, considering the references and the sources which the Knight, or better, Chaucer, refers to.

References to Anicius Manlius Torquatus Severinus Boethius' *De Consolatione Philosophiae* are undoubtedly present in Theseus' speech, but also in other excerpts of the tale, which I shall discuss in the following sections. When Boethius mentions the four elements combined in a single unity, he is referring to the unity discussed by Boethius regarding happiness: sufficiency, power, renown, fame are not single elements which constitute happiness, but a single unity which brings men to happiness; real happiness is God, since all good things are originated by him only.[50] Theseus is creating a perfect universal and cosmological order, whose primary source is god; all things are the unity of this order. I find the association made by Kolve between Theseus and Jupiter particularly interesting. In the previous section, I have tackled the notion of the "Children of the planets": according to Kolve, Jupiter's children are "intellectuals, jurists, and peacemakers, […] scholars at their books, […], judges, boatsmen […] lawyers, clerks, and courtiers".[51] Through his speech, Theseus is acquiring the role of a preacher, he is giving a sense to Saturn's harsh decision, he is finding a reason for all the sorrow caused by the final accident. He wants to establish order again: according to him, everything was created to exist but also to die after a certain period. What he is suggesting is to live worthily and under a courtly code, showing excellence and honour as long as we can, precisely because earthly life is not eternal. Excellence and honour are part of the code that knights must abide by during their existence, and Arcite and Palamon display this chivalric attitude: they fight in the tournament so as to win Emelye's heart, thus, they fight for love.

Furthermore, Theseus suggests that we should make necessity out of virtue, that is, accepting this order and living worthily. He is, as Jupiter's child, also a peacemaker, and reconciles the two lovers, urging them to marry. Marriage symbolises the perfect ending for a medieval romance,

[50] Boethius, Anicius Manlius Torquatus Severinus, *The Consolation of Philosophy*, ed. by H.F. Stewart, E.K. Rand, S.J. Tester, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1990, (III. p. 9 – III. m. 9), pp. 265-277. This is the edition that I use throughout.
[51] Kolve, *Chaucer and the Imagery of Narrative: the First Five Canterbury Tales*, pp. 127 and 129. The scholar is mentioning the German text printed in Bossert and Storck, *Mittelalterliche Hausbuch*.

because it is the union of two people who love each other, as all good things of the universe are the union of real happiness (according to Boethius). Through Theseus' interpretation, the Knight can offer his view concerning life: the positive meaning of Arcite's death, retrieved by the duke, suits best the expectation of the courtly medieval audience of that period. As Joseph Westlund points out, Theseus' justice is expressed by his pity.[52] As a matter of fact, readers have noticed hitherto the evolution of Theseus' attitude and behaviour: at the beginning of the tale, he is described as a conqueror, endowed with pride and aggressiveness, but then he becomes a merciful man who decides to spare Arcite and Palamon's lives and organises the tournament, showing at the end of the tale wisdom and finding a peaceful interpretation for Arcite's death. Thus, we can say that this tale concerns morality and nobility.[53] However, the Knight does not express only Theseus' personal ideals. He is, in some way, the person who expresses also Chaucer's ideas: he "as narrator stands between Chaucer and Theseus".[54] I believe that Chaucer is wholly able to express the message of the tale through the figure of Saturn: not by chance, Theseus's speech is an attempt to moderate the terms through which Saturn makes his decision and expresses his meaning and influence.

This final speech is not Theseus' first attempt to restore order in a world, which apparently is affected by disorder. We note the presence of the amphitheatre in the first chapter. Theseus finds the two knights fighting like fierce beasts for love. He intends to condemn them to death since Arcite comes back to Athens, even though he is exiled, and Palamon escapes from prison. The law imposed on the two knights is another link to the figure of Jupiter: he is the king of all ancient pagan gods and demands absolute devotion. When he decides to spare their lives, he builds the amphitheatre. In the first chapter, I posited that the temples and the altars are built inside the amphitheatre in order to make the two knights approach the spiritual side of life, since they seem to have lost it, acquiring a more savage and irrational attitude in the grove. I think that this is Theseus' possible intention, since he is compared to Jupiter and he behaves like a preacher at the end of the tale: he wants them to retrieve

[52] Westlund, Joseph, "The "Knight's Tale" as an Impetus for the Pilgrimage", *Philological Quarterly*, 43 (1964), p. 12.
[53] Westlund, p. 11.
[54] Scheps, Walter, "Chaucer's Theseus and the "Knight's Tale", *Leeds Studies in English*, 9 (1976), p. 19.

the right attitude to live properly. However, we should consider to whom they pray: the three gods are pagan deities who represent human faults. The two knights and Emelye are praying to their own desires and they are far from restoring the order previously lost: they are still led by their passions. As Westlund writes, these deities are impartial because through their quarrel they influence the lives of the three characters, who are praying to the chaos which characterised their actions from the beginning of the tale.[55] In praying the pagan gods, they show what they really are: just human beings influenced by gods, planets and fate: we have already seen that the characters are not described throughout the tale, we only know that they seem to be at the mercy of the stars, and they have no freedom to decide for themselves. Therefore, Theseus' final speech is the umpteenth attempt to restore the lost order and unfortunately, as pointed out by Kolve, he is himself subjected to the fickleness of stars, fortune, since he is human: "Theseus can only work toward order".[56]

At this point, one might ask who could be able to solve the existential situation of disorder in which all the characters of the tale are involved. I think that Theseus' final speech is just comforting, but it is not the solution to the problem of the human condition proposed by the Knight, or rather, by Chaucer. He seems only to offer a religious and moral message, in order to accept Arcite's death. However, I believe that his speech is developed by Chaucer because of the historical background in which Chaucer lives. Not by chance does Chaucer add Saturn, not present in *Teseida*: I posit that the role of Saturn in the Knight's Tale is to answer to the philosophical question of the tale concerning human disorder. We should analyse him looking at his duality, coming from Kronos' myths, in order to understand his role: he is presented as a malevolent star, which influences negatively the characters of the tale, but he is also the wise grandfather of all pagan deities who resolves the quarrel between Venus and Mars. He represents both the fickleness of human beings who are easily guided by their own desires and inclinations (as star) but also the prudence to live wisely (as pagan deity). His decision must not be considered the punishment typically associated to the negative planetary

[55] Westlund, pp. 6-7.
[56] Kolve, *Chaucer and the Imagery of Narrative: the First Five Canterbury Tales*, p. 129.

influence, but rather the moral message which characterises the tale and gives it the first place in *The Canterbury Tales*. As a grandfather, he warns the pilgrims to change their attitude towards life. He urges them to leave any kind of external influence and live according to their own individuality. In the following sections of this chapter, I shall analyse Saturn in his dual aspect, so as to understand his role in the tale.

2.4. Prisons, fortune and disorder

In his speech, Saturn explains that prisons are under his planetary domain (l. 2457). We see their presence throughout the tale: the first is obviously the prison-tower in which the two cousins are condemned. The second is the prison of love[57] which can be found in the two knights' behaviour and the love struggle for Emelye. I posit that the amphitheatre is the third prison. All of them play an essential role in the tale: the prison-tower and the prison of love represent the fickleness of fortune and its effects on Arcite and Palamon, whereas the amphitheatre shows that this trait does not belong only to the two knights, but also to humankind, underlying that human nature is characterised by contrariety. Saturn as planet symbolises the metaphorical prison in which human beings live erroneously, associating real happiness to something unstable, inconsistent and self-destructive, that is, Fortune. Chaucer takes Boethius' *De Consolatione Philosophiae* as a source for using the metaphor of the prison: I think that Boethius is present throughout the tale, not only in Theseus' last speech as we have read previously. Chaucer alludes to Boethius much earlier in the tale, and Saturn is his literary device to personify some of Boethius' thoughts in *De Consolatione Philosophiae*: in his work, Boethius is in prison, exiled and condemned to death. Lady Philosophy appears in order to show him the correct and moral answer to all his considerations concerning life. Let us analyse Saturn's role as malevolent planetary influence starting from the prisons I have mentioned before.

[57] On the prison of love, see Kolve, V.A., *Chaucer and the Imagery of Narrative: the First Five Caterbury Tales*, London: Arnold, 1984, pp. 90-93.

We know that the two Theban knights are imprisoned in a tower and close to it, there is a beautiful garden in which Emelye is seen by the two cousins, walking and gathering flowers. We need to consider two aspects of this scene: the opposition between the harshness of the prison and the beauty of the garden and the repeated presence of "to-and-fro" and "up and down". Both aspects are analysed by Kolve and my intention is to cite his consideration so as to develop a consideration regarding the three characters and their attitude towards Fortune. Kolve writes that the prison-tower and the garden share a wall which joins them together: this wall reminds readers the House of Fortune, present in *The Romance of the Rose* (begun by Guillaume de Lorris and continued by Jean de Meung), whose one part is decorated "with walls of gold and silver set with precious jewels", and "the rest is low and crumbling, with walls of mud and a thatch roof falling into ruin".[58] I believe that this comparison between the prison and the garden in the Knight's Tale and the House of Fortune in *The Romance of the Rose* suggests that Chaucer uses the beauty of the garden opposed to the misery of the prison as a metaphor to indicate that the three characters continually pass from positive situations to more negative ones and the other way round. Chaucer is referring to a symbol well-known to his audience, that is, the Wheel of Fortune. We find different allusions to this symbol among the Babylonians and ancient Egyptians, who invented it, but the metaphor associated to the Wheel of Fortune was developed among the ancient Greeks (we can find it, for instance, in some of Pindar and Sophocles' writings); however, the first representations of the Wheel of Fortune come only with the ancient Romans, becoming a more shared concept from Cicero's time.[59] It is only from the Middle Ages (central and late) that the Wheel of Fortune "represents not just the slipping but the rotating fortunes of men"[60], which symbolised the "ups and downs" of the changes of the social status, occurring from the eleventh century.[61] We find the rotation of the Wheel throughout the tale, not only in the reversal of different situations, but also in the repeated "to-and-fro" and "up and down": for

[58] Kolve, *Chaucer and the Imagery of Narrative: the First Five Canterbury Tales*, p. 87.
[59] Robinson, David M., "The Wheel of Fortune", *Classical Philology*, 41 (1946), pp. 207-208.
[60] Radding, Charles M., "Fortune and her Wheel: The Meaning of a Medieval Symbol", *Mediaevistik*, 5 (1992), p. 127.
[61] Radding, p. 130.

instance, Emelye walks "up and down" in the garden (l. 1052) or Palamon walks "to-and-fro" in the prison (l. 1071). As pointed out by Kolve, "the repetition is surely a key to something central in the poem":[62] I think they are all metaphors used by Chaucer to indicate how these characters wander in error because they are affected by their feelings and faults. These metaphors find the utmost expression in the three lines uttered by Egeus at the end of the poem (ll. 2847-2849), establishing a reference not only to the characters of the tale, but more specifically, to the pilgrims of the *Canterbury Tales*. The pilgrimage, in fact, becomes more a metaphor for the erring human experience, than a religious metaphor for the spiritual preparation towards God before death.

The influence brought by fortune characterises and justifies the actions of the characters, especially in the prison scene. We need to remember that Arcite laments his and his cousin's captivity, claiming that Saturn (as a planet) is responsible and affects their lives since their birth (ll. 1087-1090): all they can do is to accept and endure this situation (l. 1091). Even the fact that Palamon casts his eyes upon Emelye for the first time and falls in love with her is caused by chance or accident (ll. 1074-1077). All these are examples to understand how the two characters blame Fortune in order to escape from moral judgement, thus, their own responsibilities.[63] From their words, we can understand that they are building their ethics, but this is morally weak, since it is based on luck and accidents of fate. They seem utterly influenced by external factors which prevent them from choosing individually. I believe that they show their immaturity towards moral topics, especially when Arcite refers to Saturn's influence, because they think they are helpless human beings, therefore, they only have to accept passively what happens. In short, they lack free will. As Thomas A. Van writes, they consider the universe as the obstacle of their desires, precisely because Fortune is always contriving a snare for them.[64] I mention two particular "snares", or prisons, contrived by fortune in the tale: the prison of love and the amphitheatre.

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[62] Kolve, *Chaucer and the Imagery of Narrative: the First Five Canterbury Tales*, p. 87.
[63] Mitchell, J. Allan, "Romancing Ethics in Boethius, Chaucer and Levinas: Fortune, Moral Luck, and Erotic Adventure", *Comparative Literature*, 57 (2005), online.
[64] Van, Thomas A., "Imprisoning and Ensnarement in "Troilus" and "The Knight's Tale"", *Papers on Language and Literature*, 7 (1971), p. 7.

The first "snare", that is, the prison of love, can be identified when Arcite is released from prison, thanks to Perotheus, whereas Palamon is obliged to dwell in prison. This is one of the typical reversals associated to Fortune, which through the rotation of its wheel, changes everything. What is astonishingly unusual is what Arcite thinks regarding his freedom: he blames Fortune once again, because he believes that Palamon is not in prison, but in heaven; his cousin still has the possibility to see Emelye every day, while he is exiled and obliged to stay away from her (ll. 1235-1250). Palamon, in contrast, thinks that Arcite is luckier than him, because he is free and can go back to Thebes, their homeland, whereas he complains his lack of freedom but also his pains caused by the love for Emelye (l. 1283 and ll. 1293-1298). I need to make two considerations about this passage: the prison of love and the question directly posed by the Knight to his audience. From the words of the two knights, we can easily understand that they are not only physically imprisoned, but they are also imprisoned by the love they feel for Emelye. Arcite is so emotionally deranged that he considers his regained freedom as a kind of punishment inflicted by Fortune, while Palamon's pain caused by his captivity is intensified by his love for the lady. Therefore, they are just men oppressed by their feelings, which make them irrational, or more precisely, at the whims of Fortune. Saturn as a planet is the link between the physical prison, the garden but also the prison of love: it symbolises the irrational side of the two knights, which allows passions and faults to guide them in their choices, considerations and actions. This is a reference to *De Consolatione Philosophiae*, where Lady Philosophy makes a list of vices which are considered paramount by human beings for their happiness: material possessions, fame, power and lust. She admonishes Boethius not to pursue them because they are far from the result of real happiness, that is, having a soul which is not conditioned and ready to reach a higher good (Book II and Book III). What Boethius writes in his work leads us directly to the final question posed by the Knight after Arcite's release from prison:

> You lovers axe I now this questioun,
> Who hath the worse, Arcite or Palamoun?
> That oon may seen his lady day by day,
> But in prison he moot dwelle always.
> That other wher him list may ryde or go,
> But seen his lady shal he neveremo.

Now demeth as yow liste, ye that can, (ll. 1347-1353).

Though he seems to address lovers, or more specifically, the medieval courtly audience, Chaucer's purpose is to ask all his readers to ponder on a philosophical issue. In his final speech, Theseus says that Palamon and Emelye should not weep for Arcite's death since he is free from the instability of life (Fortune). His words allude to a more religious topic and remind readers of Troilus' soul, which sees human beings from above, while he is reaching the heavenly spheres, and mocks them because they are still struck by earthly desires and passions;[65] Arcita's soul does the same once he is ascending to heaven, in *Teseida*. (Book XI, stanza 1, 2 and 3). Theseus' words are anticipated by the Knight's question at the end of the first part of the tale. However, I posit that Chaucer's intention is not simply to ponder on religious concerns through the Knight's question, such as the ascension of the souls to heaven. When Arcite dies, in fact, the Knight says: "His spirit chaunged hous and went ether, As I cam never, I can nat tellen wher. Therfor I stinte, I nam no divinistre;" (ll. 2809-2811). Conversely, he wants to focus on what Boethius' Lady Philosophy says concerning false happiness. Through this question, he wants his audience to decide who between Arcite and Palamon is really happy. What Chaucer is highlighting here is the fact that Arcite is out of any conditions (prisons), thus, according to Boethius, he should be happier than Palamon. Despite his regained freedom, he is still unhappy, because he is seeking his happiness among deceitful aspects of life. Palamon, in contrast, remains subjected to the whims of Fortune, and he is suffering for his love for Emelye. Their behaviour shows how they live erroneously and how their reason is blurred by their love and desire, and does not allow them to distinguish real happiness from false good.

The third prison present in the tale is the amphitheatre. We know that at the beginning of the third part, Chaucer presents it in detail, with specific descriptions of the temples and altars built inside it. I want to underline an important aspect of his descriptions, because he writes that:

Round was the shap, in manere of compas,
Ful of degrees, the heighte of sixty pas,
That whan a man was set on o° degree,
He letted nat his felawe for to see. (ll. 1889-1892)

[65] Chaucer, Geoffrey, *Troilus and Criseyde*, ed. by Stephen A. Barney, New York: Norton, 2006, ll. 1807-1825. This is the edition that I use throughout.

These are geometrical allusions to the shape of the amphitheatre. North compares the arena with the zodiac, and hypothesises that the oratories built inside the amphitheatre could be planetary houses:[66] they are geographically located east, west and north (ll. 1903, 1906 and 1909). I agree with this reading, because it indicates what we have discussed so far concerning Fortune and its effects on Arcite and Palamon, but presented according to a universal perspective. Inside the amphitheatre, there are not only the two knights and Emelye, but also Theseus, the spectators of the tournament and the men who accompany both Arcite and Palamon. We can say, thus, that this amphitheatre represents the world with its inhabitants who are influenced by the circular shape of the construction, alluding to the sky and its stars which affect human behaviour (astrological influence). The prison of life in which Arcite and Palamon are condemned from the beginning becomes now universal, a human trait. The opposition between the prison and the garden of the first part of the tale is presented again in this building: we see the detailed description of the oratories, whose beauty is accomplished by decorations according to the mythological and medieval astrological tradition. But we also read about the three characters' prayers to the pagan deities: they are praying to the chaos related to human life. They seem "blinded" by their own desires, especially Arcite, who asks for victory. The amphitheatre is built to restore order, since the two knights lose their reason in prison and also in the grove, but this building is just another "snare" contrived by Fortune: they find themselves again trapped in the fickleness of earthly life, which leads them to fight for the cause which has been conditioning them from the beginning. I think that Chaucer makes a more general consideration not limited to the two cousins. In this alternation of the beauty of the building and the chaos contained inside it, there is another link to human nature. T. McAlindon's point is that: "medieval and Renaissance literature flourished in an intellectual environment where it was accepted that contrariety is an essential feature of the macrocosm and the microcosm".[67] The world and the universe were believed to be God's creations, in an order of different spheres, from earth to heaven. This order is, however, threatened

[66] North, p. 149.
[67] McAlindon, T., "Cosmology, Contrariety and the Knight's Tale", *Medium Aevum*, 55 (1986), p. 41.

by human instability, since according to the Fall, they lost their divine element and embraced their sinful nature. Because of these opposites, human nature is characterised by contrariety, which can be also found in the Knight's Tale. The amphitheatre is the outcome of these human opposites present before the third part of the tale. The two cousins are united by a harmonious bond broken by the love strife, and Theseus' attitude, initially martial, eventually becomes more chivalric and charitable: he builds the amphitheatre to solve the quarrel. We also need to remember Palamon, who, struck by sorrow for the love for Emelye, seeks his cousin to claim victory, but in the amphitheatre, he asks for the purpose which really matters: to love Emelye unconditionally. They move from irrationality to reason, from love to war. The reversal of Fortune, thus, reflects the reversal of attitude of the characters and underlines human nature, made by opposites.

Chaucer is posing an existential issue to his audience, which is embodied by the planetary figure of Saturn: human beings use their instincts rather than their reason and live in a "prison", the symbol of this self-limitation. However, Saturn himself is presented by opposites: he is also a wise man, who solves the quarrel between Venus and Mars. In the following section of this chapter, I shall propose the positive version of Kronos' myth, that is, the prosperous golden age brought by Kronos, embodied by Saturn's wisdom in The Knight's Tale as the answer to the existential issue posed by the writer.

2.5. Boethius' influence as a key for the Canterbury pilgrimage

In the previous sections, I compared Arcite and Palamon's behaviour throughout the tale and I wrote that there is a change in Palamon's attitude once he prays Venus inside the amphitheatre. We see that Palamon is constantly struck by the influence of stars and Fortune, thus, by his passions, but eventually he chooses love over personal victory, desiring his lady in his arms (ll. 2239-2247). In order to understand the possible meaning expressed by the figure of Saturn in the tale (related to his

wisdom), we need to focus on Palamon's change once again, compared to Arcite. Let us understand this meaning gradually.

Arcite shows himself more affected by different influences than his cousin: he acquires, in fact, physical saturnian characteristics, that is, the negative aspects of Saturn's planetary influence. He also ponders on different existential issues: there is a passage showing us his philosophical attitude, in which he says that human beings constantly complain about God's providence or Fortune for their fate (ll. 1251-1253). He also argues that people seek riches but they eventually find death, because riches are the cause of murder (ll. 1255-1256). He continues by saying that:

> We faren as he that dronke is as a mous:
> A dronke man wot wel he hath an hous,
> But he noot which the righte wey is thider;
> And to a dronke man the wey is slider.
> And certes, in this world so faren we;
> We seken faste after felicitee,
> But we goon wrong ful often, trewely. (ll. 1261-1267)

This is a direct reference to Boethius and his opinion concerning earthly life and real happiness, expressed in *De Consolatione Philosophiae*. These lines present the same metaphor of the drunken man used by Boethius to deal with human inability to seek real happiness (III. p. 2). Human beings look for riches, but they do not understand that their possessions do not belong to them, because the beauty or worth of something belongs only to the object itself, humans can only admire it but not possess it (II. p. 5). They seek power, without considering the fact that tyrants are constantly scared of the possibility of being oppressed by their subjects (II. p. 6). They seek glory, forgetting that the universe is enormous and renowned people are known only in their place (II. p. 7). Riches, fame, power and lust are all unstable elements, belonging to Fortune and its changes (II. p. 8). They do not constitute a single unity: Boethius, through Lady Philosophy, suggests that human beings tend to split them as different elements because they are struck by Fortune's changes. Real happiness is, in truth, self-sufficiency: it is a single unity, related to God, making human beings need nothing (III. p. 9-10). Though Arcite becomes the spokesman of Boethius' opinions, he remains concerned about his personal victory when he prays Mars, forgetting the real aim of his love, that is Emelye.

I have already written that Arcite and Palamon are described neither physically, nor psychologically. Paull F. Baum writes that establishing a differentiation between Arcite and Palamon is useless, because Chaucer opts to make a general characterization of the tale (according to the courtly-love tradition) rather than a characterization of the two knights.[68] I partially agree with his opinion, because sympathising for a specific character between the two is difficult, since they are similar; but at the same time, they also understand that Palamon becomes wiser in the third part of the tale and changes his opinion towards the love strife. He, despite his human tendency to live in a prison of self-limitation, eventually chooses to love Emelye unconditionally. As Douglas Brooks and Alastair Fowler write, "Palamon, however, can see that union as more than a victory":[69] he prays, thus, for the union of love. He seems in agreement with Boethius' concept of real happiness as a single unity before the end of the tale, while Arcite recognises his fault while he is dying. Chaucer uses Arcite and Palamon as "pawns" in Saturn's hands: they are the interpreters of the meanings associated with Saturn (represented by writers and mythographers throughout the centuries, as I discussed at the beginning of this chapter). In the first parts of the tale, we cannot see a real differentiation between the two until the third part of the tale, because they are presented just as "children of Saturn", influenced by their passions and human faults: they embody the negative aspect of Saturn (malevolent planetary influence). However, Palamon's change of attitude underlines the typical wisdom and prudence related to the pagan deity, embodying the moral message of Lady Philosophy in *De Consolatione Philosophiae*.

At this point, the role of Saturn in the Knight's Tale is to moderate human passions (according to his final decision), as wise people do: since he is also the god of time, he reminds us that we are finite, and subordinated to human faults: humans need to be perseverant, in order to become wise and free from this influence, as Palamon shows through his prayer.[70] Alan T. Gaylord writes that Saturn

[68] Baum, Paull F., "Characterization in the "Knight's Tale"", *Modern Language Notes*, 46 (1931), pp. 302-303.
[69] Brooks, Douglas, Alastair Fowler, "The Meaning of Chaucer's Knight's Tale", *Medium Aevum*, 39 (1970), p. 137.
[70] Brooks, Fowler, p. 137.

"is a sign of a dark destiny to which the willful passions of men commit them".[71] I suppose that this "dark destiny" is human self-destruction: Saturn is also represented, in fact, as a chaotic figure. The two cousins break their strong bond, claiming to love Emelye best: Palamon suffers from love melancholy but he manages to recover, while Arcite, struck initially by his lust, then by his desire for glory, goes insane and eventually perishes. At the same time, Saturn is presented as a grandfather who takes care of his granddaughter Venus ("My dere doghter Venus" l. 2453, and ll. 2470-2478). As written by Brooks and Fowler, the Knight's Tale is about human growth in order to reach wise maturity and accomplish the formation of the soul.[72] Not by chance, the characters of the tale change their behaviour: we have seen the two cousins, but also Theseus, and all of them seem to mature through their mistakes. This maturity is represented by Saturn's wisdom: he is described as an old deity, whose experience precedes him (ll. 2443-2445). His message expressed by his final decision suggests that if human beings are free from any external influence, they are able to live rationally, going beyond their immediate needs. With his scythe, Saturn metaphorically cuts off the superfluous present in life because he wants to make people grow wiser and be self-sufficient: he points out the passing from the impulsiveness of youth to the temperance and the self-control of old age. For this reason, Arcite's death is not to be considered a moral punishment, but rather a way to improve moral judgement in life, through the different life ages. His death is what Chaucer uses to represent Saturn's mythological and astrological harshness, which are "softened" by Theseus' final speech. So is the punishment inflicted to Criseyde in *The Testament of Cresseid* written by Robert Henryson: Saturn is the deity, together with Cynthia (the Moon), who punishes Troilus' lover through leprosy (ll. 302-343) for being blasphemous with Cupid and Venus and adulterous with Troilus (ll. 126-140). The disease changes her physical appearance, modifying her beauty (ll. 344-378): I believe that also in this case, the writer, through the figure of Saturn, admonishes his audience to follow the wise path, leaving any superfluous and erroneous deception, brought by passions, more specifically, by the

[71] Gaylord, Alan T., "The Role of Saturn in the Knight's Tale", *The Chaucer Review*, 8 (1974), p. 184.
[72] Brooks, Fowler, p. 142.

fickleness of Fortune, like beauty or sexual desire. As written by Boethius, the real punishment for those who let passions guide them is losing their humanity and being like animals, not like gods (IV. p. 3): Saturn suggests that we should elevate ourselves morally. Through an improved moral judgement, Saturn is able to bring order, in a world struck by disorder: he manages, thus, to bring the golden age. This new prosperous era does not necessarily coincide with the old age: Saturn reminds his "grandchildren" to be wise even before the end of life (Palamon is an example of wisdom before the old age). Therefore, Palamon is not the best or worthiest knight, he is simply the interpreter of Saturn's lesson, understanding the truth of the love strife: love is not a prize to win, but rather the union of two people who love each other. Not by chance, he is accompanied by Lycurgus during the tournament, who is not typically described as a warrior, while Arcite is accompanied by Emetreus, who is represented as a young knight, longing for victory. Even Lycurgus is saturnian somehow and for this reason, he shows prudence in the battlefield: he arrives to the amphitheatre with a chariot pulled by bulls (related to the planetary slowness of Saturn), he is not young, he has black hair and so forth (Saturnian characteristics).[73] We can say that Palamon is also the example which shows us what Boethius writes about virtuous people: they are always rewarded, because they pursue real happiness, which is, the reward itself. (IV. p. 3)

The moral lesson of Saturn characterises the entire tale, which, I believe, is not coincidentally the first of a long sequence of tales. We read tales about human faults in the *Canterbury Tales*, such as greed, cuckoldry, deceitfulness; even the pilgrims seem to be struck by these human faults, as in the case of the Pardoner, who is more interested in riches and his personal wealth, rather than the salvation of the souls. Conversely, the Knight's Tale offers a moral message: it shows human weakness but at the same time, through the figure of Saturn and his decision, it offers a possible "key" to all the other tales and the admonishment for those pilgrims who display wicked attitudes. It is also the "key" which offers the correct way to tackle the pilgrimage: Theseus' final speech and Egeus'

[73] Brooks, Fowler, pp. 8-12.

quotes concerning earthly life are religious and they basically suggest that human beings should accept their condition, and death becomes the end of this temporary sorrow. But Chaucer's intention is neither religious, nor redemptive: he, in contrast, deals with the society in which he lives. In order to understand this perspective, we need to focus on the figure of the Knight.

I have previously agreed with Scheps' opinion concerning the Knight's position in the tale: he is between Theseus and Chaucer. We notice that the characters of the tale are dukes, noblemen, and not peasants: the Knight is a man of the upper classes, as presented in the General Prologue. Through Theseus' final speech, he is representing a world according to the Christian view, but also to the courtly-love tradition which is commonly shared by aristocracy. He displays the features of courtly love when he refers to Arcite and Palamon's behaviour when they see Emelye for the first time, and he focuses on pity when Theseus spares the two cousins' lives. However, William Frost points out that "the view of the universe taken by the Tale is a tragic view, and the condition of man presented by the teller is also tragic":[74] Egeus' speech underlines that death is the end of every human sorrow, but death occurs to everyone, both wealthy and poor people.[75] As a matter of fact, Saturn's moral message is not limited to the high ranks. Saturn deals with all human beings who are not able to contain themselves and are influenced by passions. The Knight, thus, presents also Chaucer's point of view: the Knight is somehow saturnian, that is, he has already learnt the pagan deity's lesson. We can notice it in his description in the General Prologue: in the introduction, I cited what Chaucer writes about his physical appearance. He is an old man, like Saturn; he is not dressed up like his son, the Squire, and despite his military past deeds, he is no more prone to military glory: these elements reveal that he has learnt Boethius' philosophical idea, and for this reason, he is not interested in earthly things. All the philosophical and moral allusions of the tale expressed by the Knight shows that he is a wise man who understands what is really worthy of note in life. He becomes a moral example, like Saturn, for everyone, offering the key also for the other pilgrims and their tales. Therefore, the Knight

[74] Frost, William, "An Interpretation of Chaucer's Knight's Tale", *The Review of English Studies*, 25 (1949), p. 299.
[75] Frost, pp. 299-300.

represents his social class through Theseus' final speech, but at the same time, he shows, through the figure of Saturn, that is, Chaucer's opinion, his experience, prudence and perseverance.

Saturn's influence on the Knight offers a further consideration regarding the grandfather of all the pagan deities. I have written that there are neither altars, nor temples inside the amphitheatre devoted to him; no character of the tale mentions him, unlike the different considerations on Venus, Mars and Jupiter. Nevertheless, as I have written hitherto, Saturn plays a huge role in the tale: I suppose that there is no mention of Saturn and he is not praised as a deity because he merely represents human individuality from a social point of view. Theresa Tinkle cites different mythographic interpretations related to Saturn: he is the founder of agriculture, he is also a philosopher and prelate, he represents time which devours everything, and he is also the baleful planet which affects negatively earthly life.[76] I believe that Chaucer makes use of these interpretations all combined in his character to represent the society in which he lives and its members, that is, the pilgrims. We know that the participants of the pilgrimage come from different social classes: all of them could represent one or more of Saturn's mythographic features (labourers, churchmen, clerks and so forth). What Chaucer suggests with this association is not only the philosophical and moral message that I have already discussed, but something different: he urges the pilgrims to live according to their individuality. In the description of Saturn, Chaucer writes that he solves the quarrel between Venus and Mars "agayn his kynde" (l. 2451): despite its planetary chaotic force, the deity makes use of his wisdom, since he is old, to restore order. He does not abide by the astrological tradition which represents him as a malevolent star and finds a solution, despite its harshness. Saturn is the character, thus, who personifies humankind following their individuality, rather than their passions. He is the one who goes beyond the bond of medieval superstitions and lives his life according to his principles, overcoming the planetary influence attributed to his figure. Chaucer's intention is to incite his audience to "build" their future. Chaucer wrote his work at the end of the fourteenth century, thus,

[76] Tinkle, Theresa, "Saturn of the Several Faces: A Survey of the Medieval Mythographic Traditions", *Viator*, 18 (1987), pp. 289-308.

between the end of the Middle Ages and the beginning of the early modern period. He was obviously unaware of this historical passage, the terms "Middle Ages" and "early modern period" are modern conventions and labels. But I think that he was aware of the social changes which occurred in that period, therefore, he alludes to them in his tales, especially through the allegorical figure of Saturn, for what concerns the Knight's Tale. As written by Elton D. Higgs, the General Prologue presents the tensions between the medieval principles, such as feudalism and church, and a new order, characterized by a greater individualism.[77] This new order is the emerging middle class during the fourteenth century. Going against his "kynde" is a literary metaphor, I think, to show that Saturn plays the role of a fourteenth-century man who understands that his society is changing: he is to leave some of the medieval superstitions and limitations, but also the feudal system, in order to facilitate social mobility. He represents the *homo faber* who "builds" his life and society, establishing the golden age of the saturnian myth, guided by wisdom and prudence, not by irrationality and false beliefs in planetary influences. This is possible through the correct use of free will: Boethius discusses it in Book IV and V. He writes that the outcome of human actions depends upon will (the desire for the good) and ability (in order to achieve this good): without them, the good, or rather, real happiness, cannot be obtained (IV. p. II). Everyone has the will but Lady Philosophy paraphrases Plato by writing that only wise people use the ability because they are able to implement their desire wisely, whereas shameful men follow their passions, inclinations, without achieving what they desire, because wicked actions do not lead to happiness (IV. p. II). He writes that God created the world in an order of things, but people see only the disorder in this world: God gave humankind free will to act; his Providence just foresees everything in a continuous present, but it does not interfere in human decisions (V. p. 6). Kolve points out that:

> The richly medieval furnishings of the poem — its pervasive anachronism — would have suggested to Chaucer's original audiences another recognition as well: that men continue, even after the coming of Christ, to live willfully in confusion and error, prizing the world while holding it in contempt, disdaining the real freedom preferring a plurality of truths in uncertain relationship to each other.[78]

[77] Higgs, Elton D., "The Old Order and the "Newe World" in the General Prologue to the Canterbury Tales", *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 45 (1982), p. 155.
[78] Kolve, *Chaucer and the Imagery of Narrative: the First Five Canterbury Tales*, p. 157.

Saturn represents both the disorder to which Kolve and Boethius refer, but also the wise free will to restore order and cease living in human confusion.

This is how I interpret the social aspects connected to the figure of Saturn in the Knight's Tale. Nonetheless, it merely assumes the fact that Chaucer agreed with the fourteenth-century social changes. Higgs points out that there are few pilgrims who display moral virtues, such as the Knight, the Clerk and the Plowman; the majority of pilgrims show a licentious attitude: the virtuous pilgrims' role is to remind the other pilgrims of the aspects of a good and moral society, avoiding personal advantage and pursuing the communal good.[79] This is an interesting consideration which can be applied to the figure of Saturn in the Knight's Tale. "Agayn his kynde" could also be read as "against his profit": if we take Saturn as a malevolent star, we blame him for catastrophes, betrayals and other negative situations. Thus, his decision, made "against his nature" could be interpreted as Saturn's positive attitude to solve the quarrel between Venus and Mars and show wisdom, prudence and order in an intricated situation. This interpretation can display Chaucer's possible worry towards the social changes: he might have used the figure of Saturn to warn his audience to pursue individuality, without forgetting the past moral virtues. The Knight himself epitomizes these virtues in a world characterised by drastic changes. Under a mythological perspective, Kronos rebels against his tyrannical father, and I see this fact as an impetus for the pilgrims to pursue their individuality and follow their personal path; at the same time, the pilgrims are warned to maintain some moral virtues in their lives in order not to prefer their personal profit over the communal good, unlike Kronos who devoured his children. Theseus, like Jupiter (associated to justice and law), reconciles these two opposite saturnian aspects through his speech. The "ups and downs" of the Wheel of Fortune constantly repeated throughout the tale remind readers of the social changes of the fourteenth century: Saturn admonishes them to use wisdom and prudence because one can easily climb it, reaching the top, and go down from this Wheel as well.

[79] Higgs, p. 170.

Kolve's idea is that the Knight's Tale was written before conceiving the *Canterbury Tales*, and the General Prologue and the pilgrimage are meant to be dedications to the Knight's Tale.[80] I agree with Kolve because Chaucer might have initially composed the tale as a translation of Boccaccio's *Teseida*; subsequently, he changed his literary purpose, that is, the philosophical and existential issue proposed by him in the tale. Saturn is the character who embodies Boethius' moral message: he is the "bitter medicine" which Lady Philosophy offers to humankind in order to change their licentious attitude (III. p. 1) and the "wings" that she wants to affix on people's minds to make them soar, far from earthly influences, and return to their homeland (IV. p. 1). Saturn also expresses the social changes of Chaucer's period, always following Boethius' attitude towards real happiness. In the following chapter, I shall tackle the societal and political meaning that Saturn represents in the Knight's Tale.

[80] Kolve, *Chaucer and the Imagery of Narrative: the First Five Canterbury* Tales, p. 157.

Chapter 3. Saturn and the social and political disorder of later medieval England

3.1. Theseus as "destroyer of Thebes" and Saturn "bearer of misfortune": a political overview of the late fourteenth century

We have seen hitherto that Saturn symbolises wisdom, prudence and maturity through different ages of life and he is the spokesman for Boethius' ideas. He is also the figure who incites the pilgrims to follow their individuality and "build" their future. At the end of the second chapter, I wrote that Chaucer was aware of the social changes occurring in the fourteenth century, and for this reason, he used Saturn to warn his pilgrims to pursue their individuality, without forgetting the communal good, represented by medieval morality. This chapter is meant to provide the historical and social representations of fourteenth-century England expressed by Saturn in the Knight's Tale, starting once again from Kronos' duality and the deeds of Saturn. The first section of this chapter is devoted to Saturn's negative planetary influence representing the chaos brought by the historical and social facts of fourteenth-century England. Let us understand the political meaning of Saturn starting from the duke of Athens.

I compared Theseus' final consideration to a speech uttered by a preacher. I also wrote that the figure of Saturn expresses the meaning of the Knight's Tale, whereas Theseus' role is just comforting, because he tries to change the mood of the mourners for Arcite's death: he alludes to Boethius' opinion concerning the creation of the world in a perfect and unchangeable order, in which everyone has a duration in earthly life. The consolation provided by Theseus refers to the Christian message regarding piety, displayed by the duke in the moments of the tale already discussed, and to the chivalric message concerning honour and knightly values which gives sense to Arcite's death.

For all these reasons, Theseus has been mythologically associated to the figure of Jupiter, whose influence is more benevolent than Saturn's influence. Jupiter is linked to law, peace and justice, and Theseus expresses all these factors at the end of the tale. However, I wrote in the previous chapter that he matures throughout the tale, and he passes from the typical martial attitude to a wiser and more pitying behaviour, epitomizing Saturn's benevolent influence. Scheps writes that Theseus is the combination between Jupiter and Saturn's attitudes:[81] I agree with this consideration, because Theseus is similar to Jupiter for all the reasons I have already discussed, but he resembles Saturn for what concerns the societal and political aspects of the fourteenth-century England. Let us see the different passages where we can notice this similarity with Saturn.

We need to remember Saturn's speech concerning his malevolent planetary influence: drownings, prisons, rebellions, riots, poisonings, vengeance, the falling of towers, cold diseases, pestilence and treasons are all its effects (ll. 2456-2469). If we analyse Theseus' deeds, especially those of the first two parts, we notice that the duke of Athens can be associated to the evil influence of Saturn: the destructive power of war and death is present at the beginning of the tale. Theseus is the first character of the tale who appears, and Chaucer describes him as "a conquerour, That gretter was ther noon under the sonne. Ful many a riche contree hadde he wonne" (ll. 862-864). He conquered the reign of Femenye, the Amazons (l. 866): we see here his martial attitude, showing his destructive tendency to conquer kingdoms. This martial attitude is present in his military campaign against Thebes, even though he fights for a just purpose: the Theban lamenting widows ask him to avenge their husbands slain by Creon (ll. 930-951). Furthermore, Creon's evil behaviour towards the Theban conquered people is another sign of the saturnian planetary power: he does not let the widows bury their husbands (ll. 941-947). The finding of Arcite and Palamon among the corpses of the warriors who died during the battle and their imprisonment are attributed to Theseus. We already know from the previous chapters, that Arcite laments their captivity and blames Saturn and its

[81] Scheps, Walter, "Chaucer's Theseus and the "Knight's Tale"", *Leeds Studies in English*, 9 (1976), *p*. 29.

unfavourable position in the sky since their birth (ll. 1086-1089): Theseus is the earthly executioner of the saturnian influence, thus, he epitomises the negative force of the planet. Prisons are one of the effects brought by Saturn, and Theseus himself becomes the jailor of the two cousins. Scheps points out that Theseus does not only embody the negative saturnian aspects: he is the one who tries to solve the quarrel between Arcite and Palamon, as Saturn does in the quarrel between Venus and Mars, and moved by pity, he both listens to the lamenting widows and decides to avenge the death of their husbands, and to Hippolyta and Emelye's cries in order to spare the two cousins' lives.[82] Theseus is, thus, another child of Saturn, like Arcite and Palamon, showing the typical destructiveness and wisdom of Kronos.

At this point, one might ask why Chaucer characterises Saturn's speech with all these elements related to wars, death, treasons, imprisonments and so forth, reproduced by Theseus' military deeds. In order to understand this literary choice, we need to refer to the societal and political facts occurring in England during the late fourteenth century. My idea is that Chaucer uses the plot of *Teseida* to allude to the philosophical and existential issues that we have already discussed, but also to offer a representation of the societal and political environment in which he lived, through the negative aspects of Saturn's malevolent influence.[83] Chaucer refers specifically to the Ricardian period, but I think that there are also some allusions to the previous period, that is, Edward III's reign.

The pestilence mentioned in Saturn's speech is a reference to the Black Death, occurring between 1348 and 1350 for the first time, killing one fourth of the European population, and spreading terror throughout the continent, as it had not been spread before.[84] William L. Langer points out that the Black Death was known in three forms: pneumonic, bubonic and septicaemic, that is, by the poisoning of the blood.[85] If we consider death, terror and the poisoning of the blood, we link all these

[82] Scheps, p. 27.
[83] For the correspondences between Saturn's speech, the Black Death,the Peasant's Revolt and the treasons at the Ricardian Court, see Brown, Peter, Andrew Butcher, *The Age of Saturn:, Literature and History in The Canterbury Tales*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991, pp. 224-226.
[84] Langer, William L., "The Black Death", *Scientific American*, 210 (1964), p. 114.
[85] Langer, p. 114.

elements to the negative influence of the planet Saturn. We cannot forget the social consequences caused by this pandemic disaster: the same scholar writes that its societal effects are described in literary works, like the *Decameron* and John Wycliffe's writings, in which human dissoluteness, depravity and blasphemy are presented.[86] I also notice a similar representation in the *Canterbury Tales*: in the previous chapter, I wrote that there are many negative examples of pilgrims who show the worst aspects of human behaviour.

Another important fact related to death, wars and "the falling of the toures and of the walles" mentioned in Saturn's speech is the Hundred Years' War (1337-1453), a conflict between the French and the English courts. The reason of this war was, according to G. Templeman, the quarrel related to the French possessions of the English kings: "Ever since the agreement of 1259, constant disputes about these lands had poisoned the relations between the English kings and their French overlords".[87] Moreover, the war is to be considered "the culminating episode of the Middle Ages, marking the final failure of the feudal armies. Having destroyed the feudal order, the War also reared its successor".[88] Chaucer may have used the figure of Theseus, as destroyer of Thebes and conqueror of the reign of the Amazons, to recall the Hundred Years' War and display the social consequences that it brought: for example, the crisis of the feudal system, and the destructiveness and misery caused by the death of several soldiers and people. We cannot forget the Battle of Poitiers (1356), during the Hundred Years' War, in which Edward III's son, the Black Prince, fought and won. Chaucer probably uses the figure of Theseus to praise the figure of the Black Prince or simply to describe this battle or other similar military examples. However, these facts are related to the first years of Chaucer's life. Brown and Butcher, instead, suggest that Theseus's return to Athens in the opening of the tale could be seen as the return of John of Gaunt, duke of Lancaster, (Richard II's uncle) to England from Spain and Portugal in 1389, because of his intention to establish peace with the King of France: English people

[86] Langer, p. 117.
[87] Templeman, G., "Edward III and the Beginnings of the Hundred Years War", *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 2 (1952), p. 71.
[88] Postan, M. M., "Some Social Consequences of the Hundred Years' War", *The Economic History Review*, 12 (1942), p. 1.

considered John of Gaunt's return a harmonious and peaceful event,[89] since the tensions between the French and English courts had been lasting for fifty years.

"The murmure and the cherles rebelling" mentioned by Saturn could be a reference to different riots occurring during Richard II's reign and Chaucer's utmost and most productive literary period. I mention the Peasants' Revolt in 1381 because it is considered the most threatening move against the English government during the Middle Ages.[90] Not by chance, the Revolt is mentioned by Chaucer even in the Nun's Priest's Tale, where he writes that: "Certes, he Jakke Straw and his menyee Ne made nevere shoutes half so shrille Whan that they wolden any Fleming kille" (ll. 3394-3396), referring to the animals hunting the crafty and malevolent fox, describing them as fiercer than the rebels of the Peasant's Revolt. England was struck by the effects of the Black Death, the Hundred Years' War, with the pressure of the taxes imposed by the king upon the poorer part of the population to finance the military expenses required for the War, and the poll tax. These were all the premises which triggered the rebellion of the peasants and the consequent upheavals, underlining the disorder and the instability of the political life of fourteenth-century England, pointed out by Saturn's malevolent planetary influence.

"The derke tresons, and the castes olde" are linked to the treasons and plots among noblemen, courtiers and the royal family during Richard II's reign. Brown and Butcher draw a comparison between Theseus' return to Athens, with the lamenting Theban widows who ask him to revenge the slaughter of their husbands, and John of Gaunt's return to England and the situation of the English court. The two scholars write that Thomas of Woodstock, Duke of Gloucester and John of Gaunt's brother tried to destroy the influence that Richard II's favourites had at court, and bring back the chivalric values, lost by the corruption of these courtiers.[91] Since that moment, there was a period of

[89] Brown, Peter, Andrew Butcher, *The Age of Saturn: Literature and History in The Canterbury Tales*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991, p. 207.
[90] Ormrod, W. M., "The Peasants' Revolt and the Government of England", *Journal of British Studies*, 29 (1990), p. 1.
[91] Brown, Butcher, p. 208.

executions carried out by the Merciless Parliament, in order to attack directly the king's favourites and weaken his power.[92]

The destructiveness of these historical events produced radical changes in English society during the fourteenth century. We need to remember that medieval society was divided according to the tripartite model of the three estates, *oratores* (preachers, churchmen), *bellatores* (knights, warriors) and *laboratores* (labourers), and "Although this theory can be traced back to at least the ninth century, it remained popular, and perhaps even enjoyed a revival, in late medieval England".[93] In Chaucer's work, we read some examples related to these estates but we also read about different social conditions, for instance the Franklin and the Yeoman. The former is "someone who is free but not a member of the nobility", while the latter is "down the scale, but still on the free side of the divide. Like Chaucer's Yeoman, he is often a paid servant, but not a bondman".[94] We see an evolution of the tripartite model: yeomen and franklins show different social nuances of the estate of the labourers. This is a clear sign that the English society of the fourteenth century was changing. As Turville-Petre points out, labourers sold and exchanged their products in the fourteenth century, because they were part of a market economy, not in a subsistence economy.[95] This change did not only include the evolution of the social classes: we can also notice some social tensions in the fourteenth century, for example, the quarrel between the Reeve and the Miller. Their social status, gained through their professions, is similar, but they tell tales which show the Miller's greed or mock the figure of the Reeve, displaying the competition brought by social mobility. The Knight himself could represent a risk brought by social mobility. In the second chapter, I wrote that he is virtuous because he leaves any martial attitude and he learns Saturn's lesson, rather, Boethius' philosophical opinions, showing the difference between him and the Squire. However, Rigby writes that the Knight

[92] Brown, Butcher, pp. 208-209.
[93] Rigby, Stephen H., "Reading Chaucer: Literature, History, and Ideology", in Rigby, Stephen H. and Alastair J. Minnis, ed., *Historians on Chaucer: the "General Prologue" to the Canterbury Tales*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014, p. 3. Rigby cites Georges Duby and his *The Three Orders: Feudal Society Imagined* when he refers to the three estates.
[94] Turville-Petre, Thorlac, *Reading Middle English Literature*, Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2006, p. 62.
[95] Turville-Petre, p. 62.

could be considered a mercenary, since Chaucer writes in the General Prologue that he fought in Ruce (l. 54): if this fact means that he fought in Russia, the Knight fought for a paid reward against Christians, helping the Muslim Tartars.[96] This is an interpretation of the Knight, like the consideration concerning his wisdom and virtue. However, this negative interpretation of the Knight and the social tensions between the pilgrims (like the Reeve and the Miller) suggest that the fourteenth century was a period of important social changes but at the same time, of deep instability and disorder. Since the Knight is influenced by Saturn, the pagan deity once again symbolises disorder, but in this case, of the social and political aspects of the fourteenth-century England.

As we have seen for the existential issues and the disorder of human life, Saturn also epitomises a positive meaning related to wisdom which gives the "key" for human disorder. In the following section of this chapter, I shall provide the wise meaning expressed by Saturn in the Knight's Tale which offers another possible "key" to live wisely during the social and historical changes of the period in which Chaucer writes his tale. I shall consider the writer's role at the Ricardian court and his role as historian and man of culture, without forgetting his social status.

3.2. Chaucer, historian and man of the court

In this section I shall refer to some aspects of Chaucer's biography and his role at Richard II's court, because they are elements which help us to understand the Knight's Tale and more generally, the *Canterbury Tales*, as political and social allegories, in which Saturn becomes the wise answer to the changes of fourteenth-century England. This section shall analyse the figure of Saturn applied to the events of the court of England, but also to the society Chaucer represents in his work. Not by chance, at the end of the second chapter, I wrote that Saturn represents human beings seeking their

[96] Rigby, Stephen H., "The Knight", in Rigby, Stephen H. and Alastair J. Minnis, ed., *Historians on Chaucer: the "General Prologue" to the Canterbury Tales*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014, pp. 60-61.

individuality and shaping their future, but he also warns them to live wisely, according to the communal good. At the end of this section, I shall propose a possible interpretation of Chaucer's political and societal aim in writing the *Canterbury Tales*; that is, Chaucer left his work open to several possible interpretations concerning his society and made his audience reflect upon it.

We know that Chaucer was the son of a vintner of London, brought up in his family's home; he married Philippa, Sir Paon de Roet of Hainault's daughter in 1366 and he served Lionel, Edward III's second son, in the French campaign between 1359 and 1360, when he was captured and then released through a ransom.[97] Chaucer belonged to different social circles, for instance, the Custom House, that is, the medieval mercantile centre of London, and he was a householder in Aldgate; he was also a diplomat in missions abroad and at the same time, he had some connections with the aristocratic environment, becoming a valet, subsequently a squire in the royal household in 1367.[98] Chaucer's family was part of the middle class, but the writer also had the opportunity to work in different social environments, from mercantile to diplomatic and from military to noble environments: this is a feature which characterises the pilgrims. Chaucer's interest in political and societal topics present in his work. His knowledge related to the political changes, which I have already discussed in the previous section, may derive from his period at court. Brown and Butcher write that Chaucer was known as a "v*allectus*, scrutifer and armiger", commonly considered an armigerous esquire: but the term, according to the two scholars, is ambiguous, since Chaucer lived in a period of deep social changes and mobility.[99] However, these were not the only tasks accomplished by Chaucer during his period at court: we know, in fact, that he developed some of his literary works. In order to understand the literary influence that he received while he was at court, we should focus on the figure of Richard II and his court.

[97] Barron, Caroline M., "Chaucer the Poet and Chaucer the Pilgrim", in Rigby, Stephen H., Alastair J. Minnis, ed., *Historians on Chaucer: the "General Prologue" to the Canterbury Tales*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014, pp. 25-26.
[98] Barron, pp. 26-29-30.
[99] Brown, Butcher, p. 62.

Richard II, the Black Prince's son and Edward III's grandson, married twice during his life. In 1382, he married Anne of Bohemia, Charles IV's daughter (the Holy Roman emperor); Richard II and his wife did not have children, and she died of the plague in 1394. Subsequently, he married Isabella of Valois, king Charles VI of France's daughter. Let us analyse the intellectual influence brought by Anne of Bohemia, so as to understand the cultural environment in which Chaucer wrote his works. Alfred Thomas writes that Richard II was the English king mostly concerned with culture before Charles I: this was due to his wife Anne, who "brought with her a large entourage of artists, clerks, confessors, and scribes, all trained at her father's international court in Prague".[100] Anne of Bohemia gave to the English court a great literary and cultural impulse and Chaucer could elaborate his works in this cultural environment. Though he is recognised as the most important writer at Richard's II court, he does not seem to have been patronised by the king, but rather he was rewarded for his bureaucratic administration at court: for this reason, Thomas points out that Chaucer could have imagined Anne as his fictitious patron.[101] It was usual for medieval writers working at court to write literary pieces alluding to kings, noblemen and their kingdoms and honouring them. *The Book of the Duchess*, written by Chaucer, could be considered an effective example: Kathryn L. Lynch writes that the poem is a reference to the death of Blanche of Lancaster, John of Gaunt's wife, occurred in 1368.[102] The "man in blak" (l. 446) and his sorrow for the death of his "goode faire Whyte" (l. 948) could be seen, thus, as John of Gaunt's sorrow for his wife Blanche and Chaucer might have composed his poem so as to celebrate one of the most preeminent members of the court. We cannot forget *Troilus and Criseyde*, in which Chaucer probably uses Greek mythology and epics, to identify London with Troy:

[100] Thomas, Alfred, *The Court of Richard II and Bohemian Culture: Literature and Art in the Age of Chaucer and the Gawain Poet*, Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2020, pp. 2 and 7.
[101] Thomas, pp. 9-10.
[102] Chaucer, Geoffrey, *Dream Visions and Other Poems*, ed. by Kathryn L. Lynch, New York: Norton, 2007, p. 3. This is the edition that I use throughout. Kathryn L. Lynch cites J.J.N. Palmer's "The Historical Context of the *Book of the Duchess*".

This literary legend persisted well into the fourteenth century and gave Chaucer's London a link to a mythic past and to a heroic culture that helped develop and explain English national identity.[103]

All these examples show how medieval writers composed their literary works to honour their monarchs and kingdoms, aiming at personal and profitable acknowledgement, in order to be patronised. According to Thomas, the fact that Chaucer composed *Troilus and Criseyde* in the same period in which Anne of Bohemia arrived to the English court suggests that he composed it so as to make a considerable impact on her.[104] *Troilus and Criseyde* could be considered, thus, an allusion of the love between Richard II and his wife, with the legendary background of Troy, alluding to London and England. These considerations can be applied to the Knight's Tale as well: in the second chapter, I wrote that Chaucer might have first written the Knight's Tale as a translation of *Teseida*, and subsequently, the writer chose to give a different meaning to his work, that is, the wisdom and maturity of Saturn as impetus for his pilgrims. However, since I also wrote that Saturn epitomises the societal and political facts of England during the fourteenth century, Chaucer probably composed the Knight's Tale in order to represent allegorically the court in which he worked, for instance, Richard II and the other members and fourteenth-century society. Once again, Saturn plays the role of wisdom metaphorically.

In the previous section, I cited Brown and Butcher's comparison of Theseus to John of Gaunt. The scholars also suggest that Palamon and Emelye's eventual marriage could be interpreted as Richard II and Isabella of Valois' marriage intended to reconcile France and England.[105] The strife between Arcite and Palamon may allude, according to the two scholars, to the strife between Richard II and his cousin Thomas of Woodstock, duke of Gloucester: not by chance, they were cousins like Arcite and Palamon, who are fighting for Emelye: Richard II and his uncle, John of Gaunt, sought a reconciliation with France, while Thomas, duke of Gloucester, opposed this policy.[106] Theseus' final

[103] Baker, Alison A., "Contemporary English Politics and the Ricardian Court: Chaucer's London and the Myth of New Troy", in Pugh, Tison, Angela Jane Weisl, ed., *Approaches to Teaching Chaucer's Troilus and Criseyde and the Shorter Poems*, New York: Modern Language Association of America, 2007, p. 66.
[104] Thomas, p. 29.
[105] Brown, Butcher, p. 210.
[106] Brown, Butcher, p. 210.

speech appears diplomatic and political because he marries the two lovers and they remain silent: they cannot refuse, because their marriage becomes politically convenient, as the marriage between Isabella and Richard II served to achieve peace between England and France, even though this marriage did not put an end to the internal conflicts.[107] The hypothesis of the two scholars implies that the Knight's Tale mainly deals with the events occurring between 1386 and 1396-7,[108] which would push forward the dating of the Knight's Tale perhaps too much. There is also another interpretation with a different date of the composition of the Tale: Hamilton M. Smyser writes that readers cannot precisely know the dates in which Chaucer composed the majority of his works: however, the Middle Group of works, that is, *The Complaint of Mars*, the Knight's Tale (previously *Palemon and Arcite*), *Troilus and Criseyde* and The Legend of Hypermnestra in the *Legend of Good Women*, were allegedly written in the period between 1380 and 1387, showing Chaucer's new astronomical and astrological interest, not present in his earlier works.[109] Both the interpretations relating to the date of the Knight's Tale may be acceptable; nevertheless, Chaucer presented a more general discourse regarding the society in which he lived and its drastic changes, occurring in the fourteenth century, to which Saturn alludes in his speech. Brown and Butcher, in fact, suggest that the references to the events occurring in the decade between 1386 and 1396-7 presented in the Knight's Tale are not mere allegories but:

> Rather, the Knight's Tale uses the Boccaccio narrative to activate in the mind of the reader themes and incidents which are judged crucial to or indicative of developments within this decade.[110]

I find much to commend in this reading but I also believe that Chaucer does not only refer to that specific decade: through the figure of Saturn, he wants to make his audience reflect upon the events occurring in fourteenth-century England which changed his society and some medieval beliefs.

The problem, which might be posed at this point, is whether Chaucer was in favour of the changes in his society or not. According to Rigby, there are three main approaches which scholars

[107] Brown, Butcher, pp. 234-235 and 239.
[108] Brown, Butcher, p. 207.
[109] Smyser, Hamilton M., "A View of Chaucer's Astronomy", *Speculum*, 45 (1970), p. 366.
[110] Brown, Butcher, p. 207.

have used separately or combined to answer the question concerning Chaucer's ideas: the first depicts Chaucer as a supporter of the medieval conventions and inequalities; the second refers to a more "radical" Chaucer who describes inequalities and challenges medieval order; the third considers the *Canterbury Tales* as an open-ended work because it allows the audience to think according to their beliefs.[111] We can find some examples of Chaucer's conservative point of view in the General Prologue. We read that the writer presents some of the members of the high social classes with positive descriptions: for instance, the Knight; on the other hand, some of the members of low social classes are described with negative features. For instance, the Miller is presented as a "janglere and a goliardeys, And that was most of sinne and harlotryes. Wel coude he stelen corn, and tollen thryes" (ll. 560-562) and the Reeve as a choleric man (l. 587), and other people "were adrad of him as of the deeth" (l. 605). We can also consider Chaucer as a writer who incites his pilgrims to rebel against medieval society and "build" their future. An example is the portrait Chaucer makes of the Wife of Bath: through this character, he possibly wants to show how women were considered during the Middle Ages and the Wife of Bath's behaviour displays her intention to go against conventions. A further valid example is the fact that Chaucer also gives the Franklin the possibility to speak: as we have seen in the previous section, franklins are part of a new emerging social category.

All these are possible interpretations of Chaucer's societal opinion, and for this reason, one might consider the third approach used by scholars the most appropriate, according to which Chaucer incites his audience to think autonomously. Not by chance, the narrator asks directly the pilgrims who is the happiest between Arcite and Palamon, or in the Franklin's Tale, the Franklin poses to his audience the question on who is the freest character between Arveragus, Dorigen and Aurelius (ll. 1621-1622). Since the writer works at court, we notice him playing with medieval conventions in some excerpts of the General Prologue, and particularly in the Knight's Tale: the presence of epic and courtly features, the notion of treason and familial aristocratic bonds, planetary influences, the

[111] Rigby, Stephen H., "Reading Chaucer: Literature, History, and Ideology", in Rigby, Stephen H. and Alastair J. Minnis, ed., *Historians on Chaucer: the "General Prologue" to the Canterbury Tales*, p. 11.

courtly love speech given by Arcite and Palamon when they see Emelye are all elements belonging to Chaucer's far and recent past. However, we read, for example, that those familial bonds are broken (the quarrel between Arcite and Palamon) and though *gentilesse* is an essential element of the Tale, violence cannot be thwarted at the end.[112] Saturn does not merely recall the historical events of fourteenth-century England through his allegorised speech; he admonishes the audience to reflect upon medieval beliefs and the social changes with their consequences. In the Knight's Tale, Theseus tries to give his chivalric, aristocratic and religious interpretation of Arcite's death through his final speech, but we already know that Saturn is the character who expresses the philosophical and existential meaning of the tale: thus, courtly and aristocratic values do not solve the quarrel between the two Theban cousins, but rather the individuality of each human being searching real happiness and pursing the communal good.

However, we should not misinterpret Chaucer's reflections on these subjects as his possible intention to change the medieval system: as pointed out by Margaret Schlauch, commenting the Merchant's Tale, the change of "a romantic situation into a fabliau implies a critical attitude"[113] in the tale: the scholar continues by writing that Chaucer was not a reformer, but he was able to notice the absurdity of the pretence of some of the morals of his society.[114] Saturn, in giving his speech and thus, recalling the historical facts, just admonishes the audience to ponder on English fourteenth-century society and the changes occurring in that period: through his figure, Chaucer wants his audience to reflect upon the positive and the negative aspects of the societal and political environment: "Saturn is Chaucer as historian identifying the laws of motion of a distinctive historical period".[115] For these reasons, Saturn, through the mythological allusions, admonishes the pilgrims to live according to their individuality, leaving any kind of restrictive, superstitious and socially limiting convention, and thinking autonomously about their society, but at the same time, he reminds them of

[112] Brown, Butcher, p. 248.
[113] Schlauch, Margaret, "Chaucer's Merchant's Tale and Courtly Love", *ELH*, 4 (1937), p. 209.
[114] Schlauch, p. 212.
[115] Brown, Butcher, p. 250.

the moral lesson, preserving morality and good customs (affected by Boethius's ideas), all gathered in the figure of the Knight. From the audience, Chaucer expects to find moral judgment, rather than social prejudice: the questions he poses throughout his work, are meant to make readers think. This is the wisdom expressed by Saturn from a societal perspective: weighing up the social changes, both their advantages and disadvantages, and "cutting off" as Saturn metaphorically does with his scythe, what is superfluous and absurd in the fourteenth-century society, underlined by the social and historical events and their outcomes.

In the following chapter, I shall provide some instances showing that the pilgrims follow Saturn's moral and social message, that is, to reflect upon different matters (society, marriage, religion and so forth) according to their beliefs, though the pagan deity is not present, or scarcely mentioned.

Chapter 4. Some examples of saturnian influence in the *Canterbury Tales*

4.1. Saturn's moral and social significance expressed in the *Canterbury Tales*

We have seen hitherto the importance of Saturn and the moral and social meanings expressed through his speech and his final decision in the Knight's Tale but also his mythological symbolism. Though he is not present in the four tales which I shall briefly analyse, that is, the Pardoner's, the Wife of Bath's, the Clerk's and the Franklin's, Saturn's message expressed in the Knight's Tale may help readers to understand some moral and social elements of these tales. Let us start from the negative examples, for instance, the Pardoner's and the Wife of Bath's tales, and subsequently, let us consider the moral and virtuous tales, that is, the Clerk's and the Franklin's tales. In the second section of this chapter, I shall analyse some elements of the Merchant's Tale and compare them to the topics of the Knight's Tale discussed so far. I consider the meaning of the Merchant's Tale similar to the meaning of the Knight's Tale: Fortune, gardens, Boethius' ideas are all present in the two tales. Overall, the present chapter is meant to show how some of the pilgrims reflect and weigh up the positive and negative aspects of the societal changes of the fourteenth century, as Saturn suggests in recalling the historical facts in his speech.

Chaucer uses all his irony towards the figure of the Pardoner but probably also towards the other churchmen of his period. In his Prologue, the Pardoner is an immoral example because of his greed, unlike the Knight, whose gentleness and humble clothes underline his wiser attitude. The Pardoner plays with his immoral behaviour, as he says that "*Radix malorum est Cupiditas*" (l. 334): he preaches against the same vice by which he is himself affected, that is, avarice (ll. 427-428), allowing other people to reflect on this sin and repent (ll. 430-431). His intention is not to give a virtuous example, as Lady Philosophy does in *De Consolatione Philosophiae*: the Pardoner tells old stories on greed to other people in order to make them pay for their sins and find grace (ll. 432-440).

He is sincere because he directly states his real purpose in life: the souls of other people can "goon a-blakeberied" (l. 406), what matters is to earn money easily, without doing "labour with myn hondes, […] By cause I wol nat beggen ydelly" (ll. 444 and 446). Thus, the Pardoner follows his individuality and "builds" his future, based on riches and personal wealth, and he does not pursue the communal good and considers only his personal profit. In this character, I see Chaucer's possible warning towards the negative outcomes of fourteenth-century social mobility: the writer tries to admonish his pilgrims to avoid the negative example of Kronos' myth: he rebels against his father and lives according to his individuality, but at the same time, he does not consider the communal good and becomes a tyrant in turn with his children.

On the contrary, the tale offered by the Pardoner is a good example of Saturn's punishment for human excesses. His tale is about a Flemish company of young men, whose activities are gambling with dice, drinking and visiting brothels (ll. 463-473). Three men of this company are told by a boy that one of their drunken friends was slain by someone called Death during the previous night (ll. 661-676). While they are looking for Death, they find an old poor man, all wrapped up except his face: nobody wants to exchange their youth for his old age and for this reason, he wanders incessantly like a restless prisoner, because even Death is not interested in his life (ll. 711-728). They rudely ask the old man where they can find Death; the old man replies that they can find him close to an oak (l. 765). Once they reach the oak, they find eight bushels of golden coins and they stop looking for Death (ll. 769-772). Inevitably, they are struck by their greed: one of them (the youngest) is sent by the other two to take some food and wine, in order to slay him once he comes back and take his part of the loot (ll. 824-836); however, this young man contrives to put some poison inside the bottles of wine (ll. 851-854). He is eventually slain by the other two, who, in turn, drink the poisoned wine and die (ll. 885-888): they finally meet "Death".

The old man encountered by the three revellers is similar to Saturn: he attempts to admonish the three revellers but they are influenced by their passions and sins. The fact that nobody wants to exchange youth for his old age is a clear reference to the human condition: human beings prefer

Fortune's gifts over maturity, prudence and wisdom, thus, the real happiness in life (Boethius' idea expressed also by Saturn in the Knight's Tale). Not by chance, the old man compares his condition to a wandering state in which he finds himself as prisoner: it is the same metaphor used in the Knight's Tale and personified by Arcite and Palamon while they dwell in prison, which is, the prison of life, or rather, planetary influences and passions striking human beings. The eight bushels of golden coins are products of the Fortune's caprice which makes them fight in order to keep the treasure and betray one another: this is a further link to establish with the Knight's Tale, where Palamon deals with Arcite's treason, because the latter has fallen in love with Emelye, but Palamon claims that he has seen her first (ll. 1128-1148). Furthermore, the murderer of the three men's friend, Death, is also called "Pestilence" in the tale and we are told that it slew several people (l. 679): this is a reference to Black Death, discussed in the previous chapter. We need to remember that cold illnesses and pestilence are present under Saturn's domain (l. 2467 and l. 2469): even though Saturn is neither present, nor mentioned in the Pardoner's Tale, we can notice some aspects of his influence described in the Knight's Tale. According to Simon de Couvin, a late medieval canon, the Black Death occurring in 1348 was caused by a godly punishment and a planetary conjunction.[116] There is punishment both in the Pardoner's Tale, where the three revellers kill one another accidentally for their greed, and in the Knight's Tale, Saturn makes Arcite perish because the knight is blinded by his desire for victory, restoring order. Thus, if we consider Death as the Plague occurring in the fourteenth century and the popular belief that it was a godly punishment, and the association of pestilence and cold illnesses with Saturn, we can also see the three revellers punished by Death (metaphorically the Plague and Saturn) for their immoral behaviour and lack of prudence and wisdom.

In the Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale we can notice some elements similar to the moral and social meaning expressed by Saturn in the Knight's Tale. This pilgrim presents herself as a woman who follows more her experience than authority, in order to deal with marriage (ll. 1-3). She

[116] Friedman, John B., "Henryson's "*Testament of Cresseid*" and the "*Judicio Solis in Conviviis Saturni*" of Simon of Couvin", *Modern Philology*, 1 (1985), p. 13.

says that she has had five husbands (l. 6). She displays her view concerning marriage by saying that "God bad us for to wexe and multiplye" (l. 28) and she also cites the dialogue between Jesus and the Samaritan, in which Jesus said that the Samaritan had five husbands but the man, who is her actual husband, is not hers (ll. 15-19). The Wife of Bath continues her speech by saying that she married her first three husbands (who were good and old) only for their riches, thus, for her profit (ll. 197-214). Her fourth husband had a lover (l. 454) and the Wife of Bath was afraid of his possible unfaithfulness (ll. 481-482): for this reason, she looked at other men in a seductive way, so as to make her husband angry and jealous (ll. 485-488). We may think that she is a negative example if we refer to Saturn's moral meaning; however, she says that she married her fifth husband for love and not for personal interest (l. 526), giving him all her possessions (l. 630). She regrets what she did because he turned into a different person and did not let her do anything (632-633). According to William E. Mead, Chaucer tells nothing directly against women and "Yet he really hits a much harder indirect blow by letting a typical shrew expose by a process of minute self-revelation all the weaknesses of her sex".[117] Therefore, we could interpret Chaucer's portrait of the Wife of Bath as a criticism against late medieval women, since she is described as an impudent woman. My idea is, in contrast, that the Wife of Bath simply displays her considerations on marriage according to her experience. Saturn in the Knight's Tale is described as a deity who "fond in his olde experience an art" (l. 2445): the Wife of Bath is just a woman who knows the benefits and the disadvantages of marriage, and for this reason, she finds her personal way to deal with husbands and marriage. Furthermore, she becomes the "embodiment of the argument she is conducting against the determination of gender and marital relations by male-dominated and ecclesiastical authorities".[118] When she alludes to her rising sign and Mars (masculine principle) positioned in the constellation of Taurus during her birth (ll. 609-613), a zodiacal sign dominated by Venus (feminine principle), she metaphorically says that her personality is both feminine and masculine, displaying a different attitude towards marriage; thus,

[117] Mead, William E., "The Prologue of the Wife of Bath's Tale", *PMLA*, 16 (1901), p. 404.
[118] Brown, Peter, Andrew Butcher, *The Age of Saturn: Literature and History in The Canterbury Tales*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991, p. 35.

she lives according to her experience and individuality. The writer does not condemn the Wife of Bath, though she married her first three husbands for riches: we read that she married the fifth husband for love, and once she gained her individuality in their marriage, she is kind to him, and he is kind to her (ll. 823-825). Her behaviour is similar to Saturn's social admonishment in the Knight's Tale, to "build" one's future, but at the same time, pursuing the real good through experience.

The Wife of Bath's Tale is a valid example of Saturn's moral message regarding wisdom and Boethius' philosophical considerations. The tale is about an Arthurian knight who rapes a maid (l. 888). For his deplorable deed, king Arthur condemns him to death (ll. 890-891), but the queen and her ladies, as Hippolyta and Emelye do in the Knight's Tale, ask the king to spare the knight's life and let the queen judge his immoral behaviour (ll. 894-898). The queen gives the knight a task to accomplish within one year: he needs to discover what women long for the most, otherwise he will be condemned to death (ll. 900-912). He finds women who seek riches, lust, adornment and honour (ll. 925-927): this is a reference to the "ups and downs" of human beings, looking for transient goods (Fortune) and not for the real good, as Lady Philosophy says in *De Consolatione Philosophiae*. Suddenly, the knight finds an old woman who is able to give him the answer, but she asks him to give her what she will ask him later (ll. 998-1020). They agree and once they arrive at court, the knight gives the answer: women desire to dominate men (ll. 1038-1040). The old lady asks him to marry her as a reward (l. 1055). During the first night of their marriage, he is reluctant to have sex with her, because she is old and ugly (l. 1100). The old woman's speech is particularly interesting for the topic of my dissertation, because it contains several allusions to Saturn and Boethius. She deals with moral virtue, which can be attained not by ancestors' lineage, from which human beings can obtain only fleeting, transient goods: spiritual nobility is not linked to possessions, but rather to noble and virtuous deeds, according to Seneca and Boethius (ll. 1131-1170). She also wishes to live honestly with the knight, now her husband, though her ancestors were poor: the real poverty is when human beings long for something that they cannot have, unlike poor people who have nothing and desire nothing, and for this reason, they are richer. (ll. 1172-1191). This last part of her speech reminds readers of

Boethius' considerations on self-sufficiency, which is the real happiness in life. This old lady can be compared to the figure of Saturn in the Knight's Tale: she is old like the pagan deity, and she displays her virtuous and moral attitude towards the real good, as Saturn does in the Knight's Tale, affecting with his wisdom the other characters. As a result of this admonishment, the knight understands the moral lessons and accepts to stay with her, saying that "I do no fors the whether of the two, For as yow lyketh, it suffiseth me" (ll. 1234-1235). The old hag metaphorically cuts off the superfluous of life and restores the real virtuous purpose, as Saturn does in the Knight's Tale.

We have seen the examples of lack of virtue, morality and wisdom in some of the *Canterbury Tales* so far; the Franklin's Tale, in contrast, shows how the characters of the tale display Saturn's wisdom through their deeds, creating a chain of generosity and helping one another. The Franklin's Prologue is a further example of Saturn's social meaning concerning individuality. In the General Prologue, the Franklin is described as a gluttonous man, with detailed descriptions of the meals he used to eat every day (l. 334 and ll. 341-348). Nevertheless, he is also hospitable, and for this reason, he is compared to Saint Julian (l. 340).[119] In his Prologue, the Franklin presents himself as a kind man and admits that he is not a learned person and he is not going to tell a tale enriched with rhetoric and poetic forms (ll. 716-719): the colours of rhetoric are nothing for his soul (ll. 726-727). Through his speech, the Franklin offers his simplicity and a tale on generosity. When he is allowed to speak, we read that he is a man who simply follows his individuality. He does not use artificial words, he displays the real essence of virtue and morality in his tale, as Saturn teaches in the Knight's Tale, through Boethius' philosophical ideas.

His tale presents several topics related to the Knight's Tale and embodied by the figure of Saturn. When the Franklin tells about the agreement of love between Arveragus and Dorigen, he deals with philosophical issues, such as patience as a high virtue, because patient people are endowed with wisdom in order to tolerate people who are struck by "Ire, siknesse, constellacioun, Wyn, wo, or

[119] Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales, Seventeen Tales and the General Prologue*. Saint Julian is considered the patron saint of hospitality, p. 10.

chaunginge or complexioun" (ll. 781-782), and "After the tyme moste be temperaunce To every wight that can on governaunce" (ll. 785-786). The Franklin proposes the same topic present in the Knight's Tale: Arcite and Palamon are under the influence of Saturn, as all human beings are struck by their passions, but they need to use self-control and let themselves be guided by reason, unlike the evil human beings presented in *De Consolatione Philosophiae*. Another important existential issue proposed by the Franklin is when Dorigen praises God's creation but she also laments the presence of the rocks on the shore, which scare her because Arveragus could sink once he comes back, questioning their usefulness (ll. 865-893). In her speech, Dorigen is similar to Arcite in prison, who laments his captive condition: Arcite is struck by his passions and he does not use his reason, as Dorigen does not understand that those rocks "are not more real threats than moral dangers":[120] her fidelity and honour, in fact, are challenged throughout the tale, but eventually she manages to be virtuous. Dorigen does not go beyond her sorrow caused by the distance to her husband, she is just a human being, struck by her passions: the beauty of the garden in which she meets Aurelius, dancing and singing with her friends (ll. 908-937), opposed to the reflection on rocks, symbolises the human disorder caused by Fortune, like the opposition between the prison and the garden in the Knight's Tale. Aurelius resorts to astrological calculations and magic in order to approach Dorigen, rather than reason and self-sufficiency. In this existential disorder, the characters show their wisdom and generosity on a day in the end of December, when the sun is in Capricorn's constellation, according to astrology (ll. 1244-1249). We already know that Capricorn is a zodiacal sign under Saturn's domain: I think that Chaucer adds this element to underline moral virtue, also expressed by Saturn in the Knight's Tale. As a matter of fact, Dorigen abides by the promise she has made to Aurelius, and her husband accepts it because he loves her (ll. 1472-1478) and he thinks that "Trouthe is the hyeste thing that man may kepe" (l.1479). Aurelius, seeing their wisdom and generosity, breaks the bond of her promise, and allows her to return to her husband (ll. 1526-1544). At the end of the tale, he is

[120] White, Gertrude M., "The Franklin's Tale: Chaucer or the Critics", *PMLA*, 89 (1974), p. 461.

rewarded for his generosity: the clerk-magician does not ask him for money for the magic he did in order to help Aurelius. The three characters can be compared to Palamon's wise attitude in the Knight's Tale, under Saturn's mature and benevolent influence: they choose the real good, as Palamon does in praying Venus to love Emelye unconditionally.

I consider the Clerk's Tale a further example of wisdom and morality. The two main characters, Walter and Grisilde, display some aspects also present in the Knight's Tale and in Boethius' philosophical ideas. Walter, the marquis, is a young man, "ful of honour and of curteisye; Discreet ynogh his contree for to gye" (ll. 74-75) who "on his lust present was al his thought" (l. 80) and "Biloved and drad, thurgh favour of Fortune" (l. 69). On the other hand, Grisilde is a humble woman, and since "she wolde vertu plese, She knew wel labour, but non ydel ese" (ll. 216-217). She cares for her old poor father (l. 222) and despite her young age, she is known for her virtue (ll. 240-241). Once Walter marries her, he wants to test her faithfulness and her devotion to him, through several heartrending situations, like the simulation of their children's death and his choice to marry another woman. Despite Walter's wickedness and capriciousness, Grisilde accepts what Fortune inflicts on her, displaying moral virtue and steadfastness. At the end of the tale, she is rewarded because she discovers that her children are still alive. If we consider the Clerk's words at the end:

> But for that every wight in his degree
> Sholde be constant in adversitee
> As was Grisilde. Therfore Petrark wryteth
> This storie, which with heigh style he endyteth (ll. 1145-1149),

we can interpret Walter and Grisilde as an allegory of humankind subjected to Fortune's whims. Walter can be compared to the Wheel of Fortune: when he marries her, he changes her social status, thus, she passes from poverty to wealth, but at the same time, he inflicts on her terrible pains, thus, the "ups and downs" of Fortune. Nevertheless, she is able to contain her passions and feelings, despite all her pains, and she does not let passions guide her. The Clerk also says that in his period, the fourteenth century, finding a woman like Grisilde is demanding (ll. 1163-1169). The final envoy has been interpreted both as a criticism against the Wife of Bath's individuality and tendency to impose

herself upon men and Chaucer's intention to distance himself from the moral proposed in the Tale.[121] The envoy admonishes women to behave differently from Grisilde's virtue: the Clerk urges women to "Lat noon humilitee your tongue naille" (l. 1184), "Folweth Ekko, that holdeth no silence, But evere answereth at the countretaille" (ll. 1189-1190) and "sharply tak on yow the governaille. Emprintenth wel this lesson in youre minde For commune profit, sith it may availle" (ll. 1192-1194). I believe that the meaning of these last words is similar to the social meaning expressed by Saturn in the Knight's Tale: through the Clerk's Tale, Chaucer admonishes his audience to follow Grisilde's moral example when human beings face Fortune's instability, and remain virtuous since it is just transient; at the same time, through his envoy, he urges people to think on women's condition in the late Middle Ages, in order to find the inconsistencies of medieval society and the outcomes of its changes during the fourteenth century.

4.2. Similarities between the Merchant's and the Knight's tales

This section is devoted to the comparison between the Merchant's Tale and the Knight's Tale, because the topics presented in both tales are similar. Morality, social individuality, and the concept of Fortune are all combined both in the Knight and the Merchant's Tales, though these topics are presented differently.

In the Merchant's Prologue, we read that this pilgrim is not happy with his marriage, saying that he has "a wyf, the worste that may be" (l. 1218), offering a very different attitude from Grisilde's patience (ll. 1223-1224). However, at the end of the Prologue, the Merchant says that he tells his tale, without mentioning directly his matrimonial pains (ll. 1243-1244). I interpret his sentence as a clear

[121] Farrell, Thomas J., "The "Envoy de Chaucer" and the "Clerk's Tale", *The Chaucer Review*, 24 (1990), pp. 329-330. The scholar cites the opinion of different critics, for instance Nevil Coghill, Kemp Malone, Derek Brewer, Charlotte Morse and Donald Howard.

intention to speak not only about marriage but also to present other topics. Let us understand the moral and social meaning of the Merchant's Tale gradually.

The story begins with the introduction of Januarie, a knight coming from "Lumbardye […] that born was of Pavye" (ll. 1245-1246). We read that he is sixty years old and he has always been wifeless (l. 1248), satisfying his appetites concerning women and pleasure (ll. 1249-1251); but once he is sixty, he decides to get married and enjoy matrimonial life (ll. 1252-1260). There are lines displaying Januarie's ideas concerning marriage: the Merchant mentions some ancient authors who explained that marriage is a great sacrament because wives long for their husbands' good, precisely because they are ruled by them, and despite Theophrastus' *The Golden Book on Marriage*, every man should have a woman beside him (ll. 1267-1392). Nevertheless, marriage is not the main topic of the tale. As pointed out by Peter G. Beidler, Chaucer's purpose in writing the Merchant's Tale is to deal with January.[122] The repetition of "sixty" in the introduction of the tale is interesting: Chaucer wants to identify Januarie with the tradition connected with that age, when people generally ponder more on spiritual matters, rather than material and bodily pleasures.[123] I have already discussed the theory of the Four Humours connected to the ages of life in the second chapter, because it is essential to understand the meaning of the Knight's Tale. We have seen, in fact, that the Knight's Tale concerns maturity gained not only in old age, but during life: Palamon is an example of a man, not old yet, that undergoes a process of maturity and wisdom, making him prefer love over personal victory. This is not the case of Januarie, who, despite his age, still indulges in pleasures. Emerson Brown Jr. writes that even Boethius refers to his age (similar to Januarie's) in *De Consolatione Philosophiae*, and though he laments his captive situation, due to misfortune, through Lady Philosophy, he is able to understand the real truth and happiness in life, growing wiser: Januarie is Boethius' opposite, because both at the beginning and at the end of the tale, he is still struck by his desires.[124] We can easily

[122] Beidler, Peter G., "The Climax in the "Merchant's Tale"", *The Chaucer Review*, 6 (1971), p. 42.
[123] Brown, Emerson Jr., "The Merchant's Tale: Januarie's "Unlikly Elde"", *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen*, 74 (1973), p. 93.
[124] Brown, pp. 102-104.

consider Januarie similar to Arcite in the Knight's Tale, blinded by his desire to gain personal victory; however, Arcite understands his faults at the end of the tale, while Januarie does not. Let us see Januarie's path throughout the tale.

Januarie confesses that he wants a young wife, because he would be unfaithful to an old woman (ll. 1416-1436). Placebo basically says that he agrees with Januarie, because he has been always a courtier, serving different lords, without contradicting them, because noblemen are of a higher level than his (ll. 1494-1504). For this reason, Placebo supports Januarie's intention to marry a young woman. On the other hand, Justinus offers his experience, because his wife squanders his goods (ll. 1545-1552): thus, he suggests that Januarie should know whether his future wife "be wys or sobre or dronkelewe, Or proud or ells otherweys a shrewe, A chydester or wastour of thy good" (ll. 1533-1535). Justinus' words remind readers of Boethius' philosophical ideas, because he urges Januarie to know in advance whether his future wife is more interested in earthly things, passions and transient goods, rather than spiritual matters, more specifically, whether she is subjected to the Wheel of Fortune or not. Subsequently, Justinus, "which that hated his folye" (l.1655) warns Januarie that his future wife could "be Goddes mene and Goddes whippe" (l. 1671): this is another reference to wisdom, because Justinus suggests that Januarie should use "The lustes" of his wife moderately, in order to keep him distant "from other sinne" (ll. 1679-1681). Januarie does not consider Justinus' words and marries May, a beautiful woman, known for her "sadnesse and hir benignitee" (l. 1591). Their marriage is described under a sexual perspective: we read about Januarie's lechery, leading him to use "ipocras, clarree, and vernage" for his arousal (ll. 1807-1808): this detail points out his bodily weakness and his probable impotence.

The Merchant presents another character, that is, Damian, a squire serving Januarie. Damian has fallen in love with May and he displays the typical features of courtly love: he suffers because he loves a married woman, who is, at the same time, his mistress. For this striking passion, he falls sick (ll. 1902-1903), and writes a letter confessing his love for May (ll. 1879-1880). We read a similar reaction in the Knight's Tale, where the two Theban knights suffer for their love for Emelye, and

Arcite is affected by melancholy: as I previously wrote, the Knight's Tale is mainly considered a courtly romance because of its plot and the knightly love story. May reciprocates Damian's feelings (ll. 1979-1985) and writes a letter for him, in order to grant him "hir verray grace" (l. 1997).

A further essential element which relates the Merchant's Tale to the Knight's Tale is the beautiful garden, built by Januarie, The beauty of this garden reminds readers of Kolve's comparison between the prison and the garden in the Knight's Tale and the House of Fortune in *The Romance of the Rose*, that I cited in the second chapter. We have seen, in fact, that Januarie, despite his age, is not wise and he is struck by his passions and sexual desires. He is physically blind but also metaphorically blinded by his passions, which do not allow him to understand real truth and seek real happiness (ll. 2070-2071). He is not able to see his wife's unfaithfulness, but also the foolishness of marrying a young woman and his lack of interest in spiritual and moral matters, since he is no longer young. The Merchant, or rather, Chaucer, adds a few lines concerning the instability brought by Fortune and also pondered on in the Knight's Tale: the pilgrim accuses Fortune of having deceived Januarie with the happiness brought by his marriage to May (symbolised by the beauty of the garden) and Januarie finds himself in a miserable condition, that is, his blindness (ll. 2057-2068). In truth, the fault is only Januarie's: his blindness and the garden have the same role of the prison and the garden in the Knight's Tale and reveal that Januarie lets Fortune and passions guide him in their unstable ups and downs. At this point, comparing the two tales, one might ask whether Januarie is punished for his immoderate attitude or not, as Arcite is in the Knight's Tale. His blindness cannot be considered a punishment, since it simply represents his unwise behaviour, and Fortune's changes. Januarie is actually punished at the end of the tale: in order to understand this fact and its link to Saturn in the Knight's Tale, we need to remember the presence of Pluto and Proserpina in the Merchant's Tale.

Januarie always stays close to his wife because he cannot see her and he does not trust her completely. One day, he asks his wife to stay with him in the garden: Damian manages to enter through a key duplicated from Januarie's one (ll. 2150-2154) because he and May want to have sex together. He climbs a tree (l. 2210), and waits for May, who tells Januarie that she wants to pick some

pears from that tree and asks him to use his shoulders so as to reach the top (ll. 2331-2344). Pluto and Proserpina, who can be considered a further pagan godly intervention, as Saturn is in the Knight's Tale, solve the intricated situation individually. Pluto gives back his sight to Januarie, who is now able to see what his wife and Damian are doing together, but at the same time, Proserpina gives May the right words to answer back to her husband: she is able to make him believe that in order to heal his blindness, she needs to fight against a man on a tree (l. 2374). At first, Januarie does not trust her because he sees her having sex with Damian, but she continues her speech by saying that her remedy does not work since he does not see the situation properly (ll. 2376-2389). He eventually trusts her because she explains to him that nobody is able to see properly when just woken up, like Januarie (l. 2394-2406). Januarie's punishment is being married to an unfaithful woman, who is able to deceive him. His passions make him blind, and do not allow him to consider his marriage to May an imprudent action: "the Merchant tells his story in such a way as to indicate that a marriage of that type is in itself wrong".[125] For this reason, during the discussion with Pluto, Proserpina refers to Kronos, "Now, by my modres sires soule" (l. 2265): Ceres, Proserpina's mother, is Kronos' daughter. Proserpina swears to Kronos/Saturn that she wants to provide May with the right answer for her husband, in order to save her. Thus, Saturn is just mentioned here, but his moral and wise lesson in the Knight's Tale reminds us of the lesson present in the Merchant's Tale, which solves the intricated situation. May's last words at the end of the tale reminds readers of what is written in the Knight's Tale, related to Saturn and Boethius: "Ful many a man weneth to seen a thing, And it is al another than it semeth. He that misconceyveth, he misdemeth" (ll. 2408-2410). "Fortune's gifts" appear benevolent and satisfying, but they are actually misleading, as in Arcite's and Januarie's cases. For all these reasons, I believe that May is neither to be considered a malevolent character, nor is she to be judged negatively: in her marriage to Januarie, who marries her just for lust, she is able to find her way to survive.

[125] Wentersdorf, Karl P., "Theme and Structure in the Merchant's Tale: The Function of the Pluto Episode", *PMLA*, 80 (1965), p. 524.

The Merchant, through his tale, also offers readers the possibility to discuss medieval conventions. I previously wrote that Chaucer uses marriage in the Merchant's Tale to deal with the philosophical topics also present in the first tale of his work. However, I believe that Chaucer wants to present the general consideration on marriage during the late fourteenth century, as in the Wife of Bath's and the Clerk's Tales. There are, in fact, many ancient authors cited throughout the tale, and as we have already read, the Merchant, Januarie, Placebo and Justinus discuss marriage frequently, showing often their misogynist considerations. We cannot forget the discussion that Pluto and Proserpina have in the last part of the tale, where Pluto displays his misogynist ideas concerning wives, who, according to the pagan deity, betray their husbands, mentioning ancient authorities, like Solomon (ll. 2237-2248). On the other hand, Proserpina wishes May's answer to her husband to become a valid example for all women (ll. 2267-2270). Proserpina's speech reminds readers of a similar attitude, which the Wife of Bath is endowed with, and which is also present in Chaucer's Envoy at the end of the Clerk's Tale. In order to understand the social meaning expressed through the topic of marriage in the Merchant's Tale, we need to consider what J. D. Burnley writes about the garden present in the Merchant's Tale. The scholar writes that Januarie's garden could be compared to the Garden of Eden, and January and May to Adam and Eve.[126] Thus, one might associate May's unfaithfulness to the Fall caused by Eve's deed. Starting from the perspective of the Fall, Karl P. Wentersdorf evokes Pluto and Proserpina's myth, written by Ovid in his *Metamorphoses*:

> The legend of Pluto constitutes a kind of pagan Fall: just as, according to the Biblical story, death came into the world because of specific sinful acts by Adam and Eve, so, in the classical legend, the death of nature in the winter of each year is the result of an original wrongdoing — Pluto's ravishment of Ceres' daughter. […] The Pluto episode […] emphasizes not only the inevitability of May's urge to be unfaithful to her husband, but also, and this more importantly, the ultimate responsibility of January himself for his wife's infidelity, on account of the wrongness of the initial action — the "ravishment" of May.[127]

We understand Chaucer's intention in presenting the myth of Pluto and Proserpina: he wants to make his audience reflect upon marriage and women from a different perspective, as he does through the figure of Saturn in the Knight's Tale, for what concerns the historical events and societal changes.

[126] Burnley, J. D., "The Morality of 'The Merchant's Tale'", *The Yearbook of English Studies*, 6 (1976), pp. 23-24.
[127] Wentersdorf, p. 527.

Christian religion blames Eve for the Fall, while the pagan myth blames Pluto, a male deity, for raping Proserpina, as the cause of the death of nature in the world. This interpretation could be seen as one of the outcomes of fourteenth-century social changes, on which Saturn incites the pilgrims to ponder. May, endowed with cleverness, thanks to Proserpina, who swears in the name of Kronos, admonishes the pilgrims to reconsider the medieval ideas regarding women and marriage, thus, to see their limits and allow the pilgrims to think according to their beliefs. The negative aspects of their marriage are Januarie's faults, not May's: she can be considered a woman who has the power to oppose her husband's lechery and dominion through her wise answer, even though indirectly, in order to live according to her intentions. Though May is obliged to marry Januarie, she has the possibility to love Damian and meet him secretly, thanks to her cleverness.

Januarie is the opposite of Palamon and Boethius, and he is under the fickleness of Fortune; May, on the contrary, offers Chaucer's audience the possibility to consider women and marriage in a different manner, therefore, not only women are the cause of all the faults in marriage. Whether directly or indirectly, the Merchant reflects upon the outcomes of the social changes occurring in the late Middle Ages.

Conclusion. Saturn and the other planets: the Knight's Tale as an astrological allegory?

In this dissertation, I attempted to analyse the meaning of Saturn and his essential role in the Knight's Tale, starting from the dual outcome of Kronos' myth as expounded by Ovid in his *Metamorphoses* and *Fasti*, and from Kronos' golden age mentioned in Hesiod's *Works and Days*. In the Knight's Tale, Saturn represents human beings blinded by their desires, through the metaphor of planetary influence, that is, the prison of human life and, at the same time, the wisdom, prudence and maturity that people should abide by a moral life: all these elements are a clear reference to Boethius' philosophical considerations embodied by the figure of Saturn. From a political and societal perspective, Saturn's speech epitomises the historical facts occurring in fourteenth-century England, such as the Black Death, the Hundred Years' War, and the Peasants' Revolt. We have also seen that according to Brown and Butcher, the Knight's Tale mainly deals with the political events occurring between 1386 and 1396-7; the same scholars also point out that the tale is not a mere historical allegory, but rather it is a way to activate in readers' mind those events considered determinant for this decade. For this reason, I wrote that Saturn's speech recalls the political and historical events of the fourteenth century in order to make the audience weigh up the positive and negative aspects and the outcomes of the social changes of that century, for instance, social mobility. In so doing, Saturn admonishes the pilgrims to live according to their individuality, building their future and finding themselves, always pursuing the communal good and moral virtue. In the fourth chapter, I briefly analysed some aspects of the Pardoner's, the Wife of Bath's, the Franklin's and the Clerk's tales, which present particular analogies with the topics present in the Knight's Tale and embodied by the figure of Saturn. Furthermore, I found different similarities between the Merchant's and the Knight's Tale: Fortune, gardens, wisdom and the search for real happiness are present in both tales.

In this chapter I shall propose a further consideration regarding Saturn and the medieval astrological lore. We have seen, in fact, several astrological allusions in the *Canterbury Tales* and, in the second chapter, I wrote that they were part of the medieval culture to which Chaucer alludes in his works. These allusions are also present in some of Chaucer's works, for instance, *The Complaint of Mars* and *Troilus and Criseyde*; I mention these two works because I consider them valid examples in order to understand the astrological allegory of Saturn and Jupiter in the Knight's Tale. *The Complaint of Mars*, a poem on the love of Mars for Venus, has been generally considered in two ways: the first concerns political allegories, but there is also an interpretation of the work as a description of an astronomical event. As far as the political interpretation is concerned, G.H. Cowling writes that the poem, ordered by John of Lancaster, is a representation of the love between Elizabeth, Countess of Huntingdon and John Holland, Earl of Huntingdon and "the poem, intended to represent her feelings towards her husband, is another defence of her romantic marriage to Sir John Holland, afterwards Earl of Huntingdon".[128] On the contrary, according to the astrological interpretation, the poem describes the relationships between the characters of the poem under the perspective of "aspects", astrological term explaining the positions of the planets and their distances:[129] in so doing, Chaucer points out the specific position of the planets, that is, the conjunction of Venus and Mars occurring in 1385 turning "the romantic love of the daughter of his patron into something poetic".[130]

I underline the year 1385 because it is essential also to interpret the conjunction of Jupiter, the Moon and Saturn described in *Troilus and Criseyde*, and the interpretation I shall give of Saturn for the Knight's Tale. In *Troilus and Criseyde*, Chaucer writes that the crescent Moon joins Saturn and Jupiter in the constellation of Cancer, causing "swych a rein" which incites Criseyde to stay at her uncle Pandarus' house for the night (ll. 624-651). The conjunction of planets is a literary device created by Chaucer in order to explain what follows in the story. Pandarus contrives to let Criseyde and Troilus sleep together: he invents Troilus' jealousy provoked by a false rumour saying that

[128] Cowling, G.H., "Chaucer's Complaintes of Mars and of Venus", *The Review of English Studies*, 2 (1926), p. 409.
[129] Laird, Edgar S., "Astrology and Irony in Chaucer's "Complaint of Mars", *The Chaucer Review*, 6 (1972), p. 229.
[130] Cowling, p. 409.

Criseyde loves Horaste (ll. 792-798). Pandarus urges his niece to clarify immediately the situation with Troilus (ll. 850-861). The planetary conjunction, to which Chaucer refers, occurred on June 9th or 10th, 1385 and such a conjunction in the constellation of Cancer had not happened for 600 years.[131]

In the Knight's Tale, there is the presence of the pagan deities, which allegorically represent the homonymous planets and their aspects occurring on a specific date: in the lines that follow I shall present North's reading of this issue. The scholar, after consulting some fourteenth-century almanacs, concludes his reasoning starting from Saturn's speech on his planetary influences when the planet dwells in the sign of Leo: Saturn was in the constellation of Leo during the first week of May both in 1388 and 1389, and North points out that the date of the final battle between Arcite and Palamon, that Chaucer had in mind while he was writing the tale, is supposed to coincide with Tuesday, 5 May 1388, after checking some calendars and the days of the week mentioned in the Tale.[132] Considering the planetary positions of that day, North writes that Mars (17° Aquarius) is in opposition (negative astrological aspect of 180°) with Saturn (7° Leo) and Venus (15° Gemini) is sextile with Saturn (positive astrological aspect of 60°), and in an ambiguous aspect with Mars (she is in a face of Mars and at the same time in her own term).[133] The scholar also writes that:

> Those with the will to see hidden meanings in all this are not likely to have much difficulty, although Chaucer probably saw only the more obvious aspects. But the central fact is clear enough: the aptness of the horoscope is more than a product of mere chance.[134]

We already know that Chaucer used the plot of *Teseida* and added some elements so as to deal with philosophy and society (as I have already discussed). Thus, given Chaucer's possible interest in the observation of the planets, he might have allegorically associated the events described in the *Teseida* with the astronomical movements occurring in the date suggested by North (always keeping in mind that Arcite and Palamon live in ancient Greece, and not in fourteenth-century England. From this perspective, the planetary opposition between Mars and Saturn may underline the pagan deity's

[131] Chaucer, *Troilus and Criseyde*, p. 173. Stephen A. Barney adds this astronomical and astrological information.
[132] North, J.D., "Kalenderes Enlumyned Ben They: Some Astronomical Themes in Chaucer", *Review of English Studies*, 20 (1969), p. 153.
[133] North, p. 154.
[134] North, p. 154.

decision to make Arcite (devoted to Mars) perish, whereas the positive planetary aspect between Venus (to whom Palamon is devoted) and Saturn may represent the final happy outcome of the battle for Palamon. The ambiguous astrological aspects between Mars and Venus could represent the break of the familial bond between the two knights.

There is no mention of the planetary conjunction between Saturn and Jupiter in the Knight's Tale; however, we have seen that Saturn is an essential character of the Tale, but also Jupiter, who, as I wrote in the second and third chapter, is epitomised by Theseus (according to some scholars), especially when he gives his final speech: the duke of Athens thanks Jupiter for "al his grace" (l. 3069). As we have seen, Theseus is not the character who displays the meaning of the Knight's Tale: it is expressed by Saturn, with his moral, philosophical, and political message. Theseus/Jupiter finds an alternative way to interpret Saturn's meaning, which is cruel and ruthless but essentially necessary, through a courtly, aristocratic and religious consideration. As pointed out by Kolve, "Saturn is "conjunct" with Jupiter in the poem, but his nature is not fundamentally altered".[135] In spite of his typical disorder (passions, false happiness, planetary influences, death and so forth), Saturn is also able to retain his wisdom, prudence and maturity and expressed them through his final decision, made "agayn his kynde". My idea is that Chaucer initially composed the Knight's Tale as a separate work from the *Canterbury Tales* and used Saturn and Theseus/Jupiter as allegories also to allude to the effects of the conjunction between Saturn and Jupiter occurring in 1385, that is, the social changes during the fourteenth century. As Eade points out:

> We should note, too, that conjunctions of Saturn and Jupiter are necessarily of rare occurrence (they being the two slowest-moving planets), and in astrological terms the conjunction of the 'major infortune' and the 'major fortune' is momentous.[136]

In the third chapter I wrote that the figure of Saturn helps the audience to weigh up the outcomes of the social changes and ponder on some of the medieval values which needed to be reconsidered, because of these changes. The courtly and aristocratic interpretation of the tale drawn by

[135] Kolve, *Chaucer and the Imagery of Narrative: the First Five Canterbury Tales*, p. 126. The scholar quotes P.M. Kean, *Chaucer and the Making of English Poetry, II*, 29-34.
[136] Eade, p. 106.

Theseus/Jupiter is modified by the presence of Saturn: there is justice (Jupiter's influence, according to astrology) at the end of the tale, but it is not the justice that audience is expected to see, because it is affected by Saturn's decision. The genre of the tale is chivalric romance, but its meaning is different: Arcite dies as a valiant knight, according to Theseus/Jupiter, but in truth, Arcite dies as a man struck by his passions (Saturn's decision). Thus, the conjunction between the two planets may symbolise the reconsideration of some medieval values and the changes of fourteenth-century England, brought by the historical events and expressed in the Knight's Tale: Saturn reminds readers of these changes but also to retain the required wisdom. This is, I think, the saturnian golden age that Chaucer wished for fourteenth-century England.

Riassunto in lingua italiana della tesi

La presente tesi si propone di analizzare il ruolo della figura di Saturno nel Racconto del Cavaliere, scritto da Geoffrey Chaucer e inserito nei *Canterbury Tales*. Per comprendere pienamente i significati espressi da Saturno, ho diviso la tesi in quattro capitoli principali.

Nel primo capitolo, ho presentato l'ambientazione dei *Canterbury Tales*, descritta nel General Prologue, ovvero il ritrovo di un gruppo di pellegrini, provenienti da diverse classi sociali, intenzionati a compiere un pellegrinaggio verso la tomba del martire Thomas Becket, a Canterbury. Su proposta dell'oste della locanda di Southwark in cui si radunano per il pellegrinaggio, i partecipanti si raccontano storie dagli svariati argomenti. Il primo ad essere descritto è il Cavaliere, il quale possiede le virtù cavalleresche, come l'onore e la fedeltà. Viene presentato modesto come una fanciulla ma allo stesso tempo vengono elencate le azioni militari compiute in passato. Inoltre, non ha l'aspetto curato come il figlio, lo Scudiero, e indossa abiti modesti.

Sempre nel primo capitolo, ho presentato i punti caratteristici del Racconto del Cavaliere: i lettori assistono a un'apertura epica, poiché Chaucer propone la storia di Tebe attraverso le azioni militari di Theseus, duca di Atene. All'inizio del Racconto vi è infatti un chiaro riferimento alla fonte letteraria del Racconto, proveniente da autorità antiche: la fonte principale del Racconto del Cavaliere è la *Teseida* di Boccaccio, sebbene non vi sia allusione all'autore nel testo.

All'inizio del Racconto del Cavaliere vengono raccontate le azioni militari di Theseus, il quale conquista il regno delle Amazzoni, sposandone la regina Hippolyta e portando lei e la sorella Emelye ad Atene. Al ritorno, un gruppo di vedove piangenti di Tebe chiede a Teseo di vendicare l'uccisione dei loro mariti per mano di Creonte, re di Tebe, il quale non permette loro una degna sepoltura. Theseus sconfigge il re tebano e successivamente, trova due cavalieri di nobili origini, Arcite e suo cugino Palamon. Un ulteriore elemento epico nel Racconto del Cavaliere è la presenza delle divinità pagane: Arcite è devoto a Marte, Palamon a Venere ed Emelye a Diana.

In seguito si assiste al passaggio dal genere epico a quello del romanzo cavalleresco: dalla torre della prigione in cui i due cavalieri sono condannati per il resto della loro esistenza, Palamon si accorge della presenza della bella Emelye, intenta a raccogliere fiori in un bellissimo giardino. Anche quando Arcite di accorge della bellezza di Emelye, i due cavalieri elaborano descrizioni tipiche del linguaggio dell'amore cortese: Emelye diventa la fonte primaria dell'amore dei due cavalieri, i cui effetti sono da una parte di gioia e adorazione ma dall'altra di dolore, causato dall'impossibilità della vicinanza alla donna amata, paragonata a una dea. I due cugini non vengono descritti fisicamente, e nemmeno caratterialmente: si viene a conoscenza solamente dei loro valori cortesi e cavallereschi e della tendenza di Arcite a filosofeggiare sulla negativa influenza planetaria di Saturno e sulla loro condizione famigliare reale tebana. Di qui in poi verrà descritta la rottura del loro rapporto considerato fraterno: entrambi rivendicano il loro amore per Emelye, e una volta usciti di prigione, combatteranno l'uno contro l'altro in un bosco. Verranno trovati da Theseus, Hippolyta ed Emelye: inizialmente Theseus li condanna a morte per il loro tradimento e la fuga di prigione, ma le due donne suscitano la pietà del duca di Atene, il quale decide di farli combattere in un anfiteatro: il vincitore sposerà Emelye. Nell'anfiteatro, fatto costruire appositamente dal duca di Atene, vengono eretti dei templi dedicati alle tre divinità pagane, Venere, Marte e Diana. Arcite chiede a Marte di vincere il torneo, mentre Palamon prega Venere di concedergli l'amore di Emelye, e quest'ultima chiede a Diana di rimanere una vergine, ma la dea le ricorda che è promessa a uno dei due cavalieri. Nella lotta tra Venere e Marte, entrambi intenti a mantenere le promesse fatte ai due cavalieri, interviene Saturno, il quale decide di garantire la vittoria ad Arcite e l'amore di Emelye a Palamon. Alla fine del racconto, Arcite vincerà la competizione, ma il suo cavallo, spaventato dalla presenza di una furia, inviata da Plutone, per ordine di Saturno, lo fa cadere, ferendolo mortalmente. Prima di morire, Arcite riconosce la virtù cavalleresca e l'onore di Palamon. Theseus pronuncia un discorso finale in cui suggerisce di fare di necessità virtù e mostrare il proprio valore e il proprio onore durante la permanenza sulla terra. Theseus sancirà il matrimonio tra Palamon ed Emelye.

All'inizio della tesi è stato detto che la fonte letteraria a cui attinge Chaucer per il Racconto del Cavaliere è la *Teseida* di Boccaccio: per questo motivo, nella seconda parte del primo capitolo ho proposto un paragone tra le due opere, di modo da comprendere la figura di Saturno, il quale appare nel Racconto del Cavaliere ma è assente nell'opera boccacciana. La trama delle due opere è molto simile: in entrambi i casi, si assiste a un inizio epico, seguito da alcune vicende tipiche del romanzo cavalleresco. La versione di Chaucer è più breve di quella boccacciana: l'amore, infatti non è la tematica principale del Racconto del Cavaliere. Nella *Teseida* vi è, da parte dell'autore, l'identificazione tra Boccaccio e Arcite, e di Fiammetta, amata del poeta, con Emelye: il tempio dedicato ad Arcite da Palamon nel Libro XI della *Teseida*, suggerisce che l'intento letterario di Boccaccio è quello di celebrare Arcite per l'amore provato per la donna amata, come metafora delle gioie passate contrapposte alla miseria in cui si trova il poeta, lontano dalla donna amata. Invece, Chaucer inserisce l'amore cortese e gli elementi cavallereschi come sfondo alla trama: l'intento dell'autore è quello di trattare argomenti filosofici riguardanti la condizione e la felicità umane. Non a caso, il pellegrinaggio che fa da sfondo all'intera opera simboleggia il percorso umano verso l'individualità, per ritrovare il vero io e costruire il proprio futuro. Tema principale della tesi è appunto la figura di Saturno, il quale suggerisce di vivere saggiamente e moralmente per liberarsi dai condizionamenti esterni.

Nel secondo capitolo, ho riportato brevemente il mito di Kronos, descritto nella *Teogonia* e ne *Le opere e i giorni* di Esiodo, e nelle *Metamorfosi* e nei *Fasti* di Ovidio e le considerazioni astrologiche antiche e medievali riguardanti il pianeta Saturno, per comprendere sia l'influenza negativa dell'omonimo pianeta sulla libertà e individualità dei personaggi nel Racconto del Cavaliere, sia l'influenza positiva, caratterizzata dalla saggezza e dalla maturità espressa dalla divinità pagana e dall'Età dell'Oro stabilita tra gli esseri umani, una volta fuggito dall'Olimpo. Secondo la *Teogonia* di Esiodo, Kronos è figlio di Urano e Gea: il padre, spaventato da una sua possibile detronizzazione da parte dei figli, decide di imprigionarne alcuni (Hecatoncheires). Gea dona a Kronos la falce con la quale evira il padre. Una volta divenuto sovrano dell'Olimpo, Kronos divora i figli avuti con la sorella

e sposa Rea, ammonito dalla madre di una futura sconfitta inflitta dal figlio Zeus. Per salvare la vita del figlio, Rea passa una pietra a Kronos, fingendo che sia il neonato Zeus: una volta cresciuto, spodesta e scaccia il padre, divenendo sovrano dell'Olimpo. Nelle *Metamorfosi*, viene riportato che Kronos trova rifugio nell'Oltretomba, mentre nei *Fasti* fugge in Italia. Inoltre, Esiodo racconta nella sua opera (*Le opere e i giorni*) che gli esseri umani vivevano un periodo prospero, ovvero l'Età dell'Oro, durante il regno di Kronos. Queste versioni del mito rivelano la doppia natura di Kronos: secondo Theresa Tinkle, i mitografi e gli scrittori antichi e medievali lo rappresentano come un dio saggio e dotato di intelligenza divina, creatore del mondo, ma anche come un dio spietato che divora i figli, come lo scorrere crudele del tempo. Klibansky, Panofsky e Saxl sottolineano il fatto che la falce donatagli dalla madre rappresenti la proverbiale dualità della divinità pagana, incarnando sia l'uccisione del padre ma anche il tempo del raccolto, essendo considerato dio fondatore dell'agricoltura.

La dualità di Kronos/Saturno può essere identificata anche dalle considerazioni astronomiche e astrologiche rivolte all'omonimo pianeta. Secondo la concezione tolemaica, il pianeta è il più distante dal sole (tipica freddezza attribuita a Saturno), il più lento ed è caratterizzato da un movimento planetario retrogrado: per questi motivi, Saturno è stato a lungo considerato un pianeta malevolo che influenza negativamente la vita degli esseri umani. Invece, secondo alcune concezioni della filosofia del Neoplatonismo, l'influenza planetaria di Saturno favorisce l'intelletto. Theresa Tinkle evidenzia il fatto che Saturno venga rappresentato dai mitografi come un uomo velato (allo stesso modo venivano rappresentati i filosofi dai mitografi), come se stesse indicando a chi lo guarda di fare altrettanto per proteggersi, sottolineando la tipica maturità e saggezza saturnina.

Nei *Canterbury Tales* troviamo diverse allusioni ai movimenti planetari. Nel Medioevo, infatti, venivano utilizzati vari strumenti, come l'astrolabio, gli almanacchi, gli *equatoria* e i calendari per osservare i movimenti delle stelle e interpretarli per fornire consigli medici, prevedere gli esiti delle malattie ed eventi come i matrimoni oppure redigere gli oroscopi natali. Queste informazioni permettono di comprendere come l'astrologia venisse utilizzata a scopo medico-scientifico: pertanto,

ho introdotto nella mia tesi la teoria dei Quattro Umori, sviluppata nell'Antica Grecia e adottata anche durante il Medioevo e il Rinascimento per spiegare fenomeni naturali. Secondo questa teoria, gli umori sono il sangue, la bile gialla, la flemma e la bile nera, e combinati fra loro, influenzano la disposizione corporea e la personalità umana. Un eccesso oppure una carenza di uno o più degli umori, determina i tratti caratteristici di una personalità, conferendo quattro temperamenti diversi tra loro: sanguigno, collerico, flemmatico e melanconico: ogni umore/temperamento viene associato a una stagione naturale e a una fase specifica della vita. L'astrologia utilizzava la teoria dei quattro umori per giustificare la relazione tra gli esseri umani e le stelle, e per questo motivo, Saturno veniva associato alla malinconia, grazie al mito di Kronos: la divinità pagana veniva spesso rappresentata come una figura anziana e saggia, ma tendente al pessimismo e ai pensieri profondi. Si credeva che i nati sotto l'influenza saturnina, inevitabilmente acquisissero le qualità di saggezza e maturità, ma allo stesso tempo, influenzati da un eccesso di bile nera, tendessero alla depressione, all'ansia, alla malinconia e alla misantropia. Klibansky, Panofsky e Saxl sottolineano la presenza della radice greca del sostantivo "malinconia" che significa appunto "nero", e per questa ragione, la malinconia è stata spesso associata a tutto ciò che è oscuro e malevolo.

Ho considerato particolarmente importanti queste nozioni astrologiche e astronomiche per comprendere l'influenza negativa di Saturno nel Racconto del Cavaliere. Nel testo, si legge infatti che all'interno dell'anfiteatro, fatto costruire da Theseus, troviamo i muri dei templi dedicati alle divinità pagane decorati con immagini raffiguranti le caratteristiche degli esseri umani influenzati dai pianeti. Kolve afferma che queste rappresentazioni rimandano a una tradizione artistica medievale, ovvero quella dei "Figli dei pianeti", proveniente dai testi astrologici di Abu Ma'sar e Alcabitius, scritti tra il nono e il decimo secolo: la tradizione parte nel dodicesimo secolo dalla traduzione latina di questi testi, con le prime raffigurazioni artistiche avvenute alla fine del quattordicesimo secolo. Nel tempio dedicato a Marte, ad esempio, vengono raffigurate persone sotto l'influenza malevola di Marte, come una vittima di suicidio, un tiranno, un macellaio e un fabbro. Nella tesi ho ipotizzato che

Chaucer abbia utilizzato questa tradizione per rappresentare le inclinazioni dei tre personaggi nel pregare le tre divinità e descriverli come soggetti alla Fortuna e ai suoi cambiamenti.

Alla fine della terza parte del Racconto, Saturno viene presentato come una divinità che ha fatto della sua esperienza un'arte, dotato per questo di saggezza la quale lo porta ad agire contro la sua vera natura per risolvere il litigio tra Venere e Marte. Saturno sottolinea nel suo discorso la negativa influenza planetaria trasmessa ai propri "Figli" durante il transito dell'omonimo pianeta nella costellazione del Leone: gli vengono attribuiti gli annegamenti, le impiccagioni, le ribellioni della popolazione, gli avvelenamenti, i tradimenti, le vendette, la caduta delle torri, le prigioni, la pestilenza, le malattie "fredde". Tuttavia, l'influenza negativa di Saturno appare nel Racconto prima del suo discorso: la guerra di Theseus mossa contro Tebe, l'uccisione dei mariti delle donne tebane, l'imprigionamento di Arcite e Palamon, la morte di Arcite e, come evidenziato da Peter Brown e Andrew Butcher, il colore nero usato per i preparativi del suo funerale. Saturno, inoltre, influenza le caratteristiche fisiche dei suoi "Figli": l'aspetto fisico di Arcite cambia una volta uscito di prigione e bandito da Atene. Il cavaliere, infatti, diviene pallido e soffre di malinconia, e per questo motivo viene descritto come privato del sonno e dell'appetito. Un altro figlio di Saturno è Lycurgus, l'uomo che accompagna Palamon durante il torneo, descritto come un uomo vecchio, dai capelli neri, ma dotato di un'attitudine saggia e non militare come Emetreus, l'uomo che accompagna Arcite durante la battaglia finale tra i due cavalieri. Da queste riflessioni si può dedurre che Arcite rappresenti gli aspetti negativi dell'influenza saturnina, mentre Palamon l'attitudine saggia e matura apportata dall'influenza positiva del pianeta. Le riflessioni elaborate sull'influenza di Saturno rivelano una forte presenza del pianeta all'interno del Racconto: una scelta autoriale per dimostrare la fragilità dell'essere umano, afflitto dai suoi stessi desideri e dalle sue stesse passioni, attraverso la metafora delle influenze planetarie.

Nella terza parte del secondo capitolo, ho sottolineato l'importanza del discorso di Theseus, tenuto dopo la decisione di Saturno e la morte di Arcite. Il discorso del duca di Atene contiene elementi legati all'amore cortese, ai valori cavallereschi e religiosi. Theseus, infatti, produce una sorta

di cosmologia, dove Giove, creatore dell'universo, ha predisposto un ordine, realizzando la catena dell'amore, una combinazione dei quattro elementi generatrice di tutti gli esseri, sia terrestri che celesti. Oltre a questa creazione, il "First Movere" ha incluso un limite ai giorni di vita di ogni essere vivente e non: folle è colui che si ribella a questo disegno divino. Per questo motivo, Theseus esorta i partecipanti del funerale a non affliggersi per la morte di Arcite, ma bensì a fare di necessità virtù. Il consiglio di Theseus è di salvaguardare il proprio onore prima di morire, prima che esso venga dimenticato. Il duca di Atene esorta tutti i partecipanti a pensare che Arcite ora è felice poiché libero dalla prigione, ovvero dalla vita terrestre, caratterizzata dal dolore. Il discorso finale elaborato da Theseus rimanda a *De Consolatione Philosophiae*, dal quale Chaucer attinge per esprimere il significato di Saturno nel Racconto del Cavaliere. Il riferimento alla combinazione degli elementi in una singola unità rimanda all'unità espressa da Boezio riguardante la felicità umana: ciò che la costituisce non sono i singoli elementi, come l'autosufficienza, il potere, la gloria, ma l'unione di essi. V.A. Kolve associa Teseo a Giove, come se egli fosse un "Figlio" dell'omonimo pianeta: il duca di Atene, infatti, allude a Giove e all'ordine divino; inoltre, la teoria dei "Figli dei Pianeti" indica che intellettuali, giudici, avvocati, studenti e cortigiani sono dominati dall'influenza di Giove. Per questo motivo, Theseus acquisisce il ruolo di un sacerdote perché dona un senso alla decisione crudele di Saturno, sancendo il matrimonio tra Palamon ed Emelye, e stabilisce apparentemente la pace nel disordine precedente. Il matrimonio è il tipico finale per un romanzo cavalleresco: attraverso Theseus, il Cavaliere esprime i propri valori cavallereschi e cortesi, soddisfacendo le aspettative del pubblico cortese medievale. La giustizia espressa da Theseus è la pietà mostrata durante il Racconto e culminante nel discorso finale, con una positiva riconsiderazione della morte di Arcite. Tuttavia, il significato del Racconto non viene espresso dal duca di Atene: il Cavaliere, secondo Walter Scheps, è un narratore che interpreta sia il pensiero di Theseus che quello di Chaucer. La mia idea, infatti, consiste nel fatto che sia Saturno il personaggio ad esprimere il significato del Racconto. Il disordine esistenziale presente prima e durante il torneo, ovvero la debolezza degli esseri umani nell'essere influenzati dai propri desideri e dalle proprie passioni, non viene risolta da Theseus: egli, per quanto

cerchi di ristabilire l'ordine attraverso le sue decisioni, l'anfiteatro e il discorso finale, rimarrà comunque un "Figlio dei pianeti", influenzato dal disordine esistenziale (Kolve). Pertanto, il discorso finale appare consolante ma non risolutore del problema posto da Chaucer nel Racconto.

Nella quarta e quinta parte del secondo capitolo, ho dimostrato come Saturno esprima il messaggio del Racconto. Le prigioni sono uno degli elementi dell'influenza malevola di Saturno: all'interno del Racconto, vi sono appunto tre tipi di prigione. La prima, la prigione di Arcite e Palamon contrapposta al giardino incantevole in cui passeggia Emelye, e la seconda, la prigione d'amore in cui vengono intrappolati Arcite e Palamon, dimostrano come i personaggi del Racconto siano influenzati dalle loro stesse passioni, desideri, più comunemente dalla Fortuna. Kolve elabora un paragone tra la contrapposizione della bellezza del giardino e la durezza della prigione con la *House of Fortune* descritta da Guillaume de Lorris nel *Romance of the Rose*: la casa della Fortuna è caratterizzata da una parte decorata da muri dorati e argentati ricoperti di gioielli; l'altra, invece, è cadente e con muri di fango. Dunque, l'alternanza e la contrapposizione tra la prigione e il giardino nel Racconto simboleggia il continuo passare da una situazione positiva a una negativa dei personaggi: essi, infatti, sono influenzati dagli "alti e bassi" della Ruota della Fortuna. Il ripetersi dei movimenti dall'alto verso il basso e dell'andare avanti e indietro dei personaggi all'interno del Racconto simboleggia il loro vagare erroneamente nel corso della vita perché influenzati dai vizi e dalle passioni. Essi, infatti, giustificano le proprie azioni accusando continuamente la Fortuna degli avvenimenti negativi: lo possiamo notare nella scena della prigione, quando Arcite incolpa la disposizione di Saturno nel cielo per la condizione di prigionia, e afferma che tale disposizione planetaria affligge la loro esistenza dalla nascita. Oppure il momento in cui Palamon posa lo sguardo su Emelye viene descritto come un fatto accidentale. Tutti questi sono esempi che dimostrano come i due cavalieri incolpino la Fortuna per fuggire al giudizio morale ed evitare le loro responsabilità (J. Allan Mitchell): essi basano la loro etica morale sugli incidenti improvvisi del destino, rivelandosi deboli e immaturi. Secondo Thomas A. Van, i due cavalieri considerano l'universo come ostacolo

dei loro desideri, proprio perché la Fortuna escogita loro continuamente dei tranelli. Nella mia tesi, ho indicato due "tranelli" in particolare, ovvero la prigione d'amore e l'anfiteatro.

La prigione d'amore viene identificata nel dialogo tra Arcite e Palamon una volta che il primo viene rilasciato di prigione: il cavaliere accusa la Fortuna di allontanarlo dalla donna amata, e quindi si considera imprigionato, sebbene sia libero, mentre Palamon, anche se ancora imprigionato, ha la possibilità di vedere ogni giorno Emelye. Il capovolgimento tipico della Fortuna diventa ora capovolgimento di prospettiva: i due cavalieri non sono solo imprigionati fisicamente ma anche dall'amore che provano per la donna amata, e presi dalla forte passione, non riconoscono più quale sia la vera libertà. Ecco perché Arcite elabora un discorso sulla ricerca erronea della felicità degli esseri umani: un chiaro riferimento a *De Consolatione Philosopahie*, in cui Filosofia incita Boezio a non seguire i vizi che gli esseri umani comunemente considerano essenziali per la propria felicità. Al contrario, la vera felicità consiste nell'avere uno spirito non influenzato da condizionamenti esterni.

La terza prigione e ulteriore tranello è l'anfiteatro: secondo J.D. North, le descrizioni elaborate da Chaucer sulle forme geometriche della costruzione, rimandano allo zodiaco. All'interno dell'anfiteatro non sono presenti solo i personaggi principali, bensì i partecipanti al torneo e gli spettatori: se la prigione contrapposta al giardino e la prigione d'amore rappresentano la debolezza morale e il condizionamento delle passioni sui personaggi principali del Racconto, l'Anfiteatro simboleggia le costellazioni con i pianeti che si muovono al loro interno (riferimento alle passioni, desideri e vizi) e da cui gli esseri umani vengono condizionati. L'anfiteatro viene costruito per ristabilire l'ordine, ma in realtà è un tranello della Fortuna che porta i protagonisti a pregare il caos e il disordine umano, ovvero le divinità, i pianeti. L'alternanza tra la bellezza dei templi e il caos al suo interno rivela un ulteriore aspetto dell'essere umano: l'ordine creato da Dio viene alterato dall'instabilità degli esseri umani, i quali perdono la perfezione divina a causa del Peccato Originale. La natura umana, secondo la letteratura medievale e rinascimentale, è caratterizzata dalla contrarietà e da elementi opposti fra loro (T. McAlindon), come i personaggi del Racconto. La tematica esistenziale viene rappresentata dalla figura di Saturno: le prigioni sono prodotti dell'influenza

malevola saturnina, che evidenzia la tendenza umana a farsi influenzare dalla Fortuna, dalle passioni e dai desideri, impedendo di seguire l'individualità. Tuttavia, data la sua proverbiale dualità derivata dal mito di Kronos, Saturno rappresenta anche la risposta saggia a questo problema esistenziale, proponendo allo stesso tempo alcuni concetti filosofici espressi da Boezio.

Nella quinta parte del secondo capitolo, ho presentato l'influenza benevola di Saturno espressa dal comportamento di Palamon e del Cavaliere stesso. Boezio indica che gli esseri umani ricercano la felicità su aspetti della vita considerati erronei, come la ricchezza, la fama, la gloria e i piaceri. La vera felicità, secondo Filosofia, sta nell'essere autosufficienti, tendendo all'unità delle cose: la felicità non consiste in un singolo aspetto, ma dall'insieme degli aspetti che compongono la felicità stessa. Arcite si dimostra un uomo colpito dai suoi stessi desideri, e sebbene elabori ragionamenti filosofici durante il Racconto, non comprenderà la lezione di Boezio, preferendo la gloria personale. Palamon, al contrario, sebbene si dimostri alla mercé delle sue stesse passioni, alla fine del Racconto accantonerà la gloria personale e perseguirà l'unione con Emelye. I due cavalieri sono pedine nelle mani di Saturno, il quale dimostra attraverso i loro atteggiamenti la dualità del mito di Kronos: Arcite rappresenta l'autodistruzione umana come conseguenza del condizionamento dalle proprie passioni, mentre il cambiamento di Palamon dimostra la saggezza, la prudenza e la maturità tipica di Saturno. Il ruolo di Saturno nel Racconto del Cavaliere è quello di moderare le passioni e di indirizzare gli esseri umani verso un processo di maturazione: secondo Douglas Brooks e Alastair Fowler, il Racconto del Cavaliere verte sulla crescita umana e spirituale: i diversi personaggi infatti, come affrontato precedentemente, cambiano il loro atteggiamento, riconoscendo gli errori commessi. Questa maturità è rappresentata da Saturno il quale, metaforicamente, taglia con la falce il superfluo della vita umana, consentendo di vivere saggiamente e individualmente, riportando ordine nel disordine esistenziale. Non appare causale la scelta di Chaucer di porre il Racconto del Cavaliere come prima storia dei *Canterbury Tales*: penso che la lezione morale di Saturno sia d'aiuto per leggere e interpretare alcuni aspetti degli altri racconti. Il Cavaliere, oltre a rappresentare l'ideologia

cavalleresca, sembra comprendere pienamente la lezione di Boezio: egli è anziano, come Saturno, è gentile e non è vestito elegantemente, dimostrando di non essere attaccato ai bene materiali.

Il messaggio di Saturno vale per tutte le classi sociali: come ricordato da William Frost, Egeus, padre di Theseus afferma che la morte è la fine di ogni dolore umano per tutti gli esseri umani. Il dio pagano esprime l'individualità non solo morale, ma anche sociale. Non a caso non vi è alcun altare dedicato alla figura di Saturno all'interno dell'anfiteatro: la mia idea è che Chaucer abbia fatto uso di tutte queste rappresentazioni per descrivere la società in cui viveva con i suoi membri, ovvero i pellegrini, le cui classi sociali rappresentano una o diverse delle caratteristiche mitografiche di Saturno. Il dio simboleggia l'uomo che non si fa condizionare dalle superstizioni o dalle limitazioni medievali, tagliandone con la falce i legami che legano l'uomo a tali condizionamenti, per seguire la propria individualità, in un periodo storico di profondi cambiamenti sociali, tra il Medioevo e l'Umanesimo/Rinascimento. Egli rappresenta l'*homo faber* che agendo "agayn his kinde" rompe i legami con le tradizioni limitanti del passato per stabilire l'Età dell'Oro, passando dalla società feudale a quella caratterizzata dalla mobilità sociale, ricordando la lezione del libero arbitrio espressa da Boezio. Tali considerazioni dimostrerebbero l'interesse di Chaucer verso la società in cui viveva ma allo stesso tempo, implicherebbero il suo assenso al cambiamento. Pertanto, "*agayn his kynde*" può essere considerato anche come "contro il profitto personale": questo elemento rivelerebbe una possibile preoccupazione del poeta verso la mobilità sociale. Saturno, quindi, incarna il messaggio morale di Boezio: è l'amara medicina che Filosofia vuole offrire all'umanità per cambiarne il comportamento immorale, e allo stesso tempo rappresenta le ali che Filosofia vuole porre alle menti delle persone per volare verso l'alto, di modo da raggiungere la vera felicità. Egli rappresenta, inoltre, i cambiamenti sociali del quattordicesimo secolo e l'individualità umana che si attiene costantemente al messaggio morale di Boezio.

Nel terzo capitolo ho proposto una lettura politico-sociale della figura di Saturno partendo dal duca di Atene. Ho sottolineato il fatto che Theseus assomigli alla figura di Giove: tuttavia, secondo Walter Scheps, egli può essere paragonato anche a Saturno. Theseus percorre un processo di

maturazione che lo porta ad adottare un atteggiamento di pietà nei confronti degli altri personaggi, mostrando la saggezza tipica saturnina, ma allo stesso tempo, egli incarna gli aspetti negativi dell'influenza di Saturno. All'inizio del Racconto, viene presentato come il conquistatore del regno delle Amazzoni e il distruttore di Tebe; Arcite incolpa Saturno per la loro condizione ma in realtà è proprio Theseus che li condanna in prigione. Ciononostante, egli è anche colui che risolve la disputa tra i due cavalieri ed è il personaggio che cerca di vendicare le vedove tebane, mosso dalla pietà, come Saturno quando cerca una soluzione alla contesa tra Venere e Marte (Scheps).

Gli effetti dell'influenza negativa di Saturno, come ad esempio le prigioni, la caduta delle torri, le malattie, potrebbero essere un riferimento elaborato da Chaucer agli avvenimenti susseguitesi in Inghilterra nel quattordicesimo secolo. La pestilenza menzionata da Saturno potrebbe essere un richiamo alla Peste Nera, apparsa per la prima volta tra il 1348 e il 1350. La caduta delle torri a cui Saturno allude nel suo discorso, rimanderebbe invece alla Guerra dei Cent'Anni tra le corti inglesi e francesi. Il chiasso delle ribellioni potrebbe essere considerato come le sommosse provocate dalla Rivolta dei Contadini avvenuta nel 1381. Brown e Butcher paragonano il ritorno di Theseus ad Atene come il ritorno di John of Gaunt in Inghilterra, dopo la campagna in Spagna e Portogallo nel 1389 per ristabilire la pace fra Inghilterra e Francia. Sempre gli stessi autori, riferendosi ai tradimenti menzionati da Saturno, paragonano il ritorno di John of Gaunt verso la corte di Riccardo II sconvolta da alcuni scandali e tradimenti al ritorno di Theseus e l'incontro con le vedove tebane: Thomas of Woodstock, fratello di John of Gaunt, cercò di impedire il favoritismo verso alcuni cortigiani da parte di Riccardo II, attraverso il *Merciless Parliament* e una serie di esecuzioni.

La distruttività di tali eventi storici produsse radicali cambiamenti nella società inglese del quattordicesimo secolo. Uno fra questi, le modifiche al sistema tripartito della società medievale, composto da *oratores*, *bellatores* e *laboratores*: dal quattordicesimo secolo si svilupparono alcune classi sociali, come quelle dei *Franklin* e degli *Yeomen*, entrambi della categoria sociale dei *laboratores*. I primi, sebbene non provenienti dalla nobiltà, venivano considerati uomini liberi, mentre i secondi erano socialmente inferiori ai primi, ma tendenzialmente liberi. Si verificò dunque,

per la prima volta, il fattore della mobilità sociale; ma i fatti storico-politici del quattordicesimo secolo non apportarono solo benefici: nei *Canterbury Tales* assistiamo alla tensione sociale tra il Mugnaio e il Fattore, favorita dalla competizione tra le classi, conseguenza della mobilità sociale. Anche il Cavaliere stesso, considerato un uomo virtuoso, può essere visto come un mercenario, se si considera il fatto che abbia combattuto in Russia ("Ruce" nel testo) e quindi per un compenso in denaro contro i Cristiani (Stephen H. Rigby). Saturno nel Racconto del Cavaliere rimanda al disordine dell'Inghilterra nel quattordicesimo secolo, attraverso la rappresentazione di alcuni fatti storici che ne hanno cambiato profondamente la società dell'epoca. Nella seconda parte del terzo capitolo, ho proposto una chiave di lettura, ovvero la saggezza di Saturno, per valutare con un'attitudine critica e prudente i cambiamenti sociali dell'Inghilterra nel quattordicesimo secolo. La biografia di Chaucer e il suo ruolo alla corte di Riccardo II aiutano a capire come il Racconto del Cavaliere e i *Canterbury Tales* siano allegorie per interpretare gli avvenimenti del quattordicesimo secolo, e Saturno, con la sua tipica saggezza, induce a trovare una risposta ai cambiamenti imposti.

Chaucer ebbe l'opportunità di lavorare a corte come valletto, scudiero e ovviamente come poeta. L'influenza letteraria che ricevette a corte fu caratterizzata dall'arrivo di Anna di Boemia, prima moglie di Riccardo II, la quale portò con sé diversi intellettuali dalla corte di Praga. Sebbene Chaucer fosse considerato il più importante poeta alla corte di Riccardo II, sembra non venisse finanziato dal re per i suoi scritti: secondo Alfred Thomas, infatti, Chaucer potrebbe aver immaginato la regina Anna come sua finanziatrice. Data l'attività degli scrittori medievali di corte, la quale prevedeva una continua celebrazione della storia della famiglia reale e della nazione, Chaucer potrebbe aver composto alcune delle sue opere per onorare le figure reali, come si presuppone abbia fatto nel *Book of the Duchess* e in *Troilus and Criseyd*e. Per questo motivo, Brown e Butcher ipotizzano che i fatti raccontati all'interno del Racconto del Cavaliere presentino dei riferimenti agli avvenimenti della politica inglese, principalmente del periodo tra il 1386 e il 1396-7. Sempre secondo questi studiosi, essi non sono delle semplici allegorie degli avvenimenti storici reali, ma al contrario, un modo per attivare nella mente del pubblico una riflessione sui fatti storici considerati fondamentali

nel decennio citato. Come già detto, il Racconto del Cavaliere rimanda al genere del romanzo cavalleresco, dell'amor cortese e dei valori aristocratici. Tuttavia, il messaggio del Racconto non viene espresso da Theseus, bensì da Saturno: sebbene la pietà (caratteristica cortese) venga espressa ripetutamente nel Racconto, non ha la forza necessaria per impedirne la violenza finale e la rottura dei legami considerati inviolabili (Brown and Butcher). Chaucer propone un atteggiamento critico rivolto ad alcuni valori medievali che vengono messi in discussione dai cambiamenti sociali. Ecco che Saturno, attraverso la sua saggezza, spinge i lettori a non considerare gli eventi storici menzionati nel suo discorso come semplici allegorie: attraverso la sua proverbiale saggezza e maturità, esso li spinge a soppesare i vantaggi e gli svantaggi dei cambiamenti sociali apportati dagli avvenimenti storici, e tagliare nuovamente il superfluo in una società in continuo cambiamento, come quella inglese del quattordicesimo secolo.

Nel quarto e ultimo capitolo, ho proposto una breve analisi di alcuni racconti di altri pellegrini (*Pardoner*, *Wife of Bath*, *Franklin* e *Clerk*): la lezione morale e sociale di Saturno può essere d'aiuto per capire il significato di questi racconti. Nel caso del *Pardoner*, l'avidità e l'ingordigia dei personaggi del racconto li conduce alla propria autodistruzione per non aver saputo moderare le proprie passioni. Nel racconto della *Wife of Bath*, invece, la vecchia signora ricorda al cavaliere che la virtù non si acquisisce dal lignaggio, bensì dalle azioni virtuose e ricco è colui che non ha bisogno di nulla, alludendo alla lezione filosofica di Boezio. Nel suo prologo, la *Wife of Bath* dimostra la sua individualità nel riconsiderare il ruolo delle donne all'interno del matrimonio: le sue considerazioni sono il frutto dell'esperienza acquisita nel tempo, come Saturno viene descritto per la sua saggezza ottenuta attraverso la propria esperienza. Il racconto del *Franklin*, invece, sottolinea come i personaggi siano premiati alla fine del suo racconto per la loro generosità e per aver seguito il bene comune, anziché il profitto personale. Il racconto del *Clerk* offre la tenacia di Grisilde nell'accettare tutte le prove e gli alti e bassi inflitti dalla Fortuna: anche Saturno invita a moderare le proprie passioni e a non farsi condizionare dal caso. Attraverso l'Envoy finale (attribuito tendenzialmente a Chaucer), il *Clerk* invita le donne a far sentire la propria voce, evitando l'esempio di Grisilde. Il racconto del

Mercante esprime concetti simili a quelli presentati nel Racconto del Cavaliere: la cecità di Januarie viene considerata come l'irrazionalità umana che si affida alle proprie passioni e ai cambiamenti della Fortuna, e la risposta finale di May a Januarie, invece, induce a riconsiderare il ruolo della donna all'interno del matrimonio. Saturno, similmente, invita a soppesare i vantaggi e gli svantaggi dei cambiamenti e individuare l'assurdità di alcune pretese morali non più valide a causa dei cambiamenti sociali.

Nella conclusione, ho sviluppato una possibile allegoria astrologica del Racconto del Cavaliere. Ho riportato l'esempio della congiunzione astrale tra Giove, Saturno e la Luna avvenuta nel 1385 e riportata in *Troilus and Criseyde*. Le congiunzioni planetarie tra Giove e Saturno sono astrologicamente considerate degli eventi epocali (J.C. Eade). Nel Racconto del Cavaliere non vi è alcun riferimento a tale congiunzione, ma vi è la presenza sia di Saturno che di Giove/Theseus: il messaggio finale espresso da Theseus/Giove viene sovrapposto a quello reale del Racconto da parte di Saturno: Chaucer potrebbe aver usato la congiunzione dei due pianeti avvenuta nel 1385 allegorizzata attraverso le figure dei due personaggi per segnalare metaforicamente i cambiamenti sociali e politici dell'Inghilterra del Quattordicesimo secolo, augurando per la società inglese dell'epoca, una nuova Età dell'Oro, caratterizzata dalla saggezza e della maturità attribuite alla divinità pagana.

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