

## CHAPTER 1

# Dwelling Places of Chivalry and Nature

As the first tale told on the way to Canterbury, the *Knight's Tale* must carve a space for itself, and this the Knight does by describing the world, not as he finds it, perhaps, but as gentlefolk—"gentils" (line 3113)—have agreed to understand the world of chivalry. For them, his tale is a social myth of origins that provides an answer to Arcite's great questions: "What is this world? What asketh men to have?" (line 2777). The world, in this view, is one of warring peoples<sup>1</sup>—thus, the need for order and rule. But those who rule others must first conquer themselves, curb their desires, take others' needs into account, and exercise the power of a tempered will. Such a man is Theseus, Duke of Athens, and the extent of his awareness and potential force is what we may call chivalric space. Of course, chivalric space is also an imaginative dimension. The ideology of chivalry seems to extend uninterrupted between the age of Theseus and the present time of Chaucer's Knight, as if there could be no civilized place or time that was not chivalric. But within this apparently inescapable space, troubling and vitalizing it, are human desires ("What asketh men to have?"): Emelye, Palamon, and Arcite dwell in limited freedom and their achieved identity never quite fills the mirror of their wishes. As a result, their imaginations and desires seek a release in places within what we might call natural space: an enclosed garden, then an open grove. In the second half of the tale, Theseus's amphitheater encloses the grove, rendering it a field of chivalric combat, but finally Arcite's funeral pyre—in effect, the entire grove in flame—sums up his life in chivalry and the natural rhythms of love and death that are its larger context. Within these emblematic, ambivalent places, Palamon's, Arcite's, and Emelye's conflicting desires find their resolution and achieve their full significance.

### I.

Like the more famous beginning of the *General Prologue*, the opening of the *Knight's Tale* is a worldview in brief, the return of Theseus to Athens with "greet solempnytee." The passage opens with a heraldic fanfare—"lord and

gouvernour,” “swich a conquerour”—and, swelling to “gretter was ther noon under the sonne,” lets Theseus ride into history “with al his hoost in armes hym bisyde.” It is less a description of Theseus than a conceptual frame for a chivalric icon: the wise and mighty sun of chivalry, blazing with memorable deeds rendered by a series of active verbs—*wonne*, *conquered*, *weddede*, *broghte*, *ryde*—that reflect the freedom and power of his will. In its structure and language, the passage celebrates both Theseus and the greatness of chivalry itself—its privilege, its will to dominate, and its evident strength to govern. In effect, it creates a tableau, an interval of celebratory space.

The rhetoric of praise that fills this space rises toward the all-inclusive (“al the regne,” “al his hoost”) and the absolute (“swich a conqueror,” “Ful many a riche contree,” “muchel glorie and greet solempnytee”). Its intensity tells us that the Duke of Athens is a spectacle of self-evident public truth, like the floats in a parade.<sup>2</sup> The aura cast about him by the language of praise, the cataloguing of deeds, and the resonant terms of order and rule create a representative domain of social praxis where princes reign and the people lining the way are there only to shout their praises to the skies.

If this idealizing tableau bears any resemblance to late-medieval life experience, it is not that of a peasant, shopkeeper, merchant, or mayor, and perhaps not even that of a knight. Much of its detail recalls the aristocratic life, but on the whole it is a necessary fiction maintained by the ruling class and by those who depend upon them.<sup>3</sup> “In more than one respect,” Huizinga says, life in late-medieval times “had still the colours of a fairy-story; that is to say, it assumed those colours in the eyes of contemporaries.”<sup>4</sup> Princes were proud, magnificent, quick to anger, and cruel in battle, yet generous in their mercy. This is the folklore of governance and the governing class, commonplace wisdom painting its naive picture of the carefully guarded figures who govern, it is thought, by sheer power and will. Such is the world that unfolds before us in the *Knight's Tale*. The social space embodied by Theseus, his deeds, and the language that adorns them is by extension a world space, a world of chivalry where princes' wills preserve the order of things inherited from old times.

Woven into this fabric of praise, nonetheless, is a different thread entirely, which deepens the opening lines. “With his wisdom and chivalry,” Theseus has conquered, not another “riche contree,” but the “regne of Femenye,” wedding the Amazon queen and bringing her back to Athens. The length of this incongruous, and thus faintly comic, clause and the repetitive drive of its phrasing (“And weddede,” “And broghte,” “With muchel glorie and greet solempnytee”) make it the climactic statement of the opening passage. It shares the expansiveness of the initial lines (“al the regne of Femenye”) and their grandeur of tone. But our view of chivalry, and of Theseus, has been complicated. Now there is “victorie” and “melodye,” not merely conquering but wedding the queen and bringing her home.

The change in narrative potential accompanies a shift in register of language. Chivalric terms have given way to those of domestic relationships, moving from the public to the personal, just as later in the tale the story of deeds is joined by an inward-turning narrative of feelings and desires. With this new story line, we encounter a different kind of social space. Here it is the private will to power that is at issue—not governance challenged by chance, fate, tyranny, and rebellion, but frustrated love, combative jealousy, and, not least, the ache of self-determination forever denied. The chivalric and sentimental plots mingle, in other words, as they do in every romance,<sup>5</sup> complicating the apparently seamless world of chivalry that the opening lines project.

As Theseus and his troops recede, the narrator recollects himself—indeed, this first *occupatio* is largely a self-portrait—and confesses that there is not time to tell about the battle, the siege of Ypolita the Amazon queen, the wedding, or the later tempest. Opinions regarding *occupatio* in this tale have differed over time, but it seems to have many possible effects. Here repeated terms of war and the suggestive rhyme of “feste” and “tempest” return our attention to battles lost, a hard truth softened earlier by pairing “victorie” and “melodye.” Recounting these events embeds them deeper, salting the wounds of gender conflict.<sup>6</sup> Our suspicions about the narrator’s tone are confirmed when the Knight self-effacingly declines to continue the passage (“wayke been the oxen in my plough” [line 887]), and, with beautiful condescension, explains that he wishes to stay within his time limit and give “every felawe” his turn. We will notice a similar reticence when he describes Emelye’s ritual bathing in part 3. Is this modesty? More likely it is a moment of dry restraint. The battle of the sexes will resurface, but at the moment the Knight has retreated from an area of contested space where chivalry does not appear to advantage.<sup>7</sup>

The chivalric perspective re-forms immediately, as the narrator assumes the point of view of Theseus:

He was war, as he caste his eye aside,  
Where that ther kneled in the heighe weye  
A compaignye of ladyes tweye and tweye  
Ech after oother clad in clothes blake;  
(Lines 896–99)

The glances of this duke are not random but perceptive (“war”), theatrical, and charged with the potential of his will (see line 2469). Seeing the ladies is, for him, the prelude to a decision, the initiation of an action. His glance conveys his “intente,” the purpose that goes with responsibility, and following it we begin to see how the social space of chivalry is constructed. Here are ladies kneeling in the high road, cast down from their sequestered place by tyranny and bad fortune. In the world of chivalry it is shameful—worse, it is *unnatural*—for ladies

to be groveling in the road, just as it is *contra nature* that Creon left their husbands on the battlefield to rot, turning the land of the living into a grave. “Ladies,” the narrator says; but how are we to know this? “Tweye and tweye, / Ech after oother,” these women are lined up, and their symmetry reassures the aristocratic eye. And so Theseus asks who they are: their sorrow seems immeasurable, and in the world of chivalry, a prince must share the ladies’ joy and mediate their grief.

The eldest lady is the widow of Capaneus, struck down by the gods during the siege of Thebes, it is said, for his insufferable pride. His fall and his widow’s low estate are dramatized by her formal *planctus*, a passage in the high style, rich in the rhetoric of public lament:

Nat greveth us youre glorie and youre honour,  
But we biseken mercy and socour.  
Have mercy on oure wo and oure distresse!  
Som drope of pitee, thurgh thy gentillesse,  
Upon us wrecched women lat thou falle  
(Lines 917–21)

The passage amplifies their desperation, implying that only a high lord like himself could aid those brought so low. The pathos of her language—“routhe,” “greveth,” “starf at Thebes,” “I, wrecche!”—lends the scene a kind of grandeur. Rising at times to the language of prayer (“Now help us lord, sith it is in thy might” [line 930]), it emphasizes the tension between Theseus’s high fortune and the ladies’ miserable state. The scene is rendered in terms of high and low, the social axis of the chivalric world. The mention of Capaneus lends the scene a historical dimension, the weight of famous events, while the women clothed in black and kneeling in pairs create a sense of ritual. Consequently, when Theseus leaps down from his horse and, taking them in his arms, lifts them up, he seems to have entered a charged volume of representative space where aristocratic ideals are played out in a kind of chivalric allegory: aristocrats are born to high place, and it is there they should remain. The mannered gestures and the elevated language that goes with them re-create the color, purpose, and emotional tenor of chivalric life within the small but meaningful confines of this scene’s narrative space.

The climax of the widow’s speech is provided by Creon, who

Hath alle the bodyes on an heep ydrawe,  
And wol nat suffren hem, by noon assent,  
Neither to been ybured nor ybrent,  
But maketh houndes ete hem in despit.  
(Lines 944–47)

Out of anger and “despit,” Creon has left the dead Argives on the battlefield to be eaten by dogs, a classic tyrant’s decree. There is no Antigone in this story, yet the near-dead Theban princes brought in by the pillagers are reminiscent of Eteocles and Polyneices, sons of Oedipus who fought each other for Thebes and died under its walls. Emelye herself is no Antigone, and has no need to be. Yet her relationship to Theseus is shadowed by Creon the tyrant, and by Antigone, the daughter of Oedipus who dared oppose her private will to his public authority.

But it is the heap of dead bodies that seizes our attention. After the battle, Theseus honors the remains, but we are left with the haunting image of dogs tearing the bodies. Tumbled and chaotic, dead bodies in a heap are an affront to sacred ritual, while letting “houndes ete hem in despit” negates human identity because it disintegrates human form. Creon’s edict is unnatural, because it transforms something human into something that is not, and animals are the means for this grisly metamorphosis. In this tale, they become symbols of the loss of humanity through tyranny, or through any serious aberration of the human will. And with that loss, the action descends to animal passions and the social chaos against which chivalry is a bulwark.

The linked motifs of animals and metamorphosis suggest the precarious human balance and its tendency to slide toward bestiality. The “beasts of battle” at Thebes were the dogs of Creon, but the golden pennant of Theseus bears an image of the Cretan Minotaur. Attempts have been made to connect the legend of Theseus and Ariadne with the *Knight’s Tale*, hoping thereby to complicate Theseus’s character, but the tale offers little to support it. The Minotaur simply recalls Theseus’s slaying of that dreadful half-beast in the heart of his labyrinth. The image implies the metamorphic slippage of man into beast, and the golden “penoun,” the victory of human reason over the darkness. As for the Amazons, they are led by one named for the horse that is the symbol of their freedom: Ypolita (“Horsewoman”), a woman both “fair” and “hardy,” which faintly suggests that she dwells beyond the periphery of what Athenians, and perhaps English dukes, would consider an appropriate lifestyle for a woman of the ruling class.

Taken together, the Amazons and Thebans represent the kinds of social excess that do not belong in chivalric space. Athens being the center of this space, Scythia and Thebes are lawless outlying territories, while the Minotaur and the other animal motifs imply a blurring of the human image that threatens the humanity sheltered by chivalric space. The adventures of Theseus are thus forays into what we may call natural space, where the chivalric will is weakened or changed and animal passions reign. Natural space, like the domestic space created by the language of sentiment, will recur in the narrative. Despite their obvious differences, both suggest the inner needs and drives of human nature, as opposed to chivalric reason and form.

Theseus must prevent chivalry from descending into natural chaos, and the source of his wisdom is a wise balance. In his “wysdom and his chivalrie” are the paired Roman virtues of *fortitudo* and *sapientia*, and in the recurrent readjustments of his will<sup>8</sup> we hear distant echoes of *moderatio* and perhaps even the *sophrosyne* of Odysseus, the art of finding, not exactly the middle way, but the *best* way between impossible extremes.<sup>9</sup> Theseus’s two campaigns also suggest the moderating influence of his will. In each case he tempers the chivalric with the domestic, justice with mercy. After killing Creon he “rente adoun bothe wall and sparre and rafter” (line 990)—in other words, he razed the city and canceled the blind laws of Creon’s tyranny; then he returned to the widows the remains of their husbands. In the country of the Scythians, by contrast, he was content to defeat their leader, Ypolita, in battle and marry her. The terms of peace are not described, but presumably making Ypolita his queen constituted something like the rule of law for the Amazons. Thus, he tears down the walls (and laws) of the Theban tyranny, but sets up laws for Amazons who apparently have none, ranging freely in the unwallled plains of Scythia.

The two campaigns of Theseus are chivalric in the obvious sense that they involve battles, ways of restraining the recalcitrant and imposing order. But in his response to the Theban ladies we have seen his self-restraint, his “pitee.”<sup>10</sup> With them he is wary yet open and compassionate, leaping down from his horse to help, for his “gentil” heart demands it:

This gentil duc doun from his courser sterte  
 With herte pitous, when he herde hem speke.  
 Hym thoughte that his herte wolde breke,  
 Whan he saugh hem so pitous and so maat  
 (Lines 952–55)

It is the nature of a wise prince to feel the needs of his body politic, and the feeling is not whimsical but heartfelt; it penetrates the core of his nature, so that in a direct, visceral way, he is one with those in need. His governance depends upon such feelings, which enable but can also constrain his chivalric will. Whatever happens, he will respond feelingly, then move to put affairs in order. In this intimate sense, the world of chivalry lies both *within* the heart of Theseus and in the vast reach of his power.

Indeed, chivalry is ample, its horizons far. Yet having heard the ladies out, Theseus rides immediately to Thebes as if the journey involved nothing but his will to be there. Before that, we find him in Scythia, south of the Black Sea, but we do not count the miles, because distance vanishes in this tale, just as it does in Greek romance; the narrative takes place in what Bakhtin calls “adventure time,” which pays little attention to the mundane reality of movement over the ground.<sup>11</sup> This ancient convention provides the chivalric space

of the *Knights Tale* with its nearly infinite breadth and potential: Theseus, we feel, can ride anywhere he needs to go (“rode,” “ride,” or “rit” occur five times as he sets out for Thebes), and whenever he gets there he will act as freely. This freedom of movement and act is a metaphor for the freedom of his will. Thus, the intimate heart and the far adventures of Theseus are inseparably paired; together, they reflect the inner and the outer dimensions of chivalric space, representing chivalric life both as a private, felt experience and as the public display of worthy deeds.

The climax of Theseus’s adventure narrative is his Theban campaign. The events are briefly rendered, but these little tableaux can be brightly expressive. When Theseus sets out for Thebes, the red statue of Mars

So shyneth in his white baner large  
That alle the feeldes glyteren up and down

.....

Thus rit this duc, thus rit this conquerour,  
And in his hoost of chivalrie the flour  
(Lines 976–77, 981–82)

This passage is a version of “the knight sets forth” convention, and like the opening passage it creates the emplacement of Theseus in chivalric space. The duke is riding to war, and the fields glitter all about, manifesting his brilliance and power. Moving into this contested space, Theseus will not go unnoticed by those who (surely) are there to see him ride, framed splendidly by “his hoost of chivalrie the flour.”

Arriving at Thebes, Theseus “alighte / Fair in a feeld, ther as he thoughte to fighte” (line 984–85), so that the narrative can flow from fields of martial passage to the field of battle, from one chivalric space to the next. After the battle, with Creon dead, he pitches camp on the same field of battle, and from that representative space “dide with al the contree as hym lest” (line 1004). Specifically, he restores to the Argive ladies the bones of their husbands, so that these introductory adventures extend from wedding to funeral, as if tracing the course of life itself. Each of these focal—indeed, vital—events was enabled by battle, the exercise of chivalric will. Their social and geographical polarity make chivalric space a global construct, coexistent with the world of men (the civilized ones, at least) and presided over by the gods. Chivalry is not the tyranny of Thebes, nor the isolated freedom of Amazons, but an ideology rooted in social needs and natural necessities, the heart-root of every social transaction.

At this moment of gathered symmetries, a troubling scene darkens the narrative, for after the battle the pillagers have come out. The subject matter is low, the language ugly (“To ransake in the taas of bodyes dede, / Hem for

to strepe of harneys and of wede" (lines 1005–6), and the high ethic of noblesse oblige is displaced by profit motive ("the pilours diden bisynesse and cure" [line 1007]). Piled with the dead they discover two princes of Thebes, wounded but good prospects for ransom. This rapid descent to hard realism marks a departure from chivalric space, since Palamon and Arcite have lost the royal protection of Thebes. Their ambiguous condition ("Nat fully quyk, ne fully dede" [line 1015]) is like their new social status, an uneasy liminal and thus changeable experience.<sup>12</sup> Their instability accounts for the puzzling alternation between motifs harsh and tender, between "grevous bloody wounde" and "blood royal / Of Thebes" (lines 1010, 1018–20), between "of sustren two yborn" and "Out of the taas the pilours han hem torn" (lines 1019–20). They are carried "softe" to Theseus (their ransom might repay gentleness), but potential heirs to the throne of Thebes must not go free, so he consigns them to perpetual imprisonment in Athens. Anonymous and vulnerable in exile, they dwell uneasily between chivalric and natural space, participating in the spectacle of one and falling victims to the necessities of the other.

## II.

Theseus reenters Athens, Palamon and Arcite begin life in prison, and years pass. This narrative stasis is ended by Emelye. Despite her being "syntactically expendable" at the end of this and other clauses describing Theseus' wedding,<sup>13</sup> Emelye initiates the tragicomic suits of Palamon and Arcite simply by responding to nature. Critical opinion has often failed to find personality, identity, willpower, or any other individuality in this pink-and-white-flower girl; it points repeatedly to her failure to accomplish her desires or do anything at all for herself. In fact, Emelye is not an individual, but is a representative figure like Theseus and the others, not a personality but a type. Whereas Theseus is quick to anger, quick to feel "pitee," and quick to act—these are the virtues of a prince—and Palamon is worshipful in love and Arcite aggressive (such are lovers), Emelye is merely responsive, not to men but to her natural surroundings and to the higher cosmic nature represented by the goddess Diana. So Theseus is drawn by social disorder, Palamon and Arcite by female beauty, and Emelye by her kinship with the natural world; their strength is in doing (or pursuing), hers rather in being. Like her older sister, Emelye is an Amazon, and the extramural freedom of Amazons is defined by its contrast with the tyranny of Thebes, "with his olde walles wyde" (line 1880). Yet Emelye seems also to represent an inner, personal freedom that walls can not contain. As she strolls up and down within the small world of the garden, gathering flowers, Emelye is simply and beautifully being who she is, responding freely as her nature (and Nature) dictate.<sup>14</sup>



Emelye's identity, with its natural overtones, has to be carefully established, because it is an absolute quality. Theseus becomes familiar to us through his public interventions, and Palamon and Arcite through their emotional struggling, but Emelye's "intente" must always be assumed, except in this identifying garden scene and its structural twin, her prayer to Diana. Here she is mirrored by the (virginal) lily, graceful "upon his stalke grene" (line 1036); she is fresher than May flowers—even her healthy flush of youth is finer than the color of the rose, so that every human quality cools in metaphor to a natural one. Moreover, the voice of spring has called her—"The seson prikethe every gentil herte" (line 1043)—and of course she responds, "starting" out of bed early in the morning, putting on fresh clothes, braiding her hair, gathering flowers, and singing like an angel. This typifying portrait shows us a happy young woman, happy because she is at peace with herself: she is in tune with her surroundings, expressing who she is within a natural space that resonates with the presence of her identity. In this Edenic garden, Emelye is profoundly in place, for she apparently has no wish to be any place else.

At this moment, Emelye does not seem to be a victim of her circumstances, but appears to dwell as comfortably within chivalric space as she does within natural space. The flowers she gathers are "party white and red," a balanced, symmetrical motif and a common design feature in late-medieval courtly decoration; they match the respective white and red symbolism of Palamon and Arcite's banners in part 4. With the flowers, she fashions a "subtil" garland for her head, which implies taste and breeding, as well as identity with natural things. Her singing, angelic and pure, suggests that something of heaven's harmony might exist within a palace garden. One might object that it is a walled garden, and that Emelye is as much a prisoner in the garden as Palamon and Arcite are within the "grete tour . . . so thikke and stroong" (line 1056) that adjoins the garden wall.<sup>15</sup> But clearly, Emelye is free to enter and leave the garden, and she goes there for her own enjoyment. The larger issue is whether she is free to leave the *castle* walls, but since there is nothing to indicate that her cloistered freedom as Theseus's sister-in-law is anything but agreeable to her, we must set aside our suspicions and accept that this castle pastoral represents what is most unusual and most to be valued, both in life and in Chaucer: a portrait of the soul at rest, a person expressing her innate freedom simply by being in place.

But no careful reader can miss the rhyming of Emelye's angelic "soong" and the tower ("thikke and stroong"), or fail to reflect upon the seasonal, and thus eternal, peace of the spring garden being "even joynant" to the prison. Emelye's garden is for her a serene natural space encapsulated by and in harmony with chivalric space, but for the two lovers it provides only a means of descent, a spur to their contentious mortal nature. Palamon has risen early and is enjoying the view from the tower. From there he can survey "al the noble citee" (his eyes, at least, can go there); nearer at hand, he can see the green

branches of the garden (“allas!”); finally, through the big, square iron bars of his prison window, he casts his eye on Emelye (“A!”), and now his prison is narrow indeed: she is where his eyes, his imagination, and his will must remain, so that the forbidden paradise becomes for him a kind of hell,<sup>16</sup> an even more constraining prison, while for Emelye it remains a liberating place whose walls are hardly mentioned, since everything she wants is there. The contrast is reinforced. Both of them feel the energy of spring, but while Palamon was “romynge” (pacing) in his high chamber, Emelye “romed” (strolled freely) among the flowers. And when Palamon casts his eye on Emelye and loses what freedom he has left, we remember Theseus casting his eye on the sorrowing widows and having the sight enable his “pitee,” thus empowering his will and ultimately enlarging his rule. The purpose here, I believe, is less to emphasize Palamon’s discontent than to drive home a point the Stoics liked to make: happiness is not to want. Through no fault of his own, Palamon has been placed twice over in a situation of lack: the garden is for him a natural prison within the political constraints of chivalric space.

Palamon’s discontent is broadened by his complaint at the end of part 1:

Thanne seyde he, “O cruuel goddess that governe  
This world with byndyng of youre word eterne,  
.....

What is mankynde moore unto you holde  
Than is the sheep that rouketh in the folde?”  
(Lines 1303–4, 1307–8)

From his point of view, human life itself is a constrained freedom, an imprisonment divinely imposed.<sup>17</sup> The second half of his complaint rises to matters of the will and spirit:

“And yet encresseth this al my penaunce,  
That man is bounden to his observaunce,  
For Goddes sake, to letten of his wille;  
Ther as a beest may al his lust fulfille.  
And when a beest is deed he hath no peyne;  
But man after his deeth moot wepe and pleyne,  
Though in this world he have care and wo.”  
(Lines 1315–21)

Unlike the animals, man is also self-imprisoned, bound by social and moral constraints; even his spirit may suffer infernal imprisonment for a misspent life. “What is this world?” For man it is a place where nature’s freedom is denied, and he must accept that denial as proper to his condition.

Palamon's complaint is the more striking for being dialectically paired with the discontent of Arcite, who is released from prison but must leave Athens and Emelye. Like Palamon at the window, he now finds his prison worse than before: "Now is me shape eternally to dwelle / Nought in purgatorie, but in helle" (lines 1224–26). The particular shape of hell for him is the emptiness of exile, "bareyne of alle grace," where no earthly element or creature can help him: "Wel oughthe I sterve in wanhope and distresse" (lines 1244, 1249). But again like Palamon, Arcite's pathos is greatest in the second, universalizing half of his complaint:

"We faren as he that dronke is as a mous.  
A dronke man woot wel he hath an hous,  
But he noot which the righte wey is thider,  
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."  
(Lines 1261–67)

For him, the human condition is not prison but exile, separation not only from what makes us happy, but even from knowing what could. That, surely, is too great a freedom (no freedom, if no constraint). In their philosophical pathos, Palamon and Arcite have described the limits of human will through spatial metaphors of prison and exile, places where the will either has no choices and cannot move, or is entirely free but with no place to go. We reflect upon Emelye, who is content to be in place because there is no other place where she *wants* to go; and we remember Theseus, who restored governance to the Thebans, so narrowly constrained by walls and tyranny, and brought governance to the free-ranging Amazons, thereby establishing both peoples within the controlled environs of chivalric space.

### III.

With the sight of Emelye, Palamon and Arcite are changed forever, and as they leave prison we become aware of how intimately they are bound to the world of natural change. Arcite returns, lovesick, to Thebes, and wastes away, "His hewe fallow and pale as asshen colde" (line 1364). An ambiguous dream and his changed reflection in a mirror send him back to Athens, where he poses as a poor squire, just as much in prison (since he can now see Emelye) as Palamon has been for seven years. At this point Palamon escapes from prison and hides in a nearby grove, waiting until night, when he can safely make his way

to Thebes and raise an army to win Emelye. Thus, the devotee of Mars becomes an adoring lover, and the servant of Venus decides to wage war. We note the changes in both men, but especially Arcite, who undergoes what is essentially a metamorphosis by way of sickness, dream, altered self-image (the mirror), and a different social identity. These are images of descent, because they imply the increasing turbulence of each man's nature. Both have given up their chivalric blood-bond for the tighter bond of love for Emelye, and this will lead to mortal change: one of them will die in her pursuit. The grove, a natural space that suggests the world of their inner natures, is indeterminately both "faste by" the prison tower and "a myle or tweye" from the court. We must conclude that this alternate space is "even joynant" to chivalric space, always an open door into the jungle, just as Emelye's garden is her eternal refuge.

Arcite enters the grove early in the morning of Palamon's escape. Roused by the spring season and desire for Emelye, he rides into the fields on a warhorse "as startlynge as the fyre"; singing a Maying song so awkward only he could have composed it, he "roams" up and down the grove, gathering twigs and leaves. These details fall exactly into parallel with those of Emelye's garden scene, except that whereas Emelye was fresh, "subtil," and angelic, Arcite is lusty, loud, and energetic. He too identifies with natural space, but his garland is green leaves, not flowers. Like her, he is observed by Palamon, but Palamon in a bush, which conceals him so well it seems "That 'feeld hath eyen and the wode hath eres'" (line 1522). Both men have entered a natural space, but as their greenery and then their actions begin to demonstrate, it has also entered them. The grove reflects inner space. It is a mirror of identity, just as the garden was for Emelye.

The instability of love and human nature appears first and strongest in Arcite, probably because he is soon to die. Having sung his May song, he suddenly becomes melancholic:

Right so kan geery Venus overcaste  
The hertes of hir folk; right as hir day  
Is gereful, right so chaungeth she array.  
(Lines 1535–37)

Melancholy produces in him a full-dress apologia, beginning with his ancestral Theban roots and moving into love, then death for love, at which point he falls down in a deathlike "traunce." Convenient as all this is for recognition's sake, it also demonstrates how love has changed his life. Palamon reflects that change, feeling a cold sword glide suddenly through his heart, and he starts up, quaking with anger, "face deed and pale," to challenge his cousin. The next day, ready to duel, *both* their faces change color, paling as if they were spear hunters waiting for a lion or a bear. Then they are dueling, not like men, but

metamorphically, like “a wood leon,” “a crueel tigre”—like *wild boars* “That frothen whit as foom for ire wood” (line 1659). Close to death, Palamon and Arcite have reached the bottom of their descent. Deep in the grove and ankle-deep in blood, they are like the Minotaur at the center of his labyrinth, surrounded by his own inner darkness, his human reason utterly submerged.

However these Theban cousins may love each other, their passions have overwhelmed them, setting the scene for the tale’s striking midpoint reversal. “Destinee, ministre general” arrives exactly on time in the person of Theseus. His “appetite” for hunting has brought him out early this May morning, enabling the work of fate:

For certainly, oure appetites heer,  
Be it of werre, or pees, or hate, or love,  
Al is this reuled by the sighte above.  
(Lines 1670–72)

Thus impelled, Theseus has ridden to the grove with Ypolita and Emelye (dressed as huntresses, all in green), pursuing the great hart (“herte”), and as the hunting theme mingles with the pursuit of love, it is obvious that the hunters (lovers) become the hunted. But surprisingly, the focus remains on Theseus. His heart has also become the quarry. Spurring between the young men, he hears their confession and as quickly decrees their death, but the women reply with a storm of weeping and he softens, as he did when the grieving widows threw themselves at his feet, “For pitee renneth soone in gentil herte” (line 1761). His anger accuses them, but his reason excuses the offense. But having acquitted them in the courtroom of his mind, Theseus finds a compromise between justice and mercy in an extraordinary monologue, spoken within the chambers of his heart:

And eek his herte hadde compassioun  
Of women, for they wepen evere in oon,  
And in his gentil herte he thoughte anon,  
And softe unto himself he seyde, “Fy  
Upon a lord that wol have no mercy,  
But been a leon, bothe in word and dede,  
To hem that been in repentaunce and drede,  
As wel as to a proud despitous man  
That wol mayntene that he first bigan.”  
(Lines 1772–78)

As the kernel of his subsequent public address on love, lovers, and the tournament, Theseus’s “inner speech” is a humble but truer reflection of his identity

as prince. His appetite for hunting prevented Palamon and Arcite from killing each other (that was “destinee”), but it was his own “gentil” compassion for women (“pitee”), and consequently his mercy, that kept *him* from killing them. Aided by women’s emotions, Theseus has fought down the lion within his own heart, the “princely” anger that would prevent wise decisions, separating him from himself and from his body politic. For him as well, the grove is Dante’s *selva selvaggia*, the savage forest of the heart—both an outer and an inner space.

#### IV.

When Theseus expands the duel of Palamon and Arcite into a formal tournament, one hundred armed knights on a side, he announces that “The lystes shal I maken in this place” (line 1860)—in the same natural space, that is, and in the savagery of their natures. But they will also be fighting a mock war by chivalric rules, within the public bounds of chivalric space. In effect, chivalry has been imposed upon nature, and the two spaces have merged (or perhaps chivalry had always been “nature methodized”?). Natural change will cast doubt on this chivalric confidence as we move from garden and grove to temple and amphitheater. Individual love and antagonism, which caused a duel in an isolated glade, will acquire universal significance through prayer to divine forces and an exercise in pan-Hellenic chivalry.

The new venue embodies this greater mingling of chivalry and nature. Since no other building receives a full description and this one systematically recalls chivalric life, we may conclude that Theseus’s grand theater is in effect the House of Chivalry. A mile round and sixty feet high, it suggests the world horizons of chivalry and its connections with cosmic nature.<sup>18</sup> Gate towers at the eastern and western sides point to Venus and Mars, respectively, in the eastern and western skies and enclose temples dedicated to those gods. On the north side, a turret high on the wall (no gate) contains the oratory of Diana, the virgin goddess of nature. No temple is dedicated to the frightening Saturn, but the south side of the theater is suggestively vacant, and his powerful presence later in the poem implies that he is the fourth of these cosmic forces. Thus, chivalry is aligned with the four corners of the natural world, and the theater’s temples imply the bearing of cosmic force on human nature.

The theater is also, and pointedly, representative of chivalric space. The eastern and western gates, whatever their higher significance, are entrances for opposing bodies of fighting men. The height of the walls allows for the “degrees” of many seats, some of them high up, for royalty, and the lower ones for the public who witness the tournament, testifying to its importance. But chiefly, the theater is a constructed thing, an enormous, expensive *building*. The narrator dutifully lists the carvings and other artwork, the many artisans brought

to create that art, and the money (“of gold a fother”) spent to pay them. The theater’s richness and size announce its social significance, and the tournament contestants, drawn from chivalry everywhere, indicate its political importance. Within this place, armed conflict is a way of life with its own customs (“gyses”), language (“sparth,” etc.), and tradition (“Ther shyveren shaftes upon sheeldes thikke” [line 2605]).<sup>19</sup> The carvings on the walls assimilate the whole world to the House of Chivalry as if to say that chivalry, like nature, is worldwide.

The deeds of arms within the theater have their source both in human nature and cosmic forces. Palamon, Arcite, and Emelye pay homage to Venus, Mars, and Diana, respectively—an association amplified by the paintings in the temples of those gods. The temple of Venus, for example, illustrates the “circumstances” of love—“Charmes and Force, Lesynges, Flaterye, / Despense, Bisynesse, and Jalousye” (lines 1927–28)—the all-encompassing and obsessive world of lovers. Within Venus’s love garden, and powerless to escape (“Allas!”), are more than a thousand illustrious men and demigods. Equally helpless are those who follow Mars (the temple of Mars in Thrace is windowless, a burnished steel tomb, its garden a waste forest). Within the great dome of the cosmos, and within chivalric space, men are prisoners, their wills bound to love or conquer. The third prison is nature itself, as we see in the paintings of Diana’s temple.

The temple of “Dyane the chaste” receives a briefer description, and the significance of the four Ovidian scenes of “huntyng and shamefast chastitee” is elusive. As her portrait makes clear, Diana is goddess of three realms—the moon and childbirth, the hunt, and the underworld—and all four stories involve hunters. In each story, however, there is a reversal: the hunter becomes the hunted. Callisto and Daphne are both huntresses, and both are pursued by gods—Zeus, who loves Callisto, gets her with child, and in revenge the angry Diana turns her into a bear; and Apollo chases Daphne until her father (a river god) turns her into a laurel tree. Actaeon is also a hunter until Diana changes him into a deer, and his hunting dogs tear him to pieces. Maleager, whose wife is the beautiful Cleopatra, slays the Caledonian boar (sacred to Diana) as well as two of his uncles; in vengeance, and perhaps in jealousy, his mother burns the stick—his life—that she pulled from the fire at his birth. Consumed by inner fires, he dies in the middle of the forest. The stories are balanced and sequential, moving from Callisto, the more tragic female, to Maleager, the more tragic of the males. If life is a pursuit, then women and men are hunters, and inevitably as they chase their futures, life touches them and they are the hunted: their sexuality implies their mortality. These are nature’s changes, and Diana, the virgin huntress-goddess of childbirth and the underworld, life and death, presides over all of them as a principle of mutability.

These stories tell the mortal necessity of moving from birth to death with all of nature’s dying generations. Seen in this way, life itself is a kind of

prison, as Palamon and Arcite complain, and the sight of Emelye strolling freely among the flowers makes their confinement seem worse than ever. For Emelye, the garden seemed to express the timeless freedom of her identity with nature. But her prayer to Diana shows that even she has come to feel the press of natural necessity.

The opening passage of Emelye's prayer to Diana invokes the goddess painted on the temple wall:

“O chaste goddess of the wodes grene,  
To whom bothe hevne and erthe and see is sene,  
Queene of the regne of Pluto derk and low,  
Goddesse of maydens, that myn herte hast knowe  
Ful many a yeer, and woost what I desire”  
(Lines 2297–2301)

But recalling the portrait of Diana as it was described earlier, we notice that Emelye invokes her selectively. She emphasizes chastity (“chaste goddess,” “Goddesse of maydens”), mentions nature and thus the hunt (“the wodes grene”), and refers to the underworld, but Diana's role as goddess of the moon is given only a glancing reference (“To whom bothe hevne and erthe and see is sene”), and childbirth is not mentioned at all. We remember that the Ovidian stories were said to be about “huntyng and shamefast chastitee,” even though childbirth is pivotal to the lurid tales of Callisto and Maleager. And we may wonder, too, why Emelye prays “As keepe me fro thy vengeance and thyn ire / That Attheon abouthte cruelly” (lines 2302–3), when it is the huntress Callisto whose sad tale of childbearing must frighten her the most.<sup>20</sup>

Clearly, Emelye wants to avoid even the mention of marriage and childbirth—

“Chaste goddess, wel wostow that I  
Desire to ben a mayden al my lyf,  
Ne nevere wol I be no love ne wyf.  
I am, thow woost, yet of thy compaignye,  
A mayde, and love huntynge and venerye,  
And for to walken in the wodes wilde,  
And noght to ben a wyf and be with childe.  
Noght wol I knowe compaignye of man.”  
(Lines 2304–11)

—but in her repeated denial of those conditions (“nevere . . . noght . . . Noght”), she again ignores that Diana is also and equally goddess of childbirth and the moon, whose phases imply not only childbirth but all the



changes of nature, including death. It is understandable, surely, that Emelye wants to remain in Diana's company of maidens, walking freely in "the wodes wilde," just as she did in the palace garden. In effect, she asks the goddess of chastity, childbirth, and death to preserve her from the changes that, as Ovid implies, must come to all the living. Does she not realize that her plea is a fantasy? Just before the bitter tears for maidenhood that end her prayer, she inserts a pithy, pragmatic request that acknowledges both the narrowness of choice available to her and her need to work within those constraints:

"And if so be that thou wolt nat do me grace,  
Or if my destynnee be shapen so  
That I shal nedes have oon of hem two,  
As sende me hym that moost desireth me."  
(Lines 2322–25)

For Emelye this choice is unwelcome, but it is necessary. Denying what is, for her, the necessity of marriage and childbirth would be more in character, as most of her prayer plainly reveals, yet failing to recognize the reality of one's imprisonment is merely to yield to it and become a victim.<sup>21</sup> By contrast, choosing a way, however painful, is a movement of the will that maintains one's freedom from circumstances, no matter how tiny and limited a freedom it may be. Emelye is, of all the characters in the *Knight's Tale*, the most limited in her choices. Therefore her gesture of will is the most significant one in the tale.<sup>22</sup> Like Palamon and Arcite, she is a prisoner of her own nature: if Palamon must love and Arcite conquer, Emelye's desire is to express herself through nature and lose herself within it, to the extent that even within the structures of chivalric space, she can happily remain an Amazon.<sup>23</sup> But confronted with the necessity of a royal marriage (within the walls of Thebes), she moves against her natural inclinations to the degree that she is able to make a real choice that is still in some way liberating for her. Like Theseus in the grove, she has conquered a powerful tendency of her own nature, and in so doing retains a measure of freedom and identity.<sup>24</sup> In this, at least, she remains herself, an Amazon by nature (as in Diana's temple), but lodged within the House of Chivalry.

## V.

It would be tidy if Palamon and Arcite were also to confront themselves and stand free of their natures for a representative moment, but neither seems to achieve an identity separate from his ruling passion. Theseus tempers his will in response to the tears of women, and Emelye yields to the idea of marriage

enough, at least, that she can choose the better husband. But Palamon remains fully devoted to Venus, and Arcite to Mars; it is Saturn who mediates their wills, killing one of them and granting each a part of his desire. Thus, Arcite has the victory, but not a life with Emelye; Palamon has Emelye, but the narrator's claim that she loves her new husband "tenderly" in return seems a little dubious.<sup>25</sup> Nonetheless, it is a solution that satisfies the requirements of both chivalry and nature. Theseus needs an alliance with Thebes, and if the victory honored Mars, then Venus needs a marriage. Saturn, in his "olde experience," is able to find such a balance because the arc of his power is the widest of the planet gods, and thus the highest level of nature. His place in the heavens defines the largest natural space, for it encompasses Diana's moon, Venus, Mars—indeed, all of nature.

Diana represents the principle of nature's changes, but the coldness of Saturn is—like death—an absolute natural law, the summation of all contraries and the hard limit of every ephemeral creation. That is why the litany of his powers, where life drowns in darkness, seems so hauntingly real and inevitable. All things have an end. For the timeless charm of a spring garden to have meaning, there must also be, somewhere, the sudden fall from grace—the ruin of the high halls, "the cherles rebelling," pestilence, chaos, death.<sup>26</sup> This is the deep chord that sounds in Egeus's simple commonplace (there never was a man who lived who did not die) and in Theseus's grander idea of the "ordinaunce" of the "Firste Moevere" that "speces of thynges and progressiouns / Shullen enduren by successiouns" (lines 3013–14). Chivalry itself must fall, someday, or fade quietly into memory while people pursue other dreams, and that, perhaps, and not the death of Arcite, is the note of sadness so many have heard beneath the elegant surface of part 4.

Part 4 opens, nevertheless, with yet another bright morning, a parallel to the events of part 2; now as then, love engenders combat, and Theseus ensures proper decorum. The difference here is scale. Lists of tournament gear are followed by crowd scenes and "battle" scenes that create an impression of variety and multiplicity. The breadth of these public scenes is accompanied by an expansion in vertical field. As Theseus appears at a window of his palace, the people press forward with a "heigh reverence" (line 2531) to hear his "heigh discrecioun" (line 2537), and their cheering "touchede the hevене" (line 2561). In the theater, "Whan set was Theseus ful riche and hye" (line 2577), then "Unto the seetes preeseth al the route" (line 2580). In this tale, at least, the "route" is not oppressed by or even conscious of such secondhand treatment; rather, the sun is bright, the streets are hung with cloth of gold, and Theseus is in place—at a window "like a god in trone" (line 2529) or seated high above the tournament—imposing his "mighty dukes wille" (line 2536) to the great satisfaction of all. This expansion in scope prepares us for the cosmic vision of Theseus's chain of love speech. But our immediate impression is of

the generous reach of chivalric space, of the height of its ideals, of its infinite customs and complexity, and of the lords, knights, squires, and armorers all going about their business. The theater is a frame for the chivalric world, but this is chivalry itself, proud, exuberant, self-referential, and heedless.

Soon the armies are assembled, the theater gates are shut, Palamon and Arcite fight like lion and tiger, and as before, Theseus separates them: Arcite has won. But this time, nature—Saturn—intervenes, making the separation permanent. It is a remarkable reversal. In the grove, Theseus turned Palamon's and Arcite's madness to docile joy; here, the change is from joy to grief. And if earlier his decree instantly transformed the natural space of the grove into chivalric space, here, as quickly, a chivalric place becomes a natural one, the site of Arcite's funeral pyre. It is apparent from such reversals that chivalry alternates with nature because they are interpenetrant, both occupying the same space. At times chivalry seems to dominate—these are the interventions and public spectacles created by Theseus—but nature is always present, and as men pursue love, war, and the freedom to be, they themselves are increasingly the quarry, following nature's path to their ends.

Arcite, especially, is nature's prey. Numerous metaphors predict his fate throughout the tale, and when he is thrown from his fiery horse, we are not surprised that his last appearance will be atop his funeral pyre. Yet as he confronts his death, we are given another extraordinary view into a human heart. Earlier, Theseus spoke from within his heart; now it is Arcite ("Naught may the woful spirit in myn herte / Declare o point of alle my sorwes smerte" [lines 2765–66]). Here again is natural space within chivalric space, chivalric man struggling with himself, except that this time the heart is not angry but literally broken, and the temptation is despair. Some have found the description of Arcite's condition insensitive or clinically detached (Arcite's sentimental complaint is bracketed and probably enhanced by the narrator's lack of sentiment), for its chief effect is cool finality: "Al is tobrosten thilke regioun; / Nature hath now no dominacioun" (lines 2758–59). Where once was life and movement there is now "clothered blood," "venym and corrupcioun"—the stark referent for Theseus's main argument in his chain-of-love metaphor:

"Nature hath nat taken his bigynnyng  
Of no partie or cantle of a thing,  
But of a thing that parfit is and stable,  
Descendynge so til it be corrupable.[?]"  
(Lines 3007–10)

Arcite's corrupted chest reflects the darkness of Saturn's reign, because it demonstrates the chaos and stasis at the end of order. *Et in arcadia ego*. For every bright morning in nature and chivalry, there is in time this answering

stillness. Just as the destructive anger of princes was examined within the heart of Theseus, Arcite's breast presents the one narrow if appalling view of mortality in this tale.<sup>27</sup> L. O. Aranye Fradenburg has written that "[w]hat emerges in and through Arcite is the Thing, that inert stuff of the real. . . . [I]t is that which is in him more than himself."<sup>28</sup> In other words, the corrupted mass represents the unconscious desire (the Thing, or *jouissance*) that he offers up in sacrifice by dying for Emelye. It does seem likely that Arcite's broken chest signifies something concealed or repressed by chivalric discourse yet unavoidably, inescapably real—not unconscious desire, perhaps, but the unthinkable end point when the world will go its way without us. That reality, manifested as an unconscious fear so terrible it really cannot be thought but only felt indirectly and briefly through images, is what his wound represents for the world of chivalry.

In despair, Arcite commends his cousin in his place. His paean to knighthood—

“That is to seyen, trouthe, honour, knyghthede,  
Wysdom, humblesse, estaat, and heigh kynrede,  
Fredom, and al that longeth to that art”  
(Lines 2789–91)

—is clearly a summary of his own virtues, preparing us for the solemn funeral where chivalry mourns for him and for itself. The funeral's center is the pyre, and like the great theater, it will be built “in that selve grove, swoot and grene” (line 2860), a place to be in love, to fight, and now to die. The theater and pyre are carefully brought into parallel. While the theater is sixty paces high, the pyre is twenty fathoms broad. After the wood is piled on, Arcite is laid among cloth of gold, garlands, jewels, and spices—“richesse” analogous to the carvings and other expensive adornments Theseus lavished on the theater. The Greeks assemble in a “huge route” like the tournament audience, and as before, “goon / Hoom to Athenes, when the pley is doon” (lines 2963–64). Like the theater, the funeral pyre gathers to itself the world of chivalry in a ritual celebration. But the world of nature is also present. All the trees of the grove, it seems, were cut down to make the fire. Not only does Chaucer list each tree in an extended catalogue (a “world of trees” has fallen with Arcite), but he also deepens the sense of change and loss by rooting it in Ovidian myth, describing how the wood gods “ronnen up and down, / Disherited of hire habitacioun” (lines 2925–26),<sup>29</sup> how all the beasts and birds flee in fear, and how even the shady ground is startled by the sun. As all those trees burn along with dead Arcite, chivalry and nature mourn together, and there is the sense, as in Ovid, that an age is passing into oblivion,<sup>30</sup> as if, somehow, a sort of innocence had been lost.

But for Arcite, the important part of this emblematic scene is the pyre itself,

That with his grene top the hevene raughte;  
And twenty fadme of brede the armes straughte—  
This is to seyn, the bowes weren so brode.  
(Lines 2915–17)

The pyre is vaguely anthropomorphic, “his grene top” reaching and the “armes” stretching wide, and the narrator acknowledges this odd figure by explaining dryly that arms are boughs. When Chaucer’s narrative calls attention to itself, there is usually an implication we are meant to catch, and I believe that is the case here. In the *Ovide moralisé*, Daphne’s metamorphosis is described in an abbreviated *effictio*, moving from top to toe, and part of this description parallels Chaucer’s lines:

Ses crins dorez et flamboians  
Devrindrent feuilles verdoians;  
Ses bras sont en lons rains muez:  
Tous ses cors le est transmuez  
(Lines 3029–32)<sup>31</sup>

[Her gold and flaming hair / Became green leaves; Her arms were  
changed into long branches: / Her whole body was transformed]

We remember that Emelye wore a crown of (funereal) oak leaves when she sacrificed to Diana and chose the man who would love her the most. Her bright hair was not braided but combed out, “untressed al” (line 2289). She kindled both the fires for her sacrifice, and now she has come to light the funeral pyre. If Chaucer intended such a parallel, it would suggest that just as Daphne became a tree, Emelye “becomes” Arcite’s funeral pyre. The transformation of beautiful Daphne in the moralized Ovid is an unfamiliar frustration for Apollo—his “comic downfall,” as Mary Barnard says.<sup>32</sup> But when Emelye merges in figure with the green trees of the pyre, becoming a fire of love and death with arms that stretch so wide, her “metamorphosis” implies that pursuing her has been Arcite’s life, and thus inevitably the cause of his death—his “downfall.”

We have seen the worlds of chivalry and nature internalized and made relevant to Arcite’s fate through metaphors of his ruined chest and his summative funeral pyre. The broken body where “nature will not work” is not unlike the hopeless disorder of a fallen city—Thebes, perhaps—where “governance” is equally unworkable. The pyre, where so many man-made and

natural things dissolve in flame, is a sad inventory of the life Arcite has lost in these two worlds, and a final embracing, as it were, of the woman for whom he lost them—his “sweete foo.” The very length of the funeral passage and the incantatory repetition of its *occupatio* formula (“Ne what . . . Ne how . . .”) create a powerful sense of an ending filled with inexpressible regret for the passing of young knights like Arcite, and for the long bloom of chivalry itself.<sup>33</sup>

But the true ending of the tale is instead a return to natural space on an epic scale, a cosmic view not unlike that of Troilus looking back on the world, in laughter, from the eighth sphere. When, after “certeyne yeres,” Theseus and his parlement see the need to ally with Thebes, he gives his chain of love speech that doubles as a *consolatio* for the death of Arcite and an argument that Palamon and Emelye should agree to be married. The argument has the effect of tempering the consolation, giving it an undertone of worldliness—philosophy as it is actually lived. The language reminds us that Theseus is a good rhetorician, aware of his audience and his need to reach them: “For it is proved by experience” (line 3001), he says, and “Wel may men knowe, but it be a fool” (line 3005). Nevertheless, the dominant effect is the sublime freedom of seeing the whole cosmos—“the fyr, the eyr, the water, and the lond”—extend before us, an order held “In certeyn boundes, that they may nat flee” (lines 2992–93). Thanks to the “faire cheyne of love” that binds them all, descending into the world and linking the eternal with the temporal, even mortal men have a part in eternity, for they, like other “speces of thynges and progressiouns / Shullen enduren by successiouns” (lines 3013–14). This calmly overwhelming idea sets the mind free in space and time. No doubt Theseus and the knight narrator understand chivalry itself to be an ordering principle analogous to nature’s order.<sup>34</sup> But having read the *Knight’s Tale*, we are more likely to seek such an order within the private hearts of those who, like Emelye, confront necessity by confronting their own desires, thereby winning such small freedom as can be had within the constraining worlds of chivalry and nature.