

ENGLISH 201

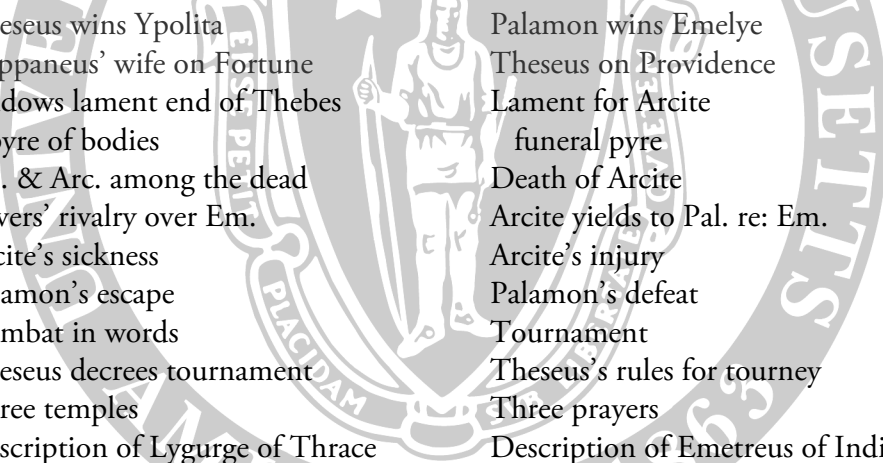
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH — BARTLETT HALL

CHAUCCER

One of the major themes of *The Knight's Tale* is the role of ritual, ceremony, and formality (order) in controlling expressions of violence and sexual impulse. For Chaucer, this relation between apparent disorder and evident order at the human level also exists at the cosmic level; the apparent disorder of human life exemplified in the plot is set against the evident order of Providence and Destiny.

Chaucer has given us a plot that seems to jump from one event to the other. The apparent disorder fills us with a sense of unease. But as we read along, we find that events and images are repeated, and a sense of order seems to emerge in the background. That combination of unease in disorder and confidence in the sure hand of the author is one of great effects of *The Knight's Tale*.

Here is a chart of the plot parallels:



Theseus wins Ypolita	Palamon wins Emelye
Cappaneus' wife on Fortune	Theseus on Providence
Widows lament end of Thebes	Lament for Arcite
pyre of bodies	funeral pyre
Pal. & Arc. among the dead	Death of Arcite
Lovers' rivalry over Em.	Arcite yields to Pal. re: Em.
Arcite's sickness	Arcite's injury
Palamon's escape	Palamon's defeat
Combat in words	Tournament
Theseus decrees tournament	Theseus's rules for tourney
Three temples	Three prayers
Description of Lygurge of Thrace	Description of Emetreus of India