

5-20-2011

"Wood Leoun" . . . "Cruel Tigre": Animal Imagery and Metaphor in "The Knight's Tale"

Jennifer LaBurre
University of New Orleans

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.uno.edu/td>

Recommended Citation

LaBurre, Jennifer, ""Wood Leoun" . . . "Cruel Tigre": Animal Imagery and Metaphor in "The Knight's Tale"" (2011). *University of New Orleans Theses and Dissertations*. 125.
<https://scholarworks.uno.edu/td/125>

This Thesis-Restricted is brought to you for free and open access by the Dissertations and Theses at ScholarWorks@UNO. It has been accepted for inclusion in University of New Orleans Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks@UNO. The author is solely responsible for ensuring compliance with copyright. For more information, please contact scholarworks@uno.edu.

“Wood Leoun”... “Cruel Tigre”: Animal Imagery and Metaphor in “The Knight’s Tale”

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
University of New Orleans
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts
in
English

By

Jennifer M. LaBurre

B.A. University of Louisiana at Lafayette, 2007

May, 2011

Acknowledgements

I would like to take a moment to thank my thesis director, Dr. Kevin Marti, and thesis committee members, Dr. Lisa Verner and Dr. Dan Gonzalez for taking the time to read this paper and for all the assistance and guidance they have provided to help me through this process.

I would also like to thank my parents and sister for putting up with entire tables consumed by papers and moving carefully around stacks of books for the last few months and for shooining the cats away, night and day, to keep them from toppling all my nicely organized research to the floor.

Table of Contents

Abstract	iv
Introduction.....	1-6
Section I: Knight.....	7-10
Section II: Arcite and Palamon.....	11-22
Section III: Theseus	23-26
Section IV: Emelye.....	27-31
Section V: Lycurgus and Emetreus.....	32-37
Conclusion	38-39
Works Consulted.....	40-43
Vita.....	44

Abstract

The people of the Middle Ages believed animals were disconnected from themselves in terms of ability to reason and ability to resist passions. Humans and animals were created by God, but he bestowed man with a soul and the ability to resist earthly delights. When men were described in terms of their bestial counterparts it was conventionally meant to highlight some derogatory aspect of that character. Chaucer makes use of the animal-image throughout *The Canterbury Tales*, especially in “The Knight’s Tale,” to stress a break in each character from humane reason or to emphasize a lean towards a bestial nature. The degree of this departure is showcased in the ferocity of the animal-image in question and the behavior and nature of the character, i.e. the animals of a more timid nature or neutral standing highlight a much less negative nature than the ferocious predators present in the battle scenes.

Keywords:

Canterbury Tales, Geoffrey Chaucer, “The Knight’s Tale,” Animal Metaphor, Animal Imagery, Bestiary, Arcite, Palamon, Theseus, Emelye

Introduction

To be bestial implies a departure from humanity. As the Aberdeen translation of the 1542 manuscript details on the nature of the beast:

The name 'beast' applies, strictly speaking, to lions, panthers and tigers, wolves and foxes, dogs and apes, and to all other animals which vent their rage with tooth or claw - except snakes. They are called 'beasts' from the force with which they rage. They are called 'wild' because they enjoy their natural liberty and are borne along by their desires. They are free of will, and wander here and there, and where their instinct takes them, there they are borne (*Aberdeen Bestiary*).

To be akin to the beast is to associate one with rage, liberty, and uncontrollable passion. Chaucer makes use of these connotations throughout his work, *The Canterbury Tales*, using the animal metaphor or image to assist in commentary upon a character's inherent nature or deficient character. There are almost no inclusions of the animal metaphor in *The Canterbury Tales* that would suggest a positive aspect or upswing in character in question and, more often than not, these comparisons are meant to show a degradation from human towards the bestial realm.

This does not mean every animal is traditionally associated with negative attributes. Quite the contrary, most animals hold both positive and negative connotations and traditions in the medieval mindset. These connotations may be traced to the works of writers such as Aristotle, Pliny, Isidore of Seville, and most prominently in *Physiologus*, a sort of animal encyclopedia originally dated somewhere between the second and fourth century, most likely

near Alexandria (Curley xvi-xxi). The popular bestiaries of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries have traces of these works.¹

Each of these works contains roots in allegorical understandings and moralizations of animal behavior, usually highlighting any given animal as an instrument for God's instruction for model Christian behavior. For example, we find the description of the weasel as documented in the Aberdeen folio. The description begins with a breakdown of the beast's name, "mustela, 'a long mouse', so to speak, for *theon* [*telos*] in Greek means 'long'" followed by an account its natural state and behavior, detailing its hunting of snakes and mice as well as its peculiar mode of copulation and giving birth through the mouth and out the ear respectively; this form of copulation is then paralleled to the "inconsiderable number of people who listen willingly enough to the seed of the divine word but, caught up in their love of wordly things, ignore it and take no account of what they have heard" (*Aberdeen Bestiary*). This is the typical formula for bestiary entries and provides the modern reader with an understanding not only of the medieval notions of various animal's behaviors and natures but also of the allegorical interpretation of those natures.

Chaucer's familiarity with any one or various versions of the bestiary genre is difficult to prove or disprove without a shadow of a doubt, although there are elements present in his writings which do support the conjecture that he must have possessed at least a basic knowledge of the bestiary and its more common traditions commonly used in sermons. One obvious connection between Chaucer's writing and bestiary lore is found in "The Knight's Tale":

Ther nas no tyger in the vale of Galgopheye,

Whan that hir whelp is stole whan it is lite,

¹ This is a general statement regarding the bestiaries of the twelfth century and beyond as they are derived from the writings of Aristotle, Pliny, Isidore of Seville, etc. Florence McCulloch does an excellent job of tracing the similarities between these writers and the descriptions included in various bestiaries. For more, see McCulloch, Florence. *Mediaeval Latin and French Bestiaries*. 1960.

So crueel on the hunte as is Arcite

For jelous herte upon this Palamoun; (1.2626-2629, emphasis mine)².

The selection here quoted is directly lifted from the traditional moral story associated with the tiger, as T.H. White translates from a twelfth century bestiary in his *Book of Beasts*:

Now the Tigress, when she finds the empty lair of one of her cubs that has been stolen, instantly presses along the tracks of the thief. But this person who has stolen the cub, seeing that even though carried by a swiftly galloping horse he is on the point of being destroyed by the speed of the tigress, and seeing that no safety can be expected from flight, cunningly invents the following ruse. When he perceives that the mother is close, he throws down a glass ball, and she, taken in by her own reflection, assumes that the image of herself in the glass is her little one. She pulls up, hoping to collect the infant. But after she has been delayed by the hollow mockery, she again throws herself with all her might into the pursuit of the horseman, and, goaded by rage, he delays the pursuer by throwing down a second ball, nor does the memory of his former trick prevent the mother's tender care. She curls herself around the vain reflection and lies down as if to suckle the cub. And so, deceived by the zeal of her own dutifulness, she loses both her revenge and her baby (12-13).

One may assume not only that Chaucer was familiar with the tale associated with the tiger but, seeing as how he stops the analogy with only the opening of the story, that his audience would have been familiar with the story as well as part of the common knowledge of the time. His targeted audience only required a brief allusion in order to register the entire subtext of the description.

² All subsequent quotations from *The Canterbury Tales* are from the Riverside Chaucer, 3rd edition, 1987.

As one reads through Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* it is clear the animal itself does not matter. Be it mouse or lion, the animal is usually negatively reflective. It is better to be wholly human with reason and accountability than to have any attribute closely related to any animal as they are creatures notoriously associated with passion and irrationality. To be human in the Middle Ages, as Joyce E. Salisbury explains:

“became defined by such things as wearing clothing, eating in certain ways, and generally acting with reason (rather than passion). As people began to define humanity by behavior, it seems to have opened the possibility for redefining people who had previously been accepted as human. Early Christian thinkers had categorically stated that all people were human. However, by the late Middle Ages some groups of people seemed to be less human than others. During the early Middle Ages, the poor and women may have been considered lesser humans, but by the late Middle Ages, they were considered closer to animals” (“Human Beasts” 15).

The bestializing of the poor can be found in the beast fable, most notably in the works of Marie of France who frequently presented her peasant characters, literally, in the form of animals (Salisbury, “Human Animals” 54). The general association of the beast with the poor is proliferated in fabliaux, a genre “partly or wholly devoted to peasants as comical figures: their stupidity, their foolish violence, their association with excrement” and, especially in the case of Chaucer's writings, their habits of copulation (Freedman 30).

Chaucer's use of animals throughout the *Canterbury Tales* conventionally falls into one of three categories: animals in simile and metaphor, animals as a necessary part of a scene or background, and animals of a scene in relation to the focused character of said scene. For

example, as part of the pilgrimage plot structure, each pilgrim character is necessarily on horseback as part of the very structure and reality of a pilgrimage. The simple presence of a horse, therefore, is not necessarily reflective on the character itself; the horse in many ways is merely a necessary part of the scene. However, there are several occasions where Chaucer goes into detail about a particular character's horse; it is here that the horse goes from being a background piece to reflective on the character's disposition.

Chaucer uses the animal image most commonly at any time where he wishes to stress a deficiency in character. The use of the animal image in this way is just as practical as it is forceful. *The Canterbury Tales'* main mode of transmission would have been oral recitation. In this mode there is no rewind button, so to speak; authors needed to communicate images and ideas both quickly and effectively in a single pass. Thus, informing the audience that the Miller of "The Reeve's Tale": "camus was his nose; / As piled as an ape" attributes the Miller with ape-like attributes, which immediately makes him a fool or dupe of some kind according to the literary tradition of the era and foreshadows the future action of the two clerks sleeping with his daughter and wife in the same night under his very nose (*RT* 1.3934-3935)³. All of this is accomplished with a quick reference alluding to the similarity between the Miller's nose and that of an ape's and is supported by the continued behavior of the Miller as the tale progresses.

The incorporation of the ape with the Miller is not surprising. "The Reeve's Tale" is one of the many fabliaux in the *Canterbury Tales* with its focus on peasant life, and the animal is a traditionally, expected image. The fascinating study is in deciphering how Chaucer took this predominantly low-brow, pejorative image and applied it to his courtly cast of characters. This is exemplified through Chaucer's courtly romances. Chaucer's courtly romances are as follows:

³ For more detail on the likeness between the "Reeve's Tale"'s Miller, see Dennis Biggin's entire article, "Sym(e)kyn/simian: The Ape in Chaucer's Millers." *Studies in Philology* 65 (1968): 44-50.

“The Knight’s Tale,” “The Squire’s Tale,” “The Wife of Bath’s Tale,” “The Franklin’s Tale,” “Sir Thopas,” “The Man of Law’s Tale,” and “The Clerk’s Tale” (Severs 229). Not all of Chaucer’s romances contain the animal image, but the most striking of this selection is “The Knight’s Tale” as it contains more animal images than any of the other *Canterbury Tales* with twenty-eight different animals (thirty-one animals if one separates the general term “horse” into the four the sub-terms used throughout the tale of “horse,” “courser,” “steed,” and “bay-steed”) mentioned a total of seventy-one times.

“The Knight’s Tale” possesses all three modes of animal incorporation that Chaucer uses to integrate into his tales as previously described. Each character is both directly and indirectly compared to an animal in simile and metaphor, animals are consistently part of scenes as necessary accessories to the plot, and the animal/human relationship in several instances sheds light on a particular character and/or situation. In keeping with Chaucer’s conventional use of the animal image, it is clear that in each use Chaucer is bringing to light some deficiency on the part of the specific character and supplying commentary as necessary in the context of the comparison/pairing. For the purposes of this paper, the main focus will center on those images concerned with metaphor and comparison (whether the image is directly attributed to a character with the incorporation of “like” or “as” or is subtly ascribed by hidden association).

Section I: The Knight

Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* is a depiction of medieval life through the tales of various characters of various social positions through various genres. The individual tales often reflect heavily on the lifestyle and capacity of the teller and vice versa. The Wife of Bath, for example, centers her tale upon the question of sovereignty in the household; she is herself a "professional" wife of sorts who details her marriage affairs as a preamble to her tale. The Miller, a notoriously racy character in traditional folklore, recounts a fabliaux of the carpenter and his wife. The Pardoner recounts his conventional homily while simultaneously pointing out the hypocrisy within it, thus proving that those of his station are corrupt at heart.

Following this structure we find the Knight, the first noted character of the "General Prologue"; in following the tradition of the social class structure (nobility, clergy, peasant), the Knight is above all other characters in his station and he is the first to tell his tale of all the characters. Before this can take place, Chaucer must first apply his efforts of social critique to the Knight.

The Knight is one of the few characters who does not appear to be inherently corrupt or unethical but is instead a "parfit gentil knyght" (*GP* 1.72). As a member of the highest noble class Chaucer includes in his pilgrimage setting, one might expect a gleaming knight without a soiled spot to speak of. Instead, we find a knight who is described in terms of his accomplishments first and foremost rather than his appearance. This is emphasized further as the "General Prologue" continues and we find that most of the other, more morally oblique, characters are described in terms of their physical appearance and clothing before all other attributes.

The only physical description we possess to judge the Knight by is the emphasis on the state of his tunic and, appropriately enough, the state of his horse:

But for to tellen yow of his array,
His hors were goode, but he was nat gay.
Of fustian he wered a gypon
Al bismotered with his habergeon,
For he was late ycome from his viage
And wente for to doon his pilgrimage (*GP* 1.73-78).

Even in describing his “array,” the horse still comes before his clothing. In insisting his horse was good, though not elaborately dressed, Chaucer emphasizes the treatment of the Knight’s companion animal as being more important as well as more impressive than the Knight’s personal care. One may read this unconcern for personal hygiene as a strike against the Knight’s character, as Jeffrey Helterman asserts in his article “The Dehumanizing Metamorphosis of the Knight’s Tale,” but I find it instead to be a strong separation between the Knight and his superficial fellow pilgrims. This separation is reinforced when one considers the appearance of the Squire, the Knight’s own son, who is first and foremost “A lovyere, and a lusty bachelor, / With lokkes crulle as they were leyd in presse” before there is any mention of his knightly duties (*GP* 1.79-80). The Squire, like most of his fellow pilgrims, is initially described in terms of physicality. This disconnects the Knight from his counterparts and reinforces his place morally above the other pilgrims.

The Knight himself is associated with only one additional animal: the ox. In dwelling on the great expanse of his tale, the Knight comments, “I have, God woot, a large feeld to ere, / And wayke been the oxen in my plough” (*KT* 1.886-887). The ox is an early domesticated animal used primarily, as the Knight suggests, for the purposes of plowing fields (Salisbury, *Beast Within* 13). This appears to be an effort on the Knight’s part to humble himself before his company; by

citing a common farm-centered animal, the Knight shows a great contrast to the traditionally chivalric and nobility centered tale he is about to communicate. The contrast is especially clear as the tale progresses and a clear lack of domestic animals is prevalent.

Keeping in his characterization, the Knight tells a traditional romance, a genre that typically reflects the ideals of “chivalry, of knights dedicated to lord, to lady, and to Church ... emphasis upon bravery and honor, or themes of love or religious faith” (Severs 229). The Knight follows this definition to a tee with his tale; he focuses his tale on two knights who fall in love with the same woman, enter into a duel as a result for their squabbles which the Knight eventually expands and aggrandizes into a full scale tournament with the lady-love set as the prize for the winning side all while the knights contemplate their place in the grand scheme of the universe and make offerings and pleadings with the gods who rule over man from above.

The animals the Knight selects as part of his tale are, too, indicative of the court and are associated with noble status. In this tale, the Knight makes use of twenty-eight types of animals mentioned a total of seventy-one times as broken down in *Figure 1*.

The number of exotic animals that can be associated with noble class and heraldry (lion, bear, tiger, hart, boar, wolf, griffin, alaunt, eagle, leopard, hawk) outweigh those of the common class (mouse, sheep, lark, hare, sow, crow) both in quantity of species types and quantity of appearances. This elevates the animal imagery

Animal	Quantity
Horse (Course; Steed included)	16
Lion	8
Hound	8
Hart	6
Bear	4
Lark	3
Boar	3
Tiger	2
Cuckoo	2
Oxen	1
Minotaur	1
Mouse	1
Sheep	1
Serpent	1
Hare	1
Doves	1
Sow	1
Wolf	1
Griffin	1
Bull	1
Raven	1
Alaunt	1
Steer	1
Deer	1
Eagle	1
Leopard	1
Hawk	1
Crow	1

Figure 1

of “The Knight’s Tale” to the noble realm, but the relationship between image and object remains unflattering in essence.

The lack of domestic animals is striking and those that are included are often used in terms of noble activity. The dog, for example, is not merely a dog but a hound used in the royal hart hunt. The horse, too, though common enough in domestic life, is in “The Knight’s Tale” more often than not a warhorse incorporated into a battle scene.

The high amount of exotic animals over domestic animals does not assert the nobility of the animals as one might expect in a fabliaux where the domestic animal is equivalent to the peasant class which is equivalent to the sub-human category as the noble is equivalent to the just and kind ruler (Haist 3). Instead, the Knight uses these lions and tigers to communicate a growing tendency towards the ferocious aspects of their inner natures of his characters.

Section II: Arcite vs. Palamon

Arcite and Palamon are complete equals at the start of “The Knight’s Tale.” They are both of “blood roial / Of Thebes, and of sustren two y-born”; there is no difference between their breeding and station in the medieval hierarchy (l.1018-1019)⁴. They are knights of the same rank as they are found side by side on the battlefield, inferring that they have fought at one another’s side. Neither knight possesses an advantage over the other as both are imprisoned in a tower nor does one have any likelihood of escape more than the other at the opening of the tale. The only difference between the two, it would appear, is that Arcite, in the beginning of the tale, possesses a sounder mind than Palamon as he implores his cousin to ““taak al in pacience / Oure prisoun”” as it is the will of Fortune that they are locked in the tower and it is a position that must be endured (l.1084-1085).

Once Emelye is introduced into the tale, however, a shift begins to take place and the two knights begin to drift away from their reason towards the bestial plane. Although both knights are compared to the same hounds, lions, and boars, it is Arcite who comes out of the descriptions with more ruthlessness and brutality.

By technicality, it is Arcite who is infringing upon Palamon’s territory in regards to Emelye. The cousin knights hold a vow between them that demands neither will hinder the other in matters of the heart. As it is Palamon who first espies the lovely Emelye as she is walking through the garden, one may argue that he holds the clichéd “I saw her first” rights. In proclaiming his love for Emelye, Arcite is in violation of this oath, the terms of which Palamon reminds Arcite:

‘Ysworn ful depe, and ech of us til oother
That nevere, for to dyen in the peyne,

⁴ All line reference are from “The Knight’s Tale” from this point to the end of this section.

Til that the deeth departe shal us tweyne,
Neither of us in love to hyndre oother,
Ne in noon oother cas, my leeve brother,
But that thou sholdest trewely frothren me
In every cas, as I shal frothren thee –

This was thyn ooth, and myn also, certeyn;’ (l.1132-1139).

Considering that it is Arcite who violates this oath, it is clear he is closer to the role of villain rather than hero in this tale. This is reflected in the animal images that are linked to his character and though he and Palamon share equally in the frequency and types of animal images, there is often a qualifying adjective which separates he and Palamon’s standing.

The first animal metaphor in conjunction with Arcite and/or Palamon occurs after both have fallen in love at first sight with Emelye. It is Arcite, appropriately, who makes the assertion himself:

‘And eek it is nat likly, al thy lyf
To stonden in hir grace; namoore shal I;
For wel thou woost thyselven, verraily,
That thou and I be dampned to prisoun
Perpetuelly; us gayneth no raunsoun.
We stryve as dide the houndes for the boon:
They foughte al day, and yet hir part was noon;
There came a kyte, whil that they were so wrothe,
And baar away the boon bitwixe hem bothe’ (l.1172-1180).

The introductory image of the dog is interesting considering Palamon and Arcite's station in the hierarchy of their society. For Palamon and Arcite, both knights of royal blood, to be dogs is for them to be servile as dogs are employed for the needs and protection of their human masters. This marks the first recognition of their fall from noble status due to their quarrels and struggles with love.

The dog in and of itself is not traditionally a negative image, per se. The dog, according to Beryl Rowland, was in the medieval period "the Devil, the hound of hell," psychopomp representing coming death, and was associated with a variety of sins, but could also represent guardianship, fidelity, and was the emblem of St. Dominic (*Animals with Human Faces* 59-63). Through studies of medieval bestiaries one sees that the dog is widely praised for its loyalty to its master as it will "gladly dash out hunting with Master, and will even guard his body when dead" (White 62). The dog is also essential to the hunt and in herding as described in Joyce E. Salisbury's chapter "Animals as Property" in *The Beast Within*, marking the dog as a useful animal in medieval life. The insult of the comparison, therefore, does not necessarily lie in the dog itself as a fierce animal as would in the case of the boar or the bear. The derogatory tone depends on the context of the comparison itself.

The negative impact of the image lies in the twist of the scene; it is not simply a description of two dogs but of two dogs squabbling for a bone; this detail reduces the dignity of Arcite and Palamon's illogical fight over Emelye, a woman who can neither be divided between the two nor will she be the last woman to cross their paths. The dog/kite reference is a paraphrase of an Aesopean fable concerning two dogs so consumed with fighting over a bone that they allow a kite, a scavenging bird, to take the bone from under their noses (Rowland, *Blind Beasts* 51). What Arcite is attempting to assert in this comparison is the futility of the entire situation;

the two knights are locked in a tower, after all, and neither has any hope of escape, a necessity for any profitable wooing to take place. An Arcite of sound mind would accept the futility of the situation and move on.

The Arcite who has been corrupted by love (or perhaps more appropriately, “lust”) is consistently moving away from the logic of his previous self and towards an inability to reason properly, as exemplified by his summation to Palamon: ““at the kynges court, my brother, / Ech man for hymself, ther is noon oother. / Love, if thee list; for I love and ay shal;”” (l.1181-1183). The irrationality of this statement is astounding. First and foremost, neither knight is a participant at the king’s court; they are prisoners, enemies of the king, and are locked in a tower for what ought to be the remainder of their lives. Secondly, Arcite has just finished telling Palamon how illogical the squabble is, yet he calls “each man for himself” and insists that he will continue to love Emelye (Rowland, *Beast Within* 51). The once logical Arcite who reminds Palamon of the will of Fortune and the vainness of hoping against fate has appropriately reduced himself to the station of the squabbling dog.

Arcite’s use of the lower realm of animals continues during his philosophical rant over man’s struggle with the will of Fortune, using his ill chosen desire to be free from his prison as a jumping point. Arcite uses the image of the mouse in the proverbial reference to ““he that dronke is as a mous”” in his complaints against his former wishes to escape from his prison tower as he is now free from the tower but forbidden from the country and, therefore, the sight of Emelye (l.1261). This proverb, according to Beryl Rowland, refers to the mouse’s greed and extreme thirstiness, insinuating that in insatiably desiring more than his present station, where Fortune has placed him, Arcite has in fact come out behind (*Animals with Human Faces* 129). In admitting that as a human he is lacking in understanding of what is best, this proverbial

onslaught continues Arcite's philosophical development as a character, yet the mouse remains a lowly animal and, in terms of size and capabilities, it may be closer to the lowest end of the animal kingdom. This nearly negates Arcite's upward turn towards Fortune's rule. It also does not assist his case that the proverb he selects involves drunkenness and the deadly sin of gluttony.

The relation of Arcite and the lowly, servile realm of domestic animals continues indirectly as Arcite takes up his place in Theseus' court. The narrator describes Arcite in terms of his physical abilities: "Wel koude he hewen wode, and water bere, / For he was yong and myghty for the nones, / And therto he was long and big of bones" (l.1422-1424). This description sounds closer to the function of an ox or horse than to a man. Arcite is prized because of his physical ability, leaving his manners and intellect, marks of a civilized man, as secondary; this draws forth the association of Arcite with the household function of the animal rather than a participant at court. Though indirect, this image reinforces the servile nature of beast and highlights Arcite's new found proximity to such behavior in the light of his shifting persona in the aftereffects of falling in love.

Through all of this Palamon appears to have little to say. He remains silent during Arcite's philosophical discussions and his use of bestial association. Palamon is unwilling to reinforce this metaphor. The moment that truly shifts Palamon from his former self as an upstanding knight to a man more in touch with his beastly side comes after Arcite has been freed from the prison. When Palamon learns that Arcite is gone, "Swich sorwe he maketh that the grete tour / Resouneth of his youlyng and clamour" (l.1277-1278). It is the specific use of the word "youlyng" that strikes a chord, as the *MED* notates as the equivalent of "Loud wailing, lamentation; noisy outcry, clamor; also, a loud cry ... the howling of a wolf," thus causing an

indirect association between Palamon and a wolf or a dog (*Middle English Dictionary*). Palamon transforms through his frustration at Arcite's freedom and, as Palamon imagines, Arcite's newfound ability to venture out and conquer Emelye's hand. Palamon becomes one with Arcite's assertion that he and Palamon are like dogs and he officially joins Arcite in the undergrowth of the bestial world.

Palamon continues his lamentations over Arcite's release in holding the gods responsible for his current plight and compares himself and all of mankind to the sheep: "O cruel goddes, that governe / ... What is mankynde moore unto you holde / Than is the sheep that rouketh in the folde?" (l.1303-1308). Using a sheep in this case is appropriate in context due to the fact that the sheep is a lowly creature, notoriously "placid in mind" (White 73). Palamon uses an animal which inherently "symbolizes stupidity and blind submission" to relate to not only himself but all of mankind (Beryl Rowland, *Animals with Human Faces* 138). The sheep here displays Palamon's frustration at the futility of his situation and also insinuates his inability and unwillingness to change such a situation because the sheep of the fold, in their blind submission, will remain in the fold and continue to be led according to the will of their shepherds. The image of the sheep in this context becomes ironic when Palamon takes control of his destiny and breaks out of prison.

It is not until Arcite and Palamon engage in battle against one another that the next animal images occur. In a mere sixty lines, six animals appear in direct relationship to the stance and/or behavior of Arcite or Palamon or both simultaneously. Arcite and/or Palamon are in quick succession big game hunters, lions, a tiger, and boars. This heavy handed beast imagery stresses the growing bestial nature of the characters as they slowly become enraged and begin to lose their wits and civilized manners. The irony of the comparisons is the fact that previously, though

few and far between, the animals used are of a predominantly domestic nature (hounds, sheep, the mouse). The characters at the time of these comparisons had been concerned with more philosophical and logical questions in regards to their sufferings at the hand of Fortune and in wishing for more than their stations. It is when Arcite and Palamon are consumed with rage and battle that they are described as lions and/or tigers, etc., creatures with far nobler associations than the mouse and sheep. It is here that their natures turn to the completely bestial and their hidden rage comes to light.

The first image of this battle scene returns Arcite, with slight irony, to the noble realm: “This Arcite with ful despitous herte...as fiers as leon pulled out a swerd” (l.1596-1598). This image is significant in two ways: it is the first martial engagement between Arcite and Palamon, a confrontation we will see again and on a much grander scale in the tournament, and it is the first “noble” animal image of the tale. It is not so outlandish to assume that these two firsts are related to one another.

The “nobility” of the animal image is quickly negated by the qualifying adjective “fiers.” Although the lion is the traditional “king of beasts” throughout bestiaries, folklore, and fable, this does not change the fact that although the lion is the height of nobility, the introduction to all traditional bestiaries, and the most popular symbol for Christ, Arcite here is a “fiers” lion as he presents his weapon (McCulloch 137). The image presented is not the Christ-like symbol the medieval audience may have had in mind nor is it the merciful animal of the bestiary as T.H. White translates: “The compassion of lions...is clear from innumerable examples – for they spare the prostrate; they allow such captives as they come across to go back to their own country; they prey on men rather than on women, and they do not kill children except when they are very

hungry” (9). This comparison to Arcite is akin to the dangerous hunter with which the modern reader ought to be familiar.

Arcite has ferocity and animal instinct in his battle which is further illustrated as he is not only as a ferocious lion but “a crueel tigre” as well (l.1657). The tiger, though similar in principle to the lion in terms of size and species relationship (being both large, exotic cats and notorious hunters), is in medieval terms a complete disconnect. Where the lion is akin to Christ and kings under normal circumstances, the tiger is symbolic of the “powers of destruction in general” and is “firmly entrenched as the epitome of inhumanity” (Rowland, *Animals with Human Faces* 151). Arcite moves from the cruelty of a lion which, perhaps under alternate circumstances, could have been an animal of reason and mercy, to a tiger which is ruthless in its rage. It is also significant to note that the tiger is the one animal in which Palamon does not share a comparison; Arcite’s animal similes are then greater in variety than Palamon’s, thus causing Arcite to come off as the more bestially connected of the two.

The differences between Arcite and Palamon’s temperaments abound when one considers the vast difference between the adjectives used in conjunction with their respective animal metaphors. Palamon is a “wood leon” as opposed to the “cruel tigre” assigned to Arcite. Here, the significance is not so much the use of the cat image, which has not changed in its ferocity between knights, but in the adjectives used in conjunction with the images, namely “cruel” versus “wood” which, according to the *MED*, is “insane, mentally deranged, of unsound mind, out of one's mind” (*Middle English Dictionary*). Arcite is twice referred to as “cruel”; cruelty connotes an inherent deficiency in character. Crazy on the other hand can be taken as a momentarily lapse in reason where the affected may become crazy but can eventually come out from under the spell and return to a state of normalcy. Though both Arcite and Palamon are

noted as being crazed or slowly going out of their heads with their strife over Emelye, it is only Arcite who is attributed with being “cruel.” This highlights a deficiency in Arcite’s very persona; it is something that cannot be controlled or cured but is an inherent trait that has come to surface in his struggle with loving Emelye.

The brutish imagery is summed up in the reference to both Arcite and Palamon simultaneously “[a]s wilde bores gonne they to smyte, / That frothen whyte as foom for ire wood” (l.1658-1659). The bestiaries themselves do not have much to say on the subject of the boar except for the note: “For everything which is untamed and savage we call, loosely, *agreste*, wild” (*Aberdeen Bestiary*). T.H. White translates this same passage as: “For everything which is wild and rude we loosely call ‘boorish’” (76). Though no more detail exists in these texts on the nature of the beast, there is a long standing tradition of the savagery of the boar and its comparisons to a worthy opponent in the form of the courageous warrior, a tradition showcased in the hunting episodes of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (Rowland, *Animals with Human Faces* 37-43; *Blind Beasts* 74). The boar is also traditionally representative of numerous deadly sins including gluttony, lechery, and wrath; it is said boars fight with intense ferocity especially at breeding time when two males would engage in battle over a single female (Rowland, *Blind Beasts* 78). For the knights to be compared to the boar is to stress the savagery of their meeting in terms of their rising anger and growing proximity to lunacy over a potential mate.

It is with the intervention of Theseus that order is attempted to be restored between the two cousins and the bestial likenesses slip away from view for an extended span of time. In assigning the two knights the mission of finding one hundred knights apiece to participate in a controlled tournament, with rules and guidelines, Theseus extracts Arcite and Palamon from their crazed hatred and replaces them within the noble world of order and rule.

It is in the heat of battle that we find Palamon and Arcite face to face for the last time in the final tournament where we see the final animal metaphors for Arcite and Palamon in the heat of their crazed hatred against each other:

Ther nas no tygre in the vale of Galgopheye,
Whan that hir whelp is stole whan it is lite,
So crueel on the hunte as is Arcite
For jelous herte upon this Palamon;
Ne in Belmarye ther nys so fel leon,
That hunted is, or for his hunger wood,
Ne of his praye desireth so the blood,
As Palamon to sleen his foo Arcite.
The jelous strokes on hir helmes byte;
Out rennet blood on both hir sydes rede (l.2626-2635).

As Jeffrey Helterman notes in “The Dehumanizing Metamorphoses of The Knight’s Tale,” the animals themselves in this selection have a reason to be angry and to act out: the tiger is after its cub, the lion is crazed over its hunger; both reactions are well cited in bestiary lore and tradition as perfectly natural for the temperament of each animal. Arcite and Palamon, on the other hand, are disconnected from the natural reactions of the animals used to represent their demeanor. Instead, Arcite and Palamon have “only the spur of jealousy” to defend their actions; it is an unnatural and ignoble state of being (Helterman 499).

Arcite and Palamon are once again the cruel tiger and the crazed lion. This reinforces the associations implied therein: the savage cruelty in Arcite and the insane operations of Palamon. Although their battles have been placed in the socially acceptable realm of the tournament,

operating with the blessing of Theseus, neither knight has lost their original anger or ferocity and neither has made a movement towards surpassing the bestial realm. Both are trapped and refuse to escape until the other is defeated.

It appears that Arcite is more consumed with this idea of winning to the point that he is blindsided by his own determination for victory. While making offerings to their selected gods, both Palamon and Emelye make two requests in case the god in question chooses or is unable to grant one wish, he/she may take an alternately approved route. Palamon maintains his focus on Emelye's hand before the glory of defeating Arcite:

‘I kepe noght of armes for the yelpe,
Ne I ne axe nat tomorwe to have victorie...
But I wolde have fully possessioun
Of Emelye,’ (1.2238-2243).

Arcite, however, believes that in asking Mars for victory alone will assure his overall success in the tournament: “‘Yif me [victorie], I aske thee namoore’” (1.2420). Arcite does not provide Mars with an alternative to his request so the gods have no choice but to make up their own minds on the matter.

The gods do grant Arcite with victory, but do not bless him with a life with Emelye, or a life at all for that matter as it was not a stipulation he requested in addition to his victory. The irony, it would appear, is that Arcite once made speeches against resistance of Fortune's wheel and praising the virtue of patience in dealing with the adversity presented by Fortune and the will of the gods. Arcite has become one of those men he preaches openly against: making demands of the gods with no thought to the great scheme of the world around him.

Arcite has made a complete transformation. He, who was once the wise Arcite instructing Palamon on patience, has been reduced to the very essence of inhumanity. He suffers as a result of his loss of intellect and is the one who in the end loses the most: his betrothed wife Emelye and his life.

It is at the death of Arcite where Palamon makes his final animal act. He “howleth” just as when Arcite is free of the prison (1.2817). This time, however, it is a cry of grief at the loss of his friend and family member. This seems to complete Palamon’s circle through his bestial behavior. From here there are no more animal metaphors related to his character or any other. It is the final reference and completes the cycle, thus returning Palamon to his former, reasonable state of mind and behavior.

Section III - Theseus

Theseus of “The Knight’s Tale” is the duke and ruler of Athens and represents a good and just ruler over his country (Helterman 507). Theseus is intended to be the model of good judgment and martial performance as he is often the voice of reason over chaos. His standing as sound ruler places him apart and above his fellow characters; this is emphasized by his lack of direct animal association, which places him closer in rank to that of his sister, Emelye, though he resides closer to earthly status than she.

Theseus follows the classic definition of a successful warrior and ruler as he showcases both proficiency in martial action and good judgment. He is a successful military leader as he has returned from the Amazon, having conquered the infamous Hippolyta and taken her for his wife. He is also the defeater of the half-man, half-bull Minotaur, an image he proudly displays as his insignia in lieu of a coat arms. He exhibits keen judgment throughout the text, beginning with the opening of the tale in the episode with the widows. It is in this episode that the audience sees the first animal image of the tale as the widows inform Theseus that Creon of Thebes prohibits the women from taking the bodies of their departed and is instead allowing dogs to feast upon the corpses.

The dog in this scene is of course set in the negative, an instrument to further the evil image resonating from Creon and Thebes; this inclusion differs greatly from what is typical for the Chaucerian text. The dog is neither representative nor reflective of certain character nor is the dog consistently depicted in this light throughout the text; in fact, we later see the dog in companionship with Theseus himself as an incorporated element in the noble hunt. However, at this point in the tale we see the dog in its most bestial mode: a glutton feasting on the flesh of a carcass. It is interesting that in this episode such behavior does not appear to be entirely the dogs’

doing as it is noted by one widow that Creon “maketh houndes ete hem”; this insinuates the dogs are in fact instructed to feast by their masters, the evil Thebans (l.947). This is a direct reflection on Creon and his men and adds to the disgust of the scene and makes the desecration of the bodies all the more shocking and appalling. Theseus of course takes up arms and battles with Thebes and wins back the bodies for the widows to put to rest; this establishes Theseus as a hero and restorer of peace from chaos in the eyes of the audience and adds to the impression that he is a man of sound mind and will.

It is interesting to note in this scene that Theseus is akin to the lion, though indirectly and subtly. One would need to possess a substantial knowledge of bestiary lore in order to detect the reference as the term “lion” is not outright used. The subtlety of the allusion is purposeful as it shows a positive attribute on the part of Theseus’ character and it would be against Chaucer’s policy to in one instance portray an animal attribute in a positive way.

As the widows beg for his assistance in leading battle against Thebes so that they may retrieve the dead, “they fillen gruf and criden pitously” before Theseus (l.949). “Gruf” as it is used in this statement is, according to the *MED*, “to fall (turn) face downward” or “to lay (oneself) prone” (*Middle English Dictionary*). One of the attributes of the lion according to the bestiary tradition is that the lion is unable to attack the prostrate (White 9). Anyone who is familiar with the bestiary tradition, as it may be assumed most of Chaucer’s medieval audience would have been considering how popular the texts were at the time of these compositions, would be able to make the connection between Theseus as 1) a ruler who 2) shows mercy upon those who fall supplicant to him. As Theseus shows compassion towards the widows, who fall before him upon the ground, he performs as the bestiary description of the lion suggests and shows mercy upon them and agrees to assist them in their time of need.

This brief association between Theseus and the aspects of the lion's temperament is further put to use much later in the text. This is accomplished when Theseus decides to spare the warring Arcite and Palamon for their treasonous actions as he says:

‘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’ (1.1773-1776).

Again, Theseus' focus is upon mercy as it is in the encounter with the widows, but in showing mercy here he is denying the leonine traits previously described outright in conjunction with Arcite and Palamon. The lion image is previously used to show the ferocity and savageness of the feuding Arcite and Palamon, causing any noble associations therein to be discolored. The lion is, therefore, tainted in the eyes of the narrating Knight's audience and any direct association between Theseus and any animal, even the notoriously noble lion popular in heraldry, will automatically negate his standing as the wise and just ruler who will help dissolve the disorder between Arcite and Palamon. Theseus must reject such bestial associations as he does in refusing to be such a "leoun" and, instead, show mercy.

One should not ignore that fact that the lion was one of the most popular animals incorporated into heraldry, was likened to Christ, and was praised as a model for Christian behavior in the bestiaries (Dennys 133; White 9). While Arcite and Palamon hold the ferocity of the predator; Theseus holds the symbolic nature of the lion as the exemplary ruler. Theseus rejects the tainted label which further separates him from the bestial and animalistic world in which Arcite and Palamon have both fallen into, allowing Theseus to rise above the petty squabbling and senseless killing and thus reinforce his placement as noble ruler.

These are the only two instances where Theseus is remotely associated with animals in regards to his direct character. He is, however, surrounded by animals in his hunting escapades. As a member of the aristocracy, it is appropriate for Theseus to take place in the hart hunt. Hart hunting was among the noblest hunt during the medieval period (Hassig 49). As with the tournament Theseus orchestrates in order to solve the feud between Arcite and Palamon, the hunt is a form of controlled savagery. The formalized technique of pursuit and the ritualistic butchery of the animal bring a sense of dignity to the brutal act of slaughter and makes Theseus' enjoyment of the hunt a noble exercise and appropriate display of ferocity.

While Arcite and Palamon are in opposition to natural law in their struggles with one another, Theseus' actions are appropriate because the aims of his ferocity are acceptable oppositions. The leader of Thebes is in violation of order in allowing dogs to feast upon corpses instead of having the bodies turned over to their loved ones for proper burial. Theseus' attacks against Thebes are therefore justified and may be seen as acts of chivalry for the benefit of the helpless widows as well as defense of order and proper rule. The organization of the tournament lends order to the chaos of Arcite and Palamon's battle over Emelye in Arcite and Palamon from the undefined battle in the forest to an elaborate and controlled setting with clearly defined rules and religious sanction. The intention of these two martial actions is to restore order where there is otherwise chaos.

Section IV: Emelye

Emelye is unique to her fellow characters in that she is 1) a woman and 2) that her main image is not the animal but the plant. Emelye is consistently described in relation to gardens, flowers, the month of May, and clothed in the color green itself. This marks Emelye as the epitome of the beauty of nature (plants, flowers, etc.) and places her in direct opposition to the bestial elements of the males who surround her. This assists the audience in elevating Emelye to where Palamon has already ascended her: among the angels and Venus herself. She is seemingly above the bestial influences of the world.

Emelye is first espied by Palamon and quickly thereafter Arcite while she is walking in a garden, having observance for the fresh spring in the month of May. She is described in terms of nature itself:

“Emelye, that fairer was to sene,
Than is the lylie upon the stalke grene
And fressher than the May with floures newe –
For with the rose colour stroof hir hewe (1.1035-1038).

Her actions themselves are concerned with the nature that surrounds her. She is making garlands of flowers, red and white, the color of love and the color of purity respectively. She is singing, admiring the garden, and is engrossed in general enjoyment of nature and its beauty. She is peaceful and serene whereas her male counterparts are more often than not obsessed with war or some form of battle.

While the narrator attributes Emelye with beautiful flowers and places her in a garden during May, Palamon esteems her among the gods: ““I noot wher she be womman or goddesse; / But Venus is it soothly, as I gesse”” (1.1101-1102). Arcite, on the other hand, finds her to simply

be a woman: “myn is love, as to a creature” (l.1158). Arcite is, however, logical enough to see that the likelihood of either knight actually obtaining Emelye is slim to none: “eek it is nat likly, al thy lyf, / To stonden in hir grace; namore shal I” (l.1172-1173). Both knights, in alternate ways, have placed Emelye in the realm of the untouchable.

This unobtainability is in many ways present in the minds of Arcite and Palamon alone. She is a noble woman and they are, essentially, noblemen. Palamon sets out a perfect scenario in his wallowing over Arcite’s release from prison:

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

Though Theseus is a worthy martial opponent, there is no apparent reason that such an endeavor would be completely impossible. Arcite, however, due to his all consuming yearn to be near Emelye and nothing more, does not conceive the idea at all; he only desires to be close to her at all times and has no apparent intention to actually win her over for himself. Palamon, likewise, actually conceives the possibility of conquering Theseus but fails to take any action towards it as he too is consumed by the idea of Emelye and revenge against Arcite.

For either Arcite or Palamon to achieve Emelye’s graces, she must become an obtainable object of affection. This is not possible if she is to be grouped with angels, flowers, and Venus herself. She must first be brought down to the human realm but this must be accomplished without sullyng her good name or nature. This is achieved just as with her male counterparts, by connection with an animal image. It is not the narrator who attributes the animal to Emelye, but

Theseus upon learning of the almost laughable feud between Arcite and Palamon makes the correlation:

‘But this is yet the beste game of alle,
That she for whom they han this jolitee,
Kan hem therfore as mucche thank as me;
She woot namoore of al this hooite fare,
By God, than woot a cokkow or an hare!’ (l.1806-1810).

The animal reference presented here differs from other animal pairings in Theseus’ statement, “She woot namore of al this hooite fare.” This insinuates a division between Emelye and the animal world in stating she is ignorant of the brutish world and is, therefore, completely separate from it. In complete opposition to the similes presented with Arcite and Palamon, Emelye is taken out of the bestial world. The references must, therefore, be seen in negative rather than a direct reference to Emelye’s character.

The association of Emelye with a hare would be simple enough. As Beryl Rowland asserts, “the hare is the symbol of woman... and might stand, among other things, for timidity” (*Animals with Human Faces* 88). The hare is also a notoriously hunted animal, closely associated with the buck as a “beasts of the Chase” and “hares offered the best hunting, and hounds could be kept in shape for hunting deer by following the fast and wily hare” (Salisbury, *Beast Within* 90;52). Hares, therefore, are notoriously shy and timid animals as well as one of the best animals to pursue in chase and in training for “the big game” of the hart. Emelye’s equation with the hare is completely appropriate considering she is a woman who is unknowingly being pursued by two knights who are, essentially, hunting her. Theseus is, however, offering the reference in terms of what Emelye is not.

Theseus makes the allusion to “al this hootte fare,” that is of love and its passions. One may read this in terms of the lustful side of passion, equating the cuckoo and the hare, then, to the licentious side of love. Appropriately, both the cuckoo and the hare have bawdy sides to their symbolic natures.

The cuckoo, according to Beryl Rowland, “became associated with unfaithfulness as early as Roman times because of its practice of depositing its eggs in another bird’s nest” and also has echoes of the “unpleasant word *cuckold*” (*Blind Beasts* 95; *Birds with Human Souls* 38). Chaucer himself calls the bird “unkynde” or “unnatural” in the *Parliament of Fowles* which coincides with its traditional stance of being synonymous with infidelity and ingratitude for parental presence as it was alleged the cuckoo ate its own parents (*Birds with Human Souls* 39-40). The cuckoo was thus traditionally unfaithful as a spouse, as a parent, and as a child.

The hare “[was] seen as exceedingly promiscuous” and remains a notorious symbol for fertility to this day (Salisbury, *Beast Within* 82). As Beryl Rowland states the hare, as a symbol for fertility “became a symbol for part of the female anatomy and hence for the whole woman” (*Blind Beasts* 89). The hare can be then considered a representation of the more licentious side of the fertile female.

The combination of the two symbols creates a new symbol to link Emelye with, as Rowland recognizes: “Emelye then knows little of love as a cuckold or a whore, or as cuckold knows of a whore, i.e., as the cheated husband knows of his wife... the phrase is presumably proverbial by true love. Theseus is made to talk cynically about love in contrast to the two courtly lovers” (Rowland, *Blind Beasts* 95).

Theseus draws the laughable possibility of two knights concerning themselves with someone so absurdly innocent to such bawdy desires and promptly shifts it. He transforms the

desires of the two knights toward the possibility of marriage just as he transforms the ferocity between Palamon and Arcite into the controlled nobility concerned with a formal tournament. He alters Emelye from desired damsel to potential wife. He lowers her standing in a sense in this way; he brings her from the heavenly Venus Palamon first spots to a palpable woman who may be conquered and possessed.

In the end, Emelye is won and is made into a wife. Her natural descriptions disappear and she is simply a woman. It is Theseus who makes her a real and tangible possibility. This lowers her standing as the girl “walking in the... garden of heavenly delights, Venus come down to reign on earth” (Helterman 495). The animal image ascribed to Emelye grounds her on earth, assigns her with a fault in her innocence and ignorance of the sexual world; they are virtues that are turned into deficiencies by Theseus. Theseus’ acknowledgement of these faults allows Emelye to be simply a woman and it is only after this that she can be obtained by either Arcite or Palamon.

Section VI: Lycurgus and Emetreus

As part of the tournament rules ascribed by Theseus, Arcite and Palamon are each assigned with the task to find one hundred knights to participate in the tournament to support each knight. Instead of entering into a long catalogue of the contributing knights, only two are described in detail for Arcite and Palamon: Lycurgus and Emetreus. As hand selected members of each side's army, Lycurgus and Emetreus are the strongest of each army and are representative of their armies as a whole.

The heavy handed animal imagery associated with Lycurgus and Emetreus is no accident. They are warriors and for the same reason it is in battle that Arcite and Palamon's animal associations increase in quantity, Lycurgus and Emetreus are closely related to concepts traditionally connected with animals.

Lycurgus is first described as part of Palamon's army. He is

the grete king of Trace;
Blak was his berd, and manly was his face;
The cercles of his eyen in his heed,
They gloweden bitwixen yelow and reed,
And lik a grifphon looked he aboute, ...
His longe heer was kembd bihynde his bak;
As any ravenes fethere it shoon for blak; (1.2129-2144).

The description is meant to conjure a picture of a griffin. As Beryl Rowland notes in *Blind Beasts*, each aspect above described is meant to further the comparison between Lycurgus and the griffin, from his eyes which glow between yellow and red because a griffin's eyes are "like

fire” to his raven-black hair which is meant to coincide with the black feathers of the griffin’s head and neck (47).

The griffin is traditionally depicted with the head for forefront of an eagle and the hind of a lion. This makes the griffin “composed of the most royal of beasts and birds” (Rowland, *Animals with Human Faces* 87). As Ann Payne details in *Medieval Beasts*, “though the bestiary writers professed [the griffin] to be an awesome beast, they did not entrust it with great moral or symbolic significance. The accounts were generally descriptive and matter-of-fact” (28). This is reflected in T.H. White’s translation in *Book of Beasts* which includes little more than a physical description and the added details: “It is vehemently hostile to horses. But it will also tear to pieces any human beings which it happens to come across” (24).

The griffin, it would appear, is in large part dependent upon its physicality because it seems to be the only attribute worth mentioning that the animal possesses. It’s size stretches to mythic proportions, rumored to have been too large to fit in the ark at the time of the great Flood and “it was generally held that a Griffin could carry a fully armed man and his horse in its claws, or a pair of plough-oxen, and fly away with them” (Rowland, *Blind Beasts* 47; Dennys 175). The overwhelming similarities between Lycurgus and the griffin stress the physicality of the warrior, but say little of his character. As the griffin possesses no traditional moral attributes or clear symbolic nature, Lycurgus is then little more than a man of brawn. This is supported by the lengthy description of his body, “His lymes grete, his brawnes harde and stronge, / His shulders brode, his armes rounde and longe” (l.2135-2136). This, mixed with his griffin-esque attributes, make up almost the entire description of Lycurgus. There is no mention of his wisdom or mercy or any other characteristic one would link to a king. He is muscle and muscle alone.

The only other discernable attribute leant to Lycurgus is the fact that he is a dedicated hunter and a hunter of big game. This is shown in “[i]n stede of cote-armure over his harnays, / ... he hadde a beres skyn, col-blak for old” and the

white alauntz

Twenty and mo, as grete as any steer,

To hunten at the leoun or the deer

And folwed him, with mosel faste ybounde (1.2140-2142; 1.2148-2151).

His display of the bear’s skin showcases an accomplishment which he deems more impressive than what may be included on a familial coat of arms. The alaunt is a breed of dog, “[p]robably related to the Dane” and were a particularly vicious breed of hunting dog who would have necessarily been muzzled when not employed in the hunt (Rowland, *Blind Beasts* 155-156). The presence of the alaunt is similar to the presence of Theseus’ hounds in his hunting for the hart. They are a functional piece of the scene, reflect the owner’s love of the hunt, but, as Beryl Rowland suggests in *Blind Beasts*, serve little more in regards to the symbolic nature of the relationship (156). One must note the striking difference between the two inclusions: Theseus’ hounds are simply hounds, there is no further description or detail, while Lycurgus’ alaunts possess a specific breed, color, and the detail of their golden collars and muzzles. Beryl Rowland interprets this as mere pageantry of the scene, but considering the amount of detail included some significance must be present.

The dogs are white, the “true hue of a good alaunt” suggesting their breeding is pure and of the highest stock, reflecting the quality of the king who owns them (Rowland, *Blind Beasts* 155). The dogs are also muzzled, though out of necessity, one cannot help but notice the relationship

between this detail and the stifled viciousness of the tournament, which is in itself a form of controlled brutality.

The theme of contained savagery is continued in the description of Arcite's contribution to the tournament, Emetreus, "kyng of Inde" (l.2156). As Lycurgus is described as a griffin, so is Emetreus like a lion:

His criske heer lyk ringes was yronne,
And that was yelow, and glytered as the sonne.
His nose was heigh, his eyen bright citryn,
His lippes rounde, his colour was sangwyn;
A fewe frakenes in his face y-spreynd,
Bitwixen yelow and somdel black ymeynd;
And as a leon he his lookyng caste.
His berd as wel bigonne for to sprynge;
His voys was as a trompe thonderyng (l.2165-2174)

All aspects of Emetreus, from his curled hair and the markings on his face to his thundering voice point towards the lion (Rowland, *Blind Beasts* 47). Just as Lycurgus is not simply "like a griffin" so too it is not enough for Emetreus to be simply "like a lion." Emetreus' leonine aspects are ingrained in his very appearance, not just in his behaviors as we have seen in Arcite and Palamon.

As we have already seen, the lion is representative of the king of beasts and indicates the just and righteous ruler. Although these attributes place Emetreus as a symbolically better king than Lycurgus' brutish description allows, supporting this is the inclusion of his company: "dukes erels, kynges, / Were gadered in this noble compaignye / For love, and for encrees of

chivalrye” (1.2182-2184). The fact remains, however, that Emetreus is bestially described.

Though the lion is traditionally an animal with symbolic ties to Christ and to noble rulers, this tournament is far from holy intentions and the defense of anything remotely Christian, nor is the behavior of any warrior subsequently described remotely Christ-like.

As Lycurgus has his restrained white alaunts in tow so too does Emetreus’ companions. He holds a tame, white eagle in his hand and there are tame lions and leopards roaming amongst his men. The tame eagle parallels the white alaunts not only in color and relevance to a love of the hunt but also in theme. The white alaunts are muzzled and restrained just as the eagle is “tamed.” As Joyce E. Salisbury explains in *The Beast Within*, “[r]aptorial birds were not fully domestic animals like dogs. They fell into Aquinas’s category of semidomestic, or what we would consider ‘tamed’” (53). The eagle is then as far from a pet as the alaunts are, serving a similar function. The tamed lion and leopard continue the theme of the tamed ferocity of the scene. One is meant to question how civilized the scene is just as one may question how “tame” a lion or leopard may be.

These men are likened to animals as part of their very essence rather than as a morphing aspect of their character, causing their warrior-like behavior to be engrained and unchanging as opposed to Arcite and Palamon whose beast-like behavior goes against their noble natures. Lycurgus and Emetreus’ appearances, along with their constant surrounding of “tamed” predatory beasts and birds, reflects on the warrior status and lifestyle both men possess. As a result, neither man can be viewed as anything outside of their brute and brawn. Their characters then, while serving the purpose of the tournament, do little more for the plot or the image of the noble ruler. They are not necessarily evil, but they are not nor have any hope to be a positive

influence on the scene. They serve as an extension of the ferocity of Arcite and Palamon and little more.

Conclusion

All the main characters of Chaucer's "The Knight's Tale" are presented at one point or another in regards to an animal likeness. The particulars of Chaucer's use of the animal image are dependent on the situation in question and the characters involved. This is seen when one compares the way the animal images are applied to characters such as Emelye and Theseus versus Arcite and Palamon.

Emelye and Theseus are noble persons who need to remain noble persons. Theseus, representative of the consistently wise ruler must remain level headed throughout the tale if order is to be restored to his kingdom. He cannot morph into the bestial, ferocious lion as he must maintain focus. Neither can Emelye be lowered from her pedestal to the point that she is consumed by animal comparisons as we see with Alisoun in "The Miller's Tale." Each of these characters must refuse their animal comparison in order to remain gracious in the eyes of the audience. They do not have the luxury of indulging in their passions as Arcite and Palamon do.

Arcite and Palamon, on the other hand, do not refute any animal behavior but instead seem to welcome it. They become so consumed by their passions that they do not fight their bestial urges to participate in battle with one another and seem to relish in the anger and ferocity that is born from their feud. Neither takes a real moment to pause and attempt to regain their wits although Arcite does at one time admit he is aware of the futility of their squabbling when they are locked in the tower; this awareness does not keep him from pursuing his heart's desire nor does it seem to revisit him when he is freed.

Overall, Chaucer is consistent with the pejorative nature of the bestial image in "The Knight's Tale." His animals are either indifferent pieces of scenery or representative of a much deeper defect that is taking shape in his characters. In a completely ironic twist, at least within

the confines of “The Knight’s Tale,” it actually appears that Chaucer likens his domestic animal images to the morally degenerating process while he saves the lion, tiger, boar, etc., those predatory yet heraldic beasts, for when his characters have gone completely out of the realm of self-control.

Works Consulted

- Benton, Janetta Rebold. *The Medieval Menagerie: Animals in the Art of the Middle Ages*. Constance Herdon, ed. New York: Abbeville Press, 1992. Print.
- Biggins, Dennis. "Sym(e)kyn/simian: The Ape in Chaucer's Millers." *Studies in Philology* 65 (1968): 44-50. *JSTOR*. Web. 24 September 2010.
- Brown, Carmen. "Bestiary Lessons on Pride and Lust." *The Mark of the Beast*. Debra Hassig, ed. New York: Routledge, 1999: 53-67. Print.
- Clark, Anne. *Beasts and Bawdy*. New York: Taplinger Publishing Company, 1975. Print.
- Clark, Willene B. and Meradith T. McMunn, eds. *Beasts and Birds of the Middle Ages: The Bestiary and Its Legacy*. Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1989. Print.
- Collins, Arthur H. *Symbolism of Animals and Birds Represented in English Church Architecture*. New York: McBride, Nast & Company, 1913. *EBSCOhost*. 25 September 2010.
- Curley, Michael J., trans. *Physiologus*. Austin: U of Texas P, 1979. Print.
- Dean, Christopher. "Imagery in the *Knight's Tale* and the *Miller's Tale*." *Medieval Studies* 31 (1969): 149-163. *JSTOR*. Web. 25 February 2011.
- Delasanta, Rodney. "The Horsemen of the 'Canterbury Tales'." *The Chaucer Review* 3 (1968): 29-36. *JSTOR*. Web. 25 February 2011.
- Dennys, Rodney. *Heraldic Imagination*. New York: Clarkson N. Potter, Inc., 1975. Print.
- Diekstra, F.N.M. "The *Physiologus*: The Bestiaries and Medieval Animal Lore." *Neophiologus* 69 (1985): 142-155. Print.
- Fisher, John H. "The Three Styles of Fragment I of the 'Canterbury Tales'." *The Chaucer Review* 8 (1973): 119-127. *JSTOR*. Web. 10 February 2011.
- Freedman, Paul H. "The Representation of Medieval Peasants as Bestial and as Human." *The*

- Animal/Human Boundary: Historical Perspective*. Angela Creager, ed. Rochester, NY: U of Rochester P, 2002: 29-49. Print.
- “gruf(fe).” *Middle English Dictionary*. 22 February 2006. University of Michigan. 25 January 2011. <<http://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/m/mec/med-idx?type=id&id=MED19642>>
- Haist, Margaret. “The Lion, Bloodline, and Kingship.” *The Mark of the Beast*. Debra Hassig, ed. New York: Routledge, 1999: 3-16. Print.
- Hassig, Debra. *Medieval Bestiaries: Text, Image, Ideology*. Cambridge: Cambridge U P: 1995. Print.
- Helterman, Jeffrey. “The Dehumanizing Metamorphoses of The Knight’s Tale.” *ELH* 38 (1971): 493-511. *JSTOR*. Web. 21 September 2010.
- Houwen, L.A.J.R. “Animal Parallelism in Medieval Literature and the Bestiaries: A Preliminary Investigation.” *Neophilologus* 78 (1994): 483-496. Print.
- Kordecki, Lesley. “Making Animals Mean: Speciest Hermeneutics in the *Physiologus* of Theobaldus.” *Animals in the Middle Ages*. Nona C. Flores, ed. New York: Routledge, 2000: 83-101. Print.
- McCulloch, Florence. *Medieval Latin and French Bestiaries*. Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1960. Print
- Morson, John. “The English Cistercians and the Bestiary.” *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 39 (1956): 146-170. Print.
- Payne, Ann. *Medieval Beasts*. New York: New Amsterdam, 1990. Print.
- Rowland, Beryl. *Animals with Human Faces: A Guide to Animal Symbolism*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1973. Print.
- - - “Aspects of Chaucer’s Use of Animals.” *Archiv fu r das Studium der Neueren Sprachen*

- und Literaturen* 201 (1965): 114-116. Print.
- - - *Birds with Human Souls: A Guide to Bird Symbolism*. Knoxville: U of Tennessee P, 1978. Print.
 - - - *Blind Beasts: Chaucer's Animal World*. Kent, Oh: Kent State U P, 1971. Print.
 - - - "Chapter Six: Chaucer's Imagery." *Companion to Chaucer Studies*. Beryl Rowland, ed. Toronto: Oxford U P, 1968: 103-132. Print.
 - - - "Chaucer and the Unnatural History of Animals." *Medieval Studies* 25 (1963): 376-372. Print.
- Salisbury, Joyce E. "Human Animals of Medieval Fables." *Animals in the Middle Ages*. Nona C. Flores, ed. New York: Routledge, 2000: 49-65. Print.
- - - "Human Beasts and Bestial Humans in the Middle Ages." *Animal Acts: Configuring the Human in Western History*. Jennifer Ham and Matthew Senior, eds. New York: Rutledge, 1997: 9-22. Print.
 - - - *The Beast Within Animals in the Middle Ages*. New York: Rutledge, 1994. Print.
- Severs, J. Burke. "Chapter 13: The Tales of Romance." *Companion to Chaucer Studies*. Beryl Rowland, ed. Toronto: Oxford U P, 1968: 229-246. Print.
- The Aberdeen Bestiary Project*. Michael Arnott. University of Aberdeen. 25 January 2011.
<<http://www.abdn.ac.uk/bestiary/index.hti>>
- The Medieval Bestiary: Animals in the Middle Ages*. David Badke. 25 January 2011. v2.2.
<<http://bestiary.ca/>>
- Van, Thomas A. "Second Meanings in Chaucer's 'Knight's Tale'." *The Chaucer Review* 3 (1968): 69-76. *JSTOR*. Web. 10 February 2011.
- Wheatley, Edward. "Murderous Sows in Chaucer's *Knight's Tale* and Late Fourteenth-Century

France.” *The Chaucer Review* 44 (2009): 224-226. *JSTOR*. Web. 10 February 2011.

“wod(e).” *Middle English Dictionary*. 22 February 2006. University of Michigan. 25 January 2011. < <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/m/mec/med-idx?type=id&id=MED53255>>

Wheatley, Edward. “Murderous Sows in Chaucer’s *Knight’s Tale* and Late Fourteenth-Century France.” *The Chaucer Review* 44 (2009): 234-226. *JSTOR*. Web. 10 February 2011.

White, TH. *The Books of Beasts*. New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1954. Print.

“youlyng.” *Middle English Dictionary*. 22 February 2006. University of Michigan. 20 April 2011. < <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/m/mec/med-idx?type=id&id=MED54035>>

Vita

Jennifer M. LaBurre was born in Metairie, Louisiana. She obtained her B.A. from the University of Louisiana at Lafayette in 2007.