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Chivalry in Chaucer's Canterbury Tales

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Ráda bych poděkovala Heleně Znojenské, Ph.D. za odborné vedení, ochotné poskytování cenných rad a podnětných připomínek a za veškerý čas, který nad mou prací strávila.

Souhlasím se zapůjčením bakalářské práce ke studijním účelům.

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Abstrakt práce

Tato práce se zabývá odrazem rytířství a rytířské kultury v Chaucerových *Canterburských povídkách* a vztahem jeho výpovědi k pozdně středověké společenské realitě. Kapitola 1 představuje zvolené téma ve vztahu k specifickému charakteru povídek, kontextu doby a Chaucerova života. Vytýčuje cíl práce, vypořádává se s jejími omezeními a nastiňuje postup a strukturu analýzy. Kapitola 2 odkrývá původ a vývoj rytíře a utváření souboru rytířských ctností a literární složky rytířství do konce čtrnáctého století a identifikuje dva základní rytířské archetypy v postavách rytíře a panoše z Prologu. Kapitola 3 sleduje projevy rytířství v povídkách napříč žánry s výjimkou romancí a analyzuje jejich odraz se zřetelem k vypravěčům povídek. Analýza se zaměřuje nejprve na rytířskost postav rytířů (Povídka statkářova, Povídka doktora medicíny, Povídka kolejního správce, Vyprávění mnichovo, Povídka studentova, Povídka juristova, Povídka kupcova¹) a poté na známky vlivu rytířských ctností a kultury na postavy nerytířské (Povídka mlynářova, Povídka kněze jeptišek, Povídka lodníka, Povídka sluhy kanovníka). Kapitola 4 analýzu završuje reflexí rytířství v povídkách reprezentujících vrcholný žánr rytířské literatury, žánr romance. Kapitola se postupně zaměřuje na čtyři povídky (Povídku rytířovu, Povídku panošovu, Skládání o panu Thopasovi, Povídku ženy z Bath) a analyzuje je jak se zřetelem k vypravěčům jednotlivých povídek, tak k samotnému žánru romance. Kapitola 5 shrnuje poznatky práce a práci uzavírá.

¹ Geoffrey Chaucer, *Canterburské povídky*, přeložil F. Vrba (Praha: SNKLHU, 1953) 645. Všechny následující české názvy povídek jsou z tohoto vydání.

Thesis abstract

The thesis is concerned with the reflection of chivalry and chivalric culture in Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* and with the relation of his testimony to the social reality of the late Middle Ages. Chapter 1 introduces the chosen topic in relation to the specific character of the *Tales*, of the context of the period, and of Chaucer's life. It specifies the aim of the thesis, deals with its limitations, and outlines the criteria and the structure of the analysis. Chapter 2 presents the origin and the development of the knight along with the formation of the code of chivalric virtues and the literary constituent of the phenomenon of chivalry until the end of the fourteenth century and identifies two fundamental chivalric archetypes in the characters of the Knight and the Squire from "The Prologue". Chapter 3 pursues manifestations of chivalry throughout the *Tales* across genres except romances and analyses their reflection with respect to the narrators of the tales. The analysis first focuses on the chivalrousness of the knightly characters (The Franklin's Tale, The Physician's Tale, The Manciple's Tale, The Monk's Tale, The Clerk's Tale, The Man of Law's Tale, The Merchant's Tale) and then on the signs of the influence of chivalric virtues and culture on the non-knightly characters (The Miller's Tale, The Nun's Priest's Tale, The Shipman's Tale, The Canon's Yeoman's Tale). Chapter 4 crowns the analysis with the reflection of chivalry in the tales representing the peak genre of chivalric literature, the genre of romance. It successively focuses on four tales (The Knight's Tale, The Squire's Tale, The Tale of Sir Thopas, The Wife of Bath's Tale) and analyses them with respect to the narrators of

the tales and to the genre of romance as such. Chapter 5 concludes the thesis. It reiterates the significance of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* and summarizes the results of the thesis.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Chaucer's time, the second half of the 14th century, was the turning period of the Middle Ages. As Maurois writes, the repeated epidemics of bubonic plague caused a vast depopulation and brought about consequent economic and social upheavals. The substantial decrease of the peasant population endangered the position of especially the lower aristocratic classes and induced conflicting tensions within the society. During the reign of Richard II (1377-1399) the growing pressure on the remaining peasants gradually strengthened the support of the anticlerical Lollard movement and the accumulated discontent finally broke out in the sharply antiaristocratic Peasants' Revolt in 1381. The impeachment of the status of the aristocracy and the Church, the two pillars of the traditional feudal concept of the three orders, strengthened the position of the middle classes.¹ Strohm shows us the ambivalent position of those knights and esquires who did not have sufficient wealth. On the one hand they still were part of the nobility but on the other their revenues often came from the essentially middle class civil and administrative tasks and frequently they could hardly compete with the incomes of the burghers. At the same time, royal or military service previously reserved to the nobility was increasingly becoming a way to social advancement and to the acquisition of the status of a knight even for the burghers.

In Chaucer's life experience the worlds of the middle classes and of the aristocracy intersect. He was born into a

¹ André Maurois, *Dějiny Anglie* (Praha: NLN, 1993) 136-155.

middle class family but in his early teens he was sent to serve as a page in the household of the son of the reigning monarch and spent the rest of his life in close contact with the ruling aristocracy. As a Controller of the Customs and Subsidies on Wool he remained in contact with the middle classes and as a poet, a translator, a member of the royal court, and due to his trips abroad on official business he got in touch with the intellectual and literary elites. During his career he became Justice of the Peace and Knight of the Shire (Member of Parliament) for the county of Kent and in the royal service he was appointed the Clerk of the King's Works. His rich personal history illustrates the advancement of a member of the middle class through the career in service to high aristocracy and the king (and also through marriage with a woman of noble birth) to a respected social position on the level of the lower aristocracy although he never acquired the title of a knight.²

The world of Chaucer's patrons, his literary work, and perhaps even his own social aspirations implied the connection with chivalry. In the period of the increasingly accelerating social transformations chivalry became a sensitive and contested phenomenon and represents thus a suitable indicator of the shifts in the structure of the society and in the perception of the social roles as well as of the dynamics of the mutual relations of the social and cultural changes of the late Middle Ages. That is why we have chosen it as the focus of our thesis. Chivalry was a generally acknowledged attribute of a higher social standing and higher culture. The association of chivalric

² Paul Strohm, "The social and literary scene in England," *The Cambridge Chaucer Companion*, ed. Piero Boitani and Jill Mann (Cambridge: CUP, 1986) 2-4.

conventions and values with the aristocratic class was in Chaucer's time inherent. For knights and the aristocracy it represented the substantiation of their claims to the exceptionality of their own standing, for the ambitious burghers the adoption of chivalric values, social conventions and culture implicitly expressed their self-confidence and will to uplift their social standing.

Chaucer's borderline position between the worlds of the aristocracy and of the middle class may be considered representative of his time. On the other hand, his social and artistic activities required exceptional familiarity with chivalric values, conventions, and literature. In relation to chivalry his work thus represents a unique view reflecting the transformations and peculiarities of his time.

Having chosen the phenomenon of chivalry as the focus of our thesis it is essential to define what actually the term "chivalry" stands for. Kaeuper explains that for medieval people the word "chivalry" had three meanings:

The simplest sense was hardy deeds in a fight with edged weapons. A second meaning was social, the body of knights in one place or even all knights, thought of as a distinct group. The third meaning, more abstract, referred to their ideas and ideals, to chivalry as the ethos of the knights.

Kaeuper continues: "All three senses of the word appear (often intertwined) in romance literature, one of our best (if least used) sources on medieval society."³ Reading the *Canterbury Tales* in historical and literary contexts with special attention to

³ Richard Kaeuper, "The societal role of chivalry in romance: northwestern Europe," *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Romance*, ed. Roberta L. Krueger (Cambridge: CUP, 2000) 97.

the romance genre within the tales the thesis attempts to disclose the reflection of chivalry in all its meanings. The first one, however, is not treated generally and separately but as an integral part of the second and third one, which better corresponds to the present-day understanding of the meaning of the term.

The exceptionality of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* pertinent to our purpose lies in the fact that he does not offer there a single sided view and description of individual features and figures only. He gives us the opportunity to view them from the point of view of the narrator, from the point of view of individual characters who figure in the *Canterbury Tales*, and from the point of view of the heroes of the tales that the characters tell. Owing to this multiple perspective we can see a plastic picture that can contribute to our understanding of the medieval world and to the plasticisation of our notion of its social reality. The portrayal of chivalry the tales offer covers a broad spectrum of points of view, of opinions, and its perception as well as self-perception. They capture chivalry in different contexts and with different consequences, they depict it with different degree of dignity, from the peak glamorous part of the social and moral pyramid, over figures whose glamour is problematised and their role does not meet usual expectations, to open mockery. Moreover, the presence of the romance genre within the tales and the rich historical documentation of the phenomenon of chivalry provide wide space for comparison.

The aim of this thesis is to analyse the reflection of chivalry in Geoffrey Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*. The analysis shall illustrate the plasticity and plurality Chaucer achieves in

the depiction of diverse component aspects of this medieval phenomenon. In spite of the mediated multiple views from different perspectives of the medieval society the *Canterbury Tales* ultimately are a piece of work of one man and do necessarily contain a strong element of subjectivity. Chaucer's adjustment of his work to his audiences with their taste and shared view of the world also have to be taken into account. The scope of the thesis does not permit comparison with other contemporary sources and wider contexts and we cannot judge what the medieval world and society were like solely on the basis of the analysis of one work. Consequently, our conclusions in relation to the medieval society should be considered tentative.

Despite all the mentioned limitations Chaucer's particular standing, life, and doubtless exceptional personality make closer acquaintance with his work a contribution to the understanding of the medieval reality that cannot be ignored. The historians commonly quote Chaucer to illustrate their historical findings and the question of the interrelation of Chaucer's work and the medieval reality has become the focus of many specialized studies. In one of them Wallace aptly expressed the substance of the studies of literary texts in relation to historical reality:

The aim here is not to create a vantage point above the text from which the text – and the struggles of its protagonists – can be explained, or explained away. The aspiration is, rather, to restore the text to the movement of history; to recognize its own sense of

precariousness in occupying a time and place that shifts even at the instant of its own articulation.⁴

Similarly, our analysis does not aspire to disclose how chivalry was perceived by the medieval society of Chaucer's time but rather how its perception was projected into the medieval society within Chaucer's work. It is intended as a prospective contribution to the *Canterbury Tales* studies and as groundwork for further research of the phenomenon of chivalry on higher level making use of more such analyses and revealing contemporary contexts.

To be able to analyse the reflection of chivalry in the *Canterbury Tales* we first objectify the phenomenon using present-day scientific sources that deal with the history of chivalry. We delineate our present-day understanding of chivalry and its development and look for its reflections within the *Canterbury Tales*. Through the diverse narrators and characters of their tales Chaucer provides various views of chivalry and we disclose a complex network of data and their connections and analyse it with respect to the context of the acknowledged historical development. The choice of the individual tales for the analysis is determined by the presence of knightly characters or of manifestation of chivalric ideals. The various reflections of chivalry are considered in the specific contexts of the narrators of the tales and therefore each tale is analysed separately. The order of the tales is given by the criteria the analysis follows. In the individual tales we pursue the influence of the character of the narrator on his

⁴ David Wallace, *Chaucerian Polity: Absolutist Lineages and Associational Forms in England and Italy* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997) Preface xvii.

depiction of chivalry, to what extent the knightly characters correspond to the chivalric archetypes, whether the characteristics that belong among chivalric virtues function as chivalric virtues and represent them in the context of the character and tale, and in the romances we further track to what extent they correspond to the conventions of the genre.

The focus of the analysis also determines the structure of the thesis. It is divided into five chapters: this introduction, three body chapters, and a conclusion. The body chapters begin with a presentation of the historical development of a knight and chivalry and with an introduction of the chivalric archetypes from “The Prologue”, continue with a study of the reflection of chivalric ideals across genres beyond romance, and climax with an analysis of the reflection of chivalry in the romance genre within the *Canterbury Tales*.

Chapter 2: Knights

The aim of the thesis is to analyse the reflection of chivalry in Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* and ensuing from the definition of chivalry and from our methodology outlined in Chapter 1 the first step of the analysis is the delineation of the historical development of a knight and chivalry. Chapter 2 shall attempt to describe the knight as a historical phenomenon, dealing with his origin and military and social development, to portray him as a social concept, depicting the formation of a separate social layer and its association with chivalric ideals, and to present him as a literary image, touching upon the mutual relation of literature and society. Providing thus the fundamental background knowledge to be developed in the following chapters and building the notion of what or who an ideal knight was supposed to be and what virtues were associated with him Chapter 2 shall introduce and study chivalric archetypes present in the *Canterbury Tales*, that is the Knight and the Squire from "The Prologue".

A knight, as defined by Keen, is:

a man of aristocratic standing and probably of noble ancestry, who is capable, if called upon, of equipping himself with a war horse and the arms of a heavy cavalryman, and who has been through certain rituals that make him what he is – who has been 'dubbed' to knighthood.¹

Kovařík adds in his definition of a knight that a knight's horse and noble weapons, particularly a sword, also represent a

¹ Maurice Keen, *Chivalry* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1984) 1.

symbol of his state and give him social prestige.² The definition is more or less correct but it does not reflect the phenomenon in its whole complexity which is nowhere so apparent as when tracing the origin and the development of the knight. Its following survey is based on five works – Richard Barber’s *The Knight and Chivalry*, Franco Cardini’s “Válečník a rytíř” (“The Warrior and the Knight”) in Jacques Le Goff’s *Středověký člověk a jeho svět (Medieval Callings)*, Frances Gies’s *The Knight in History*, Maurice Keen’s *Chivalry*, and Jiří Kovařík’s *Meč a kříž (The Sword and the Cross)*.

The origin of the knight is hard to trace. The historians cannot determine exactly when the knight had emerged but they relate his appearance with the spreading of the word “miles” throughout the Latin sources since around the end of the 9th century. Keen explains that the meaning of the word gradually shifted in compliance with the parallel military and social developments from a professional soldier to a mounted warrior and acquired “more clearly honorific associations.”³ Kovařík reports that the historians agree that since around 1030 the expression already represented a member of an elite social layer. It was called “ordo equestris” or “ordo militaris” and it had its particular character. Its members were recognizable not only by their armour and equestrian mode of fighting but they also gradually developed a certain moral code.⁴ Cardini points out that already the knights’ predecessors, the professional warriors of the early Middle Ages, had a special status and social prestige. They had the privilege of bearing arms, and as they provided their services in warfare, they were normally

² Jiří Kovařík, *Meč a kříž* (Praha: Mladá fronta, 2005) 9.

³ Keen 27-28.

⁴ Kovařík 9.

exempt from the dues and renders that gradually developed into the feudal bans. The others, an overwhelming majority of the laity, were expected to produce enough to satisfy not only their own modest needs but also “the more demanding and sophisticated requirements of the few, who were privileged to live on the fruits of the labors of the many.”⁵ Keen clarifies the gradual coalescence of the warrior class and nobility. Due to the continual technical military developments the warriors needed more and more sophisticated equipment, which demanded more and more substantial means or substantial patronage. “Aristocratic associations of one kind or another therefore began to be more important.”⁶ The developments in arms and fighting techniques encouraged the warriors’ sense of identity and their skills and training distinguished them from other men. The engagement in warfare enabled them to accumulate wealth and thus further improved and strengthened their social standing. Those of high social standing could afford the more and more specialised and costly equipment that became indispensable for the knights. Most of the knights thus had or had won high social standing, their position had consequently risen in the social scale, and eventually the status of the knight coalesced with the nobility.⁷

Barber discloses the military use of cavalry in Europe and the military developments connected with the emergence of the figure of the knight. He begins his study with light horsemen. He states they could be commonly encountered already among the Germanic tribes and that the Romans

⁵ Franco Cardini, “The Warrior and the Knight,” *Medieval Callings*, ed. Jacques Le Goff (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1990) 75.

⁶ Keen 26.

⁷ Keen 26-27.

occasionally hired them as auxiliary troops. However, they were only little esteemed as owing to their primitive equipment they were not much effective. It was not until the overwhelming triumph of Goths over the Romans at Adrianople in 378 that cavalry began to count. Nevertheless, even after the successes of Huns, another nomadic tribe, the new style of cavalry warfare spread only slowly from the eastern Empire. Of the Germanic tribes only the Visigoths and the Lombards were successful horsemen, the Anglo-Saxons pursued their skilful infantry tactics until as late as the eleventh century. The supersession of a foot soldier by a horseman was only gradual and several factors contributed to it. Horsemen were more mobile and had more striking power so an army needed fewer of them than of foot soldiers and thus saved on supplies, on the other hand, the future knight had to spend a considerable amount on his equipment. The price of a horse in the 9th century was six times higher than the price of a cow and the price of armour possibly as much again. The superiority of horsemen increased immensely due to technical developments, the most important of which was the use of stirrups. The stirrup first appeared in China in the 5th century and its use slowly spread west. To France it came in the early 8th century and was quickly adopted and developed. Other innovations were the use of the lance in rest and of the long pointed shield. All the innovations brought a revolution in warfare. Shod horses were faster and could master difficult terrain, stirrups gave the rider better balance and opened the way for the replacement of the thrown javelin by the heavy lance used in rest as a battering ram. We can see the old and the new style side by side in the Bayeux Tapestry. (Illustration 1.) Warfare became a duel

between armies consisting of cavalry with infantry support and the climax of most battles was the spectacle of those armies meeting in full-scale charge. Barber concludes that the knight was a military as well as a social figure and that his military power constituted only half of his excellence.⁸

Cardini focuses on the development of the social concept of the knight. He connects the appearance of the knight with the period between the end of the 9th and the beginning of the 11th century associated with the barbarian invasions of the Vikings, Magyars, and Saracens and the so-called feudal anarchy with its fragmentation of public powers and incessant struggles between the ravaging and violent lords with their armed followers. He claims that it was the harshness of the times that inspired the division of the society into the three states, the three pillars of the medieval Christian world: the “oratores” – the clergy, providing spiritual care, the “laboratores” – the peasants, supplying provisions, and the “bellatores” – the warriors, ensuring protection. In his work he concentrates on the process of the sacralization of the army, that is, from our point of view, the containment of its violence by the Church, the process through which a crude warrior changed into the cultivated protector, the knight. He explains that there existed numerous groups of professional warriors serving their lord usually in exchange for lands and gifts. Already their predecessors during the early Middle Ages developed certain ethic comprising courage, faithful friendship, and affection towards their generous lord and they preserved earlier initiation rituals for admittance among those worthy of

⁸ Richard Barber, *The Knight and Chivalry* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1970) 3-6.

bearing arms, the roots of the ceremony of dubbing.⁹ However, the warriors of the harsh period of the barbarian invasions and the so-called feudal anarchy, were, as Cardini claims, primarily oppressors and plunderers: “This was the time in which men-at-arms were above all *tyranni* or *praedones*.”¹⁰ Cardini further explains that the bishops strongly denounced their extensive outrages on the defenceless inhabitants and initiated the movement “Pax Dei” and “Treuga Dei” (the Peace and Truce of God). Soon the laity as well as the lords with their armed retinues helped them enforce those as they were themselves troubled by the violence that obstructed trade and economical development in general. The Pax Dei was aimed at the protection of the defenceless, such as the clergy, widows, and orphans, and placed sanctuaries, hospitals, marketplaces, fords and roads under special protection and everyone who committed an act of violence in those places risked excommunication. The Treuga Dei established that warlike acts that were already forbidden by the Pax Dei at certain places and against certain categories of inhabitants began to be prohibited also on certain days of the week, again with the threat of excommunication. Thus wars and fighting were significantly limited. However, it would not have been possible without the support of the warriors who were willing and able to impose the pacification program by force. The original warrior ethic consisting of courage, faithful friendship, loyalty, and generousness was then enriched by the ecclesiastical peace canons that gave birth to the chivalric ethic based on the service to the church and the protection of the weak. In the

⁹ Franco Cardini, “Válečník a rytíř,” *Středověký člověk a jeho svět*, ed. Jacques Le Goff (Praha: Vyšehrad, 2003) 70-71.

¹⁰ Cardini, *The Warrior and the Knight*, 77.

second half of the eleventh century Pope Gregory VII developed the ideal of “miles Sancti Petri”, the warrior or the knight of Saint Peter, which significantly modified the meaning of the term “miles Christi” originally denoting a martyr or a monk or an ascetic. It began to be used to refer to the new type of a knight, the warrior of faith, a knight in the service of the Church, and thus united the two originally antithetical concepts of the spiritual fight against sins and the secular fight against the enemy with a sword in hand. It was at this time that the dubbing ceremony began to involve an approval by the Church. The eleventh century was a period of military expansion of Christendom and the peak of it as well as of the sacralization of the army was the first Crusade with its overwhelming success that further stimulated the crusade movement and triggered the formation of knightly military orders.

The eleventh century also gave birth to a mass of epic poetry merging Christian exaltation with military glory.¹¹ Gies comments that the “chansons de geste”, songs of heroic deeds, were orally transmitted and their subject were the exploits of Charlemagne and his followers. We do not know who composed them, transmitted them, nor who recorded them in writing. The most famous was the *Chanson de Roland*.¹² Cardini points out that it brings the first important model of the code of chivalric virtues. It is based on “prouesse”, courage, and on “sagesse”, wisdom or prudence. Those qualities are complementary. Courage without wisdom leads to folly while wisdom without courage may result in cowardice. “Mesure”, balance, of both qualities is thus desirable. However, in reality

¹¹ Cardini, *Válečník a rytíř*, 71-82.

¹² Frances Gies, *The Knight in History* (New York: Harper&Row Publishers, 1984) 71.

a knight only rarely has those virtues in harmonic balance. This balance arises rather from the knightly brotherhood in which the individual characters of the predominantly courageous and the predominantly wise complement each other. The concept of the ideal knight therefore stems from the “esprit de corps”, the spirit of the whole group, rather than from the characteristics of the individuals. Cardini suggests that the seal of the Knights Templar depicting two knights riding one horse may illustrate the “notitia contubernii,” the awareness of the fellowship in arms.¹³ (Illustration 2.)

This brings us to the self-awareness of the knight and of his consciousness of his social identity that played a crucial role in the genesis of the knight. His class identity began to evolve already during the period of the feudal anarchy when the warriors started to realize their elite social standing and certain exceptionality ensuing from their martial art, their ownership of a horse and expensive equipment, and their noble origin. The origin, as Keen and Kovařík explain, was not just a matter of birth but also a matter of worth. The notion of nobility was still rather unsettled and the qualities were as much a question of the pedigree as of skills and virtues.¹⁴ Since the eleventh century the knight’s acquisition of class identity was sealed by the addition of the Christian element. The influence of religious ethic and of crusading ideology on the ethic of chivalry in its shaping period was exceedingly powerful, but Keen emphasises they marked the origins of the religious strand in chivalry, not chivalry as such as it was not

¹³ Cardini, *Válečník a rytíř*, 75.

¹⁴ Kovařík 10., Keen 16-17.

necessarily connected with crusading.¹⁵ He asserts that the religious orders were “cut off from the courts, from the troubadour cult of love and the new models of knighthood that the secular romances presented, and from the tourneying field”.

In the twelfth century these were exactly the spheres where new potent conceptions were born.¹⁶ The courts gave birth to a new type of knight. Alongside the feudal warrior and the defender of the faith emerges the courtier. Gies compares the significance of the influence of the outpouring of chivalric literature, especially of troubadour poetry, on the knightly class in the twelfth century to the importance of the impact of the First Crusade in the eleventh century. The troubadours were knight-poets living at the courts and castles of southern France. Their name derives from the verb “trobar,” in modern French “trouver,” which means “to find”. As Gies writes, the troubadours were ““finder[s],” discoverer[s], inventor[s], creator[s].”¹⁷ They composed songs, the troubadour poetry was meant to be sung, and for most of them it was the way to make their living. They were members of the knightly class, which distinguished them from the jongleurs who were entertainers but not poets. Gies explains that becoming a troubadour was “a means of upward mobility open to a man of intelligence, artistic ability, and social skill,” he only had to find a patron.¹⁸ Gies adds that in a few cases the troubadours were from wealthy families or taken in by a richer knight or great lord, clothed, armed, and given lands, but mostly they had to find sponsors and travelled from court to court where they spent a

¹⁵ Keen 44-45.

¹⁶ Keen 50.

¹⁷ Gies 50.

¹⁸ Gies 53.

few weeks or months, sometimes years, and then moved on. Through their work and their life stories they brought in new knightly virtues such as artistic and social skills, courtliness, eloquence, gentleness, charm, handsomeness, and intelligence, and established the themes of courtly love, joy, and youth. Succeeded by the trouvères of northern France, the minnesingers of Germany, and poets of Spain and Italy, they permanently influenced the literary tradition of Europe.¹⁹ (Illustration 3.) Gies reasons that successively the literature of knighthood influenced

the self-image of the knight[, ...] his manners and mores, and through the knightly class it came to influence not only the literature but the manners and thought of Europe. It also provided the modern world with most of its notions about knights.²⁰

The particular mood and ideas of the troubadour poetry inspired to a great extent the romances, Gies continues, that originated in northern France at the end of the twelfth century.²¹ The romance genre represents the peak of chivalric literature. It comprises the complex essence of the chivalric spirit and as Krueger claims it served as a vehicle for the construction of the social code of chivalry.²² Krueger even asserts that the romance genre is “arguably the most influential and enduring secular literary genre of the European Middle Ages.”²³ According to Gies, romances are pieces of narrative poetry dealing with fictitious stories of chivalry, love, and

¹⁹ Gies 48-70.

²⁰ Gies 71.

²¹ Gies 71-72.

²² Roberta L. Krueger, “Introduction,” *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Romance*, ed. Roberta L. Krueger (Cambridge: CUP, 2000) 5.

²³ Krueger, Introduction, 1.

adventure and can be divided into three groups: the matter of France, dealing with Charlemagne and his knights and thus developing the tradition of the chansons de geste; the matter of Rome, developing new versions of classical themes; and, the most influential and best known today, the matter of Britain with its rich Arthurian myth.

Gies concludes that chivalric literature played a significant role in the history of knighthood, it helped to consolidate the self-image of the knight, to invigorate his esprit de corps, and to define the principles of chivalric behaviour. According to the chansons de geste the knight should be “brave, loyal, [generous,] and honourable”, achieving glory through courageous deeds; in compliance with the troubadour poetry he should be “courteous, [...] well-spoken, discreet, faithful in the service of love, [...] and] have excellence and worth, as well as good sense”; the Arthurian romances provided a religious spirit reminding of the Peace and Truce of God and the soldier of Christ. The chivalric literature with its models enhanced the perception and self-perception of the knight of the twelfth and the thirteenth century, he was no more the “crude, uncivilized warrior of the tenth century.”²⁴ As Cardini notes the twelfth century is not only a period in which chivalric literature flourished, it is, along with the thirteenth century, also traditionally considered to be the peak of chivalry as such. It was the period of climactic military successes, of the crusades, of adventures in distant countries, of hunting, of tournaments, initially serving as military training and later transforming into entertaining performances and courtly

²⁴ Gies 72-80.

games, the period of chivalric excitement permeating the aristocratic culture.

The twelfth and the thirteenth century were in general a period of a social explosion and expansion, of the development of the market and of towns and of their economical growth and prosperity. The burghers gained ground and to the traditional three pillars of the society, the clergy, the warriors, and the peasants, affiliated the bourgeoisie, the middle class was born. On the other hand, the transformation of the economic base of the feudal system brought erosion of the economic base of the knights. The fief system was gradually vanishing. This endangered the existence of the knights and weakened their economic power. Also richer supplies increased the demands and expenses for maintaining the high standard of living and thus participated in the impoverishment of the lower nobility. The fourteenth century contributed with general social retraction and economic crisis accelerated by the plague epidemics. In addition to this the military techniques had changed significantly. The use of new weapons, crossbows and longbows, forced the knights to use substantially heavier armour. Its price grew sharply which led to further impoverishment of the knights. The increased weight of the armour also demanded the use of stronger horses, those were slower and thus the knights were longer exposed to the arrows of the enemy. Chivalric culture had paradoxically also played its negative role in the decline of the military supremacy of the knights. It glorified the conception of a battle as a series of duels between the knights of the opposing sides in which individual power and limitless heroism verging on self-sacrifice won. Such ethos led to frequent attempts of individual

groups of knights to decide the battle and gain or defend their honour by means of independent actions regardless of the tactical instructions of the commander. Unfortunately, both possible results – the more frequent heroic defeat or death or the less usual spectacular successes – only contributed to the aura of chivalrousness of such actions. On the contrary, the towns began to build their own troops of militia and the use of professionalized non-noble mercenaries was also spreading. Those armies based their success on employing collective spirit and discipline. They gradually developed new defence and fight strategies and explored the potential of the tactical cooperation of specialized units. Their use of long pikes and of crossbows and longbows with pavises often proved fatal. Since the famous Battle of the Golden Spurs at Courtrai in 1302 the defeats of knights by infantry were more and more frequent. (Illustration 4.) For the previously mentioned reasons the fourteenth century is generally perceived as a period of the decline of chivalry. However, we have to understand that the decline was only very slow and gradual and lasted till the sixteenth century. In the fourteenth century chivalry did not perish, it merely underwent a transformation although it simultaneously lost some of its significance. While at its peak in the twelfth and the thirteenth century chivalry represented an invincible military power, in the fourteenth century they already had to face challenges but they still remained a key military force. The military function of chivalry gradually receded into the background while their social function gained prominence. Among their equals they pursued chivalric virtues and ideals in its purest form and their magic and prestige

nurtured by inspiring mythology and literature survived within the European culture in fact to our days.²⁵

Once we have built the notion of the emergence of the ideal of the knight we can proceed to the introduction of chivalric archetypes present in the *Canterbury Tales*. Already in the very “Prologue” where Chaucer introduces the pilgrims and storytellers heading for Canterbury a complex literary reflection of the social changes that took place in Chaucer’s time can be seen. The knights are not primary heroes in the centre of the story any more. In the frame story they are mere members of a group and thus leave space for new and until that time non-standard heroes – most of the characters are members of the middle class – burghers, clerics, officials. However, chivalry still retains certain value, prestige, and exclusiveness. We can see that not only in the description of both knightly characters whom Chaucer introduces to us in “The Prologue”, that is the Knight and the Squire, but it also clearly ensues from the fact that in the hierarchy of the characters which Chaucer based upon “condicioun [...] and degree” (“profession and degree”) the Knight and the Squire occupy the first two posts.²⁶

In the character of the Knight Chaucer introduces the traditional archetype of a knight – the warrior. He manifests all traditional chivalric virtues – he is described as:

a worthy man [...] That [...] loved chivalrie,
Trouthe and honour, fredom and curteisie [...]
And [was] honoured for his worthynesse.
(General Prologue p. 24, l. 43-50)

²⁵ Cardini, *Válečník a rytíř*, 84-99.

²⁶ Larry D. Benson, *The Riverside Chaucer* (Oxford: OUP, 1988) 24.

(General Prologue l. 38, 40),

Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales*, trans. N. Coghill (London:

Penguin Books, 1977) 4. All subsequent quotations are from these editions.

(a most distinguished man
Who [...] followed chivalry,
Truth, honour, generousness and courtesy [...]
And [was] honoured for his noble graces.)
(Chaucer, trans. N. Coghill p. 4)

His valiancy, doughtiness, and bravery are confirmed and illustrated by a symbolic enumeration of fights and battles in which he faithfully served as a vassal of his feudal lord. In addition to these essential chivalric qualities he even fulfils the crusade ideal of a defender of the faith:

[he had] foughten for oure feith
(General Prologue p. 24, l. 62)
([he had] jousted for our faith)
(Chaucer, trans. N. Coghill p. 4)

and a morally noble, modest, and humble man:

And though that he were worthy, he was wys,
And of his port as meeke as is a mayde.
(General Prologue p. 24, l. 68-69)

(And though so much distinguished, he was wise
And in his bearing modest as a maid.)
(Chaucer, trans. N. Coghill p. 5)

We can definitely feel that other characters respect and esteem knights:

Whan that the Knyght had thus his tale ytoold,
In al the route nas ther yong ne oold
That he ne seyde it was a noble storie
And worthy for to drawen to memorie,
(The Miller's Prologue p. 66, l. 3109-12)

(When we heard the tale the Knight had told,
Not one among the pilgrims, young or old,
But said it was indeed a noble story
Worthy to be remembered for its glory,
(Chaucer, trans. N. Coghill p. 86)

when the Host and the Pardoner have a row the Knight intervenes and reconciles them functioning as a respected peace guardian:

the worthy Knyght bigan [...]:
“Namooore of this, for it is right ynough!
Sire Pardoner, be glad and myrie of cheere;
And ye, sire Hoost, that been to me so deere,
I prey yow that ye kisse the Pardoner.[” ...]
Anon they kiste, and ryden forth hir weye.
(The Pardoner’s Tale p. 202, l. 960-968)

(The worthy Knight began [...],
‘No more, we’ve all had quite enough.
Now, Master Pardoner, perk up, look cheerly!
And you, Sir Host, whom I esteem so dearly,
I beg of you to kiss the Pardoner.[’]
[...] They kissed, and we continued on our way.)
(Chaucer, trans. N. Coghill p. 258)

The reference to the Knight’s equipment further illustrates his warrior character. He has “goode hors” (“fine horses”) but he wears

Of fustian [...] a gypon
Al bismotered with his habergeon.
(General Prologue p. 24, l. 75-76)

(a fustian tunic stained and dark
With smudges where his armour had left mark.)
(Chaucer, trans. N. Coghill p. 5)

It is true that he joined the pilgrimage right from service but the very fact reveals the Knight's priorities. The unimportance of wearing noble clothes and the significance of the possession of an excellent horse prove his focus on the deeds with weapons, that is, on the traditional military function of chivalry and virtues celebrated already by the chansons de geste.

In the character of the Squire Chaucer introduces the rather more recent type of a knight developed by romances – the gallant, the troubadour, the courtier. His characterization is more gentle and it accentuates his youth:

[he was] a yong [...] lusty bachelor [...]
Of twenty yeer of age[, ...]
as fressh as is the month of May,
(General Prologue p. 24, l. 79-92)

([he was] a fine young [...] lad of fire
[... of] some twenty years of age[, ...]
as fresh as is the month of May,)
(Chaucer, trans. N. Coghill p. 5)

his handsome appearance:

With lokkes crulle as they were leyd in presse
(General Prologue p. 24, l. 81)

(With locks as curly as if they had been pressed)
(Chaucer, trans. N. Coghill p. 5)

and his luxurious dress:

Embrouded was he, as it were a meede
Al ful of fresshe floures, whyte and reede[, ...]

Short was his gowne, with sleeves longe and wyde.
(General Prologue p. 24-5, l. 89-90, 93)

(He was embroidered like a meadow bright
And full of freshest flowers, red and white.
[...] Short was his gown, the sleeves were long and
wide.) (Chaucer, trans. N. Coghill p. 5)

However, his sumptuousness does not derogate him from
chivalric virtues:

Curteis he was, lowely, and servysable,
And carf biforn his fader at the table.
(General Prologue p. 25, l. 99-100)

(Courteous he was, lowly and serviceable,
And carved to serve his father at the table.)
(Chaucer, trans. N. Coghill p. 5)

Although to a man of his status still belongs the ability to ride a
horse and master a sword: “he hadde been somtyme in
chyvachie” (“He’d seen some service with the cavalry”)²⁷ his
main qualities seem to be his graceful manners and behaviour
and his ability to excel in various kinds of courtly
entertainment including tournaments:

Syngynge he was, or floytynge, [...]
He koude songes make, and wel endite,
Juste, and eek daunce, and weel purtreye and write
(General Prologue p. 24-5, l. 91, 95, 96)

(Singing he was, or fluting[, ...]
He could make songs and poems and recite,
Knew how to joust and dance, to draw and write)
(Chaucer, trans. N. Coghill p. 5)

²⁷ Benson 24. (General Prologue l. 85), Chaucer, trans. N. Coghill, 5.

and in love adventures:

And born hym weel, as of so litel space,
In hope to stonden in his lady grace. [...]
So hoothe he lovede that by nyghtertale
He sleep namoore than dooth a nyghtyngale.
(General Prologue p. 24-25, l. 87-88, 97-98)

(And had done valiantly in little space
Of time, in hope to win his lady's grace. [...]
He loved so hotly that till dawn grew pale
He slept as little as a nightingale.)
(Chaucer, trans. N. Coghill p. 5)

Even in his case we can feel other characters respect and esteem him:

[...] I preise wel thy wit, [...] considerynge thy yowthe,
So feelyngly thou spekest, [...] ther is noon that is heere
Of eloquence that shal be thy peere,
If that thou lyve; God yeve thee good chaunce,
And in vertu sende thee continuance,
For of thy speche I have greet deyntee.
(The Squire's Tale, p. 177, l. 674-81)

([...] I do admire / Your powers [...] For a youth,
You speak most feelingly [...] no one here
Will equal you in eloquence, or near [...]
God prosper all that's in you
And may all your talents flourish and continue!
It's all so dainty, it delighted me.)
(Chaucer, trans. N. Coghill p. 407)

The character of the Squire is valued and distinctive for his social proficiency and noble interests and skills representative of the new social role of chivalry.

Chapter 2 attempted to present the knight and his origin and development, the gradual formation of the code of chivalric virtues along with the separate social layer, and the literary constituent of the phenomenon of chivalry. Reading the *Canterbury Tales* in the historical contexts Chapter 2 aimed to disclose the reflection of chivalric archetypes present in the *Canterbury Tales*, that is of the Knight and the Squire from “The Prologue”. In the two characters Chaucer reflects the contemporary transformation of the ideal of the knight. The traditional almost ascetic warrior ideal is complemented by the new courtly ideal that answers the increasing social and cultural demands of the more cultivated environment of the courts and towns. Both ideals coexist and we could see that each embodies virtues accentuating different aspects of chivalry. They are both vigorous, leading and enjoy social prestige and authority. The transformation of chivalry and the shift in its functions is obvious but we cannot sense any decline. Although Chaucer wrote the *Canterbury Tales* at the end of the fourteenth century and reflected the contemporary medieval society, in “The Prologue” chivalry remains a prominent social element that retains its exclusiveness.

Chapter 3: Chivalric Ideals

Analysing the reflection of chivalry in Geoffrey Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* Chapter 2 has presented knights and introduced the chivalric archetypes of the Knight and the Squire from "The Prologue." Chapter 3 shall continue with a study of chivalric ideals, the ethos or virtues of the knights, across genres beyond romance providing thus a wider background for the climax of the thesis in the study of the reflection of chivalry in the romance genre within the *Canterbury Tales*. Chapter 2 has disclosed the gradual formation of the code of chivalric virtues and Chapter 3 shall pursue those virtues in knightly and non-knightly characters throughout the tales except romances and shall analyse their reflection with respect to the narrators of the tales. (Illustration 5, 6.)

The tales told by the variety of pilgrims show us a diverse range of various knightly characters. These characters are identified as knights and have some of the chivalric attributes but do not always fully correspond to the outlined image of a knight. The varied depictions of the knightly figures and virtues by the individual pilgrims who come from different social layers offer us a multiple perspective and illustrate thus the perception of knights and chivalry in the society in Chaucer's time. The analysis follows the spectrum of points of view and proceeds from the tales where the knights despite various discrepancies are perceived favourably, have prestige, and function as bearers of virtuous qualities to those where they have an insignificant or negative role or are even ridiculed.

In “**The Franklin’s Tale**” chivalric virtues are the central motif of the story and Arvéragus and Aurelius, the knight and the squire we meet in the tale, are representations of chivalric ideals. The Franklin is a member of the landed gentry. He has a higher social standing, he is rich, epicurean, and extravagant and by his life style and as the connecting link between the bourgeoisie and the aristocracy he is closer to the chivalric world and its values and looks up to it. Aware of his deficiencies and enchanted by chivalry he chooses the genre of Breton lay, a short narrative that may be classified as a form of romance literature but that, as Krueger specifies, is “not [a] full-blown romance[...].”¹ He tells a chivalric story par excellence, a story in which violation of the moral code threatens with a catastrophe but the imbalance is finally remedied by the restoration of chivalric virtues. Severs confirms it is a story

in praise of *gentillesse*, the highest conception of chivalric honor, [...] and the contagious influence of a noble deed passing from knight, to squire, to clerk.²

Arvéragus manifests the traditional chivalric attributes, he wins his wife by service and courtesy:

[he] loved and dide his payne
To serve a lady in his beste wise;
And many a labour, many a greet emprise,
He for his lady wroghte er she were wonne[, ...]

¹ Roberta L. Krueger, “Questions of gender in Old French courtly romance,” *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Romance*, ed. Roberta L. Krueger (Cambridge: CUP, 2000) 138.

² J. Burke Severs, “The Tales of Romance,” *Companion to Chaucer Studies*, ed. Beryl Rowland (Toronto: OUP, 1968) 236.

he, day ne nyght
Ne sholde upon hym take no maistrie [...]
But hire obeye, and folwe hir wyl in al.
(The Franklin's Tale, p. 178, l. 730-3, 746-7, 749)

([he] served his lady with his best
In many a toilsome enterprise and quest,
Suffering much for her ere she was won[, ...]
he would never darken her delight [...]
But would obey [her] in all with simple trust.)
(Chaucer, trans. N. Coghill, 409)

He lives at his castle, he is an honourable warrior seeking “in armes worshipe and honour.” (“high deeds of arms and reputation / In honour.”)³ But his wife’s honour is at stake. It is threatened by not keeping her word to consent to adultery if specific seemingly unrealizable conditions are fulfilled. She gave her word and it cannot be taken back nor reversed by fight. Although it was her own fault that brought her into the situation Arvéragus generously forgives her the imprudence but he insists on her keeping the word as for him it is the highest virtue and he forbids her to ever tell anyone about the affair on pain of death preventing thus both of them from disgrace. He finds spiritual purity superior to physical chastity:

I hadde wel levere ystiked for to be
For verray love which that I to yow have,
But if ye sholde youre trouthe kepe and save.
Trouthe is the hyeste thyng that man may kepe.
(The Franklin's Tale p. 187, l. 1476-9)

(I rather would be stabbed than live to see
You fail in truth. The very love I bear you
Bids you keep truth, in that it cannot spare you.
Truth is the highest thing in a man's keeping.)
(Chaucer, trans. N. Coghill p. 429)

³ Benson 179. (The Franklin's Tale l. 811), Chaucer, trans. N. Coghill, 411.

Aurelius also manifests the attributes of a knight, he is young, handsome, and strong, he knows how to sing and dance, he longs for his lady, he courts her, he gravely suffers from the pains of love, and he fulfils a task to win his lady. However, in fulfilling the task he resorts to a trick. For his defence it has to be stressed that the task could not have been fulfilled otherwise. Nevertheless, in the end he is so stunned with Arvéragus's sense of honour and noble generousness that he wants to behave as generously as him:

Thus kan a squier doon a gentil dede
As wel as kan a knyght, withouten drede
(The Franklin's Tale p. 188, l. 1543-4)

(A squire can do a generous thing with grace
As well as can a knight, in any case)
(Chaucer, trans. N. Coghill, 431)

and he releases the wife from her pledge. He also shows goodness, as he is moved by the wife's distress, and resolution to keep a given word, as he is ready to pay the price for the trick to the magician although it would almost ruin him. But the magician after hearing the whole story also decides to be generous and releases him of his debt:

Everich of yow dide gentilly til oother.
Thou art a squier, and he is a knyght;
But God forbede, for his blisful myght,
But if a clerk koude doon a gentil dede
As wel as any of yow, it is no drede!
(The Franklin's Tale p. 188, l. 1608-12)

(Each of you did as nobly as the other.
You are a squire, sir, and he a knight,

But God forbid in all His blissful might
That men of learning should not come as near
To nobleness as any, never fear.)
(Chaucer, trans. N. Coghill p. 432)

The balanced pursuit of chivalric virtues finally brings a joyful ending. Hussey points out that the question who seemed the most generous to the listeners asked at the end of the tale demonstrates the “moral excellence which commands universal respect.”⁴ The main theme of “The Franklin’s Tale” is honour, generousness, and courtesy and although they due to the time and cultural distance may again seem rather exaggerated to us, the story functions as a celebration of the chivalric values even though not necessarily only in relation to knights as the magician in the end behaves as nobly as the knight and the squire. The tale reflects the Franklin’s notion of a utopian ideal of a chivalric society in which the moral authority of authentic devotion to chivalric virtues emanates throughout the community and incites spontaneous emulation that in the end brings overall harmony.

The theme of honour and generousness appears also in “**The Physician’s Tale**” where we meet Virginius, a knight by name but not by nature. The Physician is an educated member of the middle class. He demonstrates excellent knowledge of the science of medicine but he is logically, pragmatically, and materialistically oriented and thus the world of chivalry and its ideals is rather distant for him. This lack of insight may be manifested in the uneasy combination of antique history with a knight as a protagonist and of their respective values. In his

⁴ S. S. Hussey, *Chaucer An Introduction* (London: Methuen&Co Ltd, 1971) 139-140.

moral tale he plants the figure of the knight in the setting of a classical history of tyranny by Titus Livius from which he selects the subject of threatened maidenly purity and honour. This change in the standing of the protagonist may be inspired by the version of the original story included in the *Roman de la Rose*. The background of "The Physician's Tale" matches the Roman issue and its themes are not necessarily connected with chivalry. The tale accentuates the sense of honour but it is the Roman concept of honour which on the one hand still resonates within the medieval society but on the other hand a murder as an instrument of preservation and protection of honour is sharply in conflict with the Christian morality and thus with the code of chivalric virtues as well. In contrast to Arvéragus Virginius finds physical chastity crucial and decides to kill his daughter although she would remain spiritually virtuous. Another theme is generousness which really is one of the chivalric virtues but forgiveness, manifested in Virginius's pardoning Claudius, is at the same time inherent to Christianity and thus to any good Christian and does not necessarily have to be perceived in the chivalric sense only.

Virginius lacks the basic chivalric attributes except the fact that he owns the sword with which he beheads his daughter. He decisively resists the judge's intention although he risks death but it is not courage in the chivalric sense. He does not act like a warrior, he does not confront the judge with the sword in his hand, he does not call up his vassals or ask his companions-in-arms or his sovereign to help him defeat the judge in fight. A knight is supposed to protect the weak and killing someone even with their consent can hardly be considered a kind of protection when other possibilities are still

left. Virginius even cannot see any other possibility, when his daughter asks him whether there is no other remedy, he answers: “No, certes, deere doghter myn.” (“None, none, my dearest daughter.”)⁵ He solves the situation with deference as if he was not a nobleman but someone of a lower and weaker standing than the judge. This evidently is an echo of the former character of the plebeian soldier in Livy’s original and possibly of the middle class point of view. Virginius’s generousness seems far-fetched. He kills his own daughter and saves the life of someone who actively participated in the affair that led him to the fatal deed. However, it might in fact reflect real knights’ behaviour as it was not rare that in order to preserve their chivalric honour they pursued some chivalric virtue to an absurd degree even at the cost of their own life.

Although the identification of Virginius as knight does not satisfactorily fit into the antique story and his figure does not within its context manifest most of the chivalric attributes he still successfully functions as a bearer of positive characteristics. The character of a knight is a natural choice for the substitution of the plebeian soldier, the leading character and bearer of certain moral qualities and social standing in the original. From the Physician’s choice and from the reception of the tale by the other pilgrims that does not cast any doubt upon Virginius’s conduct we can see that the society depicted by Chaucer associates virtuous qualities with the chivalric class and considers the conduct of the chivalric class virtuous.

A similar adaptation of an antique story can be found in **“The Manciple’s Tale”**. The Manciple, an uneducated middle-class narrator remoter from the chivalric world and its values,

⁵ Benson 192. (The Physician’s Tale l. 237), Chaucer, trans. N. Coghill 238.

in his moral mythological story following Ovid's *Metamorphoses* also plants the character of a knight into the role of an eminent figure, the Olympian god Apollo. His Phoebus is described as a knight but he does not correspond with the image of a warrior and he even uses a bow, a weapon if not unknightly then at least not typical of knights. The story lacks the motif of chivalric virtues and only proves the medieval association of grandeur with the chivalric state.

Knightly characters appear also among the famous historical and mythological figures in "**The Monk's Tale**". The Monk's series of exempla dealing with tragedies that befell the famous figures is focused on the inconstancy of Fortune. The Monk begins:

I wol biwaille [...]
The harm of hem that stode in heigh degree,
And fillen so that ther nas no remedie
To brynge hem out of hir adversitee
(The Monk's Tale p. 241, l. 1991-1994)

(I will now lament
The griefs of those who stood in high degree
And fell at last with no expedient
To bring them out of their adversity)
(Chaucer, trans. N. Coghill, 189)

and he warns the listeners not to "truste on blynd prosperitee."
("trust a blind prosperity.")⁶ Bowden confirms that the Monk
"extol[s the] chivalric figures" but

is far more intent on [...] the fact that important
persons have met disaster than he is on their
achievements, chivalric or otherwise – [...]

⁶ Benson 241. (The Monk's Tale l. 1997), Chaucer, trans. N. Coghill, 189.

“chivalry” does appear in [his tale but it is] treat[ed ...] conventionally and pallidly.⁷

Chivalry is out of the Monk’s focus and its reflection is only perfunctory therefore his tale was only treated in passing.

Similarly as “The Franklin’s Tale” “The Clerk’s Tale” and “The Man of Law’s Tale” might broadly speaking also be classified as romances. As we can learn from Severs they

fall into an accepted category of romances: the so-called “Eustace-Constance-Florence-Griselda Legends”: stories of Job-like sufferers sustained by religious faith.⁸

Nevertheless, Severs explains that those stories very much resemble Saints’ Legends and are mostly classified as such rather than as romances.⁹ **“The Clerk’s Tale”** is excluded from our analysis as it does not contain any reflection of chivalry. It is a story of marital fidelity and female humility and virtue. There is not a lady that tests her knight’s devotion but a husband that persistently tests his wife’s loyalty. His character provides a negative image of a lordly figure. He demonstrates jealousy, ungenerousness, unwisdom, and contradicts the courtly love conventions. His distinguished noble origin could naturally imply his alignment with chivalry but the lack or even negation of the chivalric virtues in his characterization problematize the simple association. Even the narrator of the tale never calls him a knight thus we can assume that also for him the key attribute of chivalry is not the noble origin but the

⁷ Muriel Bowden, *A Reader’s Guide to Geoffrey Chaucer* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1964) 41-42.

⁸ Severs 229.

⁹ Severs 229-230.

adoption and incorporation of the virtues that represent it. Griselda, the wife, manifests such patience and virtue that it could be peculiar only to a saint.

“**The Man of Law’s Tale**” deserves closer attention. Constance, its female protagonist, shows certain outward aspects of chivalry, there appears a knightly character, and we can trace echoes of several chivalric ideals. The tale even bears much closer resemblance to a romance. The fact that the protagonist of the tale is not a knight but a woman does not necessarily mean a diversion from the romance genre as there exist romances with female heroines who face similar challenges as knights. We can name two fitting examples from Krueger: *Roman de Silence* by Heldris de Cornuälle or *Roman de la Rose ou de Guillaume de Dole* by Jean Renart.¹⁰ It is tempting to perceive the character of Constance as an analogy to a knight because her depiction in the beginning of the story resembles a depiction of a knight

(In hire is heigh beautee, withoute pride,
Yowthe, withoute grenehede or folye;
To alle hire werkes vertu is hir gyde;
Humblesse hath slayn in hire al tirannye.
She is mirour of alle curteisye;
[...] Hir hand, ministre of fredam for almesse
(The Man of Law’s Tale p. 89, l. 162-166, 168)

(Peerless in beauty, yet untouched by pride,
Young, but untainted by frivolity,
In all her dealings goodness is her guide,
And humbleness has vanquished tyranny.
She is the mirror of all courtesy,
[...] Her hand the minister to all distress)
(Chaucer, trans. N. Coghill p. 127))

¹⁰ Krueger 133, 140.

and she also undergoes far journeys and extraordinary adventures. But she does not fight with weapons but with her virtue. She does not perform chivalric exploits but is rather a passive figure driven by her fate. She remains constant and similarly as Griselda patiently endures all hardships life brings. Even her motivations are not associated with chivalry. Her virtuousness is within the diction of Christianity to which she converts many people. Both mothers of her husbands conspire against her because they defend their own faith. If we consider the character of her actions and motivations, her passive patience and unshakable faith, we find out that Constance is a figure that rather than into a romance fits into hagiography.

Even the knight that we encounter in the tale fits into the hagiographic concept. He outwardly manifests courtly love but similarly as the unchristian mothers of Constance's husbands he is inspired by the Devil, which also explains his actions. The courtly love scheme is conventional in chivalric culture and there is no obvious reason why the knight should be inspired by Satan. The concept of courtly love acquires a different dimension in this tale. Constance is a saint and the knight longs for her with devilish foul desire, which explains why he, similarly as the Sultan or the man in the boat, ends up badly. We can trace direct proportion between the increasing holiness of Constance and the increasing foulness of the desires of the men. King Alla whom Constance marries does not long for her but takes to her because of her virtuousness. The context shows that in contradiction with romances the motif of courtly love within the tale is shifted from a positive quality to a negative one.

Besides the motif of courtly love there resounds the theme of honour also peculiar to the chivalric culture. Constance's and the knight's honour is at stake and we witness a ritual duel of honour. What is in discrepancy with chivalry here is the fact that Constance does not have a champion to defend her honour, an actual tournament or a duel does not take place, and the conflict is solved by God's direct miraculous interference. God's will plays its role even in chivalry but it is present in the combat where God gives strength, courage, and victory to the righteous. The presence of the conflict of the saintly and the infernal and of the direct protection by God typical for the lives of saints shifts the substance of the duel of honour and of the whole tale from chivalric virtues to Christian virtues and from romance to hagiography.

A diversion from the chivalric virtues can be found also in "**The Merchant's Tale**" where the characters of a knight and a squire have some traditional characteristics but their virtues are distorted and are not the central motif of the tale. The Merchant who comes from the middle-class environment produces a plot that is close to his world and problems and to which also corresponds the genre of fabliau that he has chosen for his tale. The central theme of the tale is marriage or more accurately the marital infidelity and jealousy, the faithfulness of a wife and the possibility or rather the impossibility to control it.

January, the knight, is not necessarily a chivalric character but until he gets married he is a worthy and respected man, he has his court and servants to whom he behaves generously, he does not display pure chivalric characteristics but he maintains decorum, he is interested in the opinion of his

companions, he attempts to be noble and frank. When he calls his friends and explains to them his motives for getting married which may be perceived as reasonable - he wants to have a mate and to behave properly, to add another dimension to his life, to have posterity to continue his lineage and pass on his possession, power, and renown - his instant urge to get married may be seen as slight foolishness of an ageing man, especially due to his idealised notion of marriage, but he still retains his worth. However, the way he describes and chooses the wife is in contradiction with the chivalric spirit. His urge to get married is not a result of love longing and suffering and the wedding is not a reward for a tireless devoted service to his lady. It is rather the contrary, an instantaneous whim and a rational decision of an old man to find an obliging wife who “nys nat wery hym to love and serve.” (“In service, and in love, [...] never tires.”)¹¹ Unlike the knight in “The Franklin’s Tale” who strives for a noble virtuous wife to become his equal partner within the bounds of courtly love and whose marriage is based on mutual respect January chooses his wife from a lower rank and of much younger age so that he can control and form her:

certeynly, a yong thyng may men gye,
Right as men may warm wex with handes plye
(The Merchant’s Tale p. 156, l. 1429-30)

(when they’re young
A man can still control them with his tongue
And guide them, should their duty seem too lax
Just as a man may model in warm wax)
(Chaucer, trans. N. Coghill, 362)

¹¹ Benson 154. (The Merchant’s Tale l. 1291), Chaucer, trans. N. Coghill, 358.

and the foundation of his marriage is a one-sided and ill-conceived calculation. Despite all efforts to have his marriage firmly in his hands January does not succeed. His expressions of courtesy are rather comical:

The slakke skyn aboute his nekke shaketh
Whil that he sang, so chaunteth he and craketh,
(The Merchant's Tale p. 161, l. 1849-50)

(The slack of skin about his neck was shaking
As thus he fell a-chanting and corn-craking,)
(Chaucer, trans. N. Coghill, 373)

his jealousy only stimulates his wife's defiance and her cunning eventually deprives him of his sole access to his garden as well as her womb. We do not know much about Damian, the squire, except that he falls in love with January's wife and, in accordance with the standards of courtly love, suffers enormously. Nevertheless, the main actor is the wife, Damian just writes to her to let her know about his condition, remains passive and only follows her instructions. The motif of courtly love gets a peculiar tinge due to the absence of chivalric virtues. Damian is not a noble fearless knight who woos his lady, he does not feel any remorse towards his lord because of the infidelity with his wife, and the love eventuates in lusty lechery.

The knight, his wife, and the squire are gradually deprived of the traditional attributes. The knight is a sad, deceived, and somewhat ridiculous character. His wife excels in tricks instead of virtue and from indication of courtly love of the squire remains just concupiscence in the end. The love

affair thus shifts from the sphere of courtly love to the sphere of ordinary infidelity. It is also supported by the choice of expressions:

And [...] Damyan
Gan pullen up the smok, and in he throng[, ...]
Pluto saugh this grete wrong.
(The Merchant's Tale p. 167, l. 2352-4)

([...] and Damian
Pulled up her smock at once and in he thrust[, ...]
Pluto saw this shameful lust.)
(Chaucer, trans. N. Coghill, 386)

The Merchant's tale is generally treated as a fabliau and in accordance with such interpretation the heroes with chivalric background and allegorical characters seem only to ennoble and enrich the plot and cover up what might well be a middle-class theme. However, the use of the noble protagonists typical of romance instead of the town-based characters typical for a fabliau, the presence of the allegorical figures, and echoes of romance themes offer another possible interpretation. The tale might also be read as a demoted romance, seen through the perspective of a fabliau and deprived thus of the romance ideal dimension. Such interpretation would disclose on the one hand the Merchant's familiarity with the romance genre and thus with the chivalric culture but on the other hand his lack of illusions about knights and squires. Nevertheless, the essence of the actual reflection of chivalry within the tale remains the same regardless of the interpretation, the spirit of chivalry is fully subdued in favour of the fabliau spirit.

Throughout the tales we can trace manifestation of various forms of chivalric ideals not only in knightly characters

but also in non-knightly characters, which further illustrates the spread of chivalric values into social classes other than the aristocracy. The middle-class narrators give evidence of the middle-class adaptation of the chivalric culture. Despite different living and social conditions the burghers are trying to adopt or at least to imitate some elements of chivalry. In the Merchant's fabliau we could see the depiction of knightly characters with tendency to behave as burghers. The opposite, a depiction of the spread of chivalric behaviour into the middle-class environment, can be seen for example in **the Miller's fabliau**. While the student's confession of love to the comely carpenter's wife is mostly lustful and straightforward, the parish clerk Absalon is obviously influenced by the troubadour courtesy:

He syngeth in his voys gentil and smal,
"Now, deere lady, if thy wille be,
I praye yow that ye wole rewe on me."
(The Miller's Tale p. 70, l. 3360-2)

([he] started singing softly and with grace,
*'Now dearest lady, if thy pleasure be
In thoughts of love, think tenderly of me!'*)
(Chaucer, trans. N. Coghill, 93)

However, it is obvious that chivalric manners are not peculiar to him, at once

He woweth hire by meenes and brocage,
And swoor he wolde been hir owene page.
(The Miller's Tale p. 70, l. 3375-6)

([he] Wooed her by go-between and wooed by proxy
[and] Swore to be page and servant to his doxy.)
(Chaucer, trans. N. Coghill, 93)

He unsuccessfully combines wooing methods of chivalric courtly love:

He syngeth, brokkyng as a nyghtyngale
(The Miller's Tale p. 70, l. 3377)

([he] Trilled and rouladed like a nightingale)
(Chaucer, trans. N. Coghill, 93)

and more down-to-earth methods associated with the bourgeois context:

He sente hire pyment, meeth, and spiced ale,
And wafres, pipyng hoot out of the gleede;
And, for she was of town, he profred meede.
(The Miller's Tale p. 70, l. 3378-80)

(Sent her sweet wine and mead and spicy ale,
And wafers piping hot and jars of honey,
And, as she lived in town, he offered money.)
(Chaucer, trans. N. Coghill, 93)

His wooing in accordance with chivalric manners in the middle-class environment has a completely comical and inapt effect. In the end, it is true that after a very disrespectful rejection and humiliation, Absalon throws off the mask of a courtly lover and out of his outraged conceit he decides to take revenge. Concerning the deceived husband we can notice that the chivalric charisma of the knight in "The Merchant's Tale" was beneficial to his dignity because unlike him the carpenter in "The Miller's Tale" gives an impression of a complete chump and the infidelity of his wife as if even was not regarded as treachery.

The complexity of adoption of chivalric values by middle-class burghers is also well illustrated in “**The Nun’s Priest’s Tale**”. With a bit of exaggeration the character of the cock in this animal fable can be compared to a knight. In favour of cautiousness he leaves aside one of the chivalric virtues, courage, which brings him disfavour from his lady. When he submits to her insistence and suppresses his cautiousness he finds himself in danger of losing his life from which he escapes only owing to cunning, slyness, and sobriety, characteristics unworthy of a knight but very useful for a burgher. Also in **the Shipman’s fabliau** the merchant’s wife lists chivalric virtues as desired characteristics of a husband, namely courage, wisdom, and generousness: “housbondes sholde be / Hardy and wise, and riche, and thereto free.” (“husbands [should] be [...] Sturdy and prudent, rich and openhanded.”)¹²

Reference to chivalric ideals appears even in the **Canon’s Yeoman’s anecdote** as Bowden observes. When the treacherous canon assures the foolish priest of his honesty he guarantees: “Trouthe is a thyng that I wol evere kepe / Unto [...] I shal crepe / Into my grave” (“My honour is a thing I hope to keep [...] till [...] I creep / Into my grave”) and he proclaims to pay the priest’s kindness back to him.¹³ And when the priest is persuaded that he can buy from the canon magic powder that changes mercury into silver his eagerness is described as such that

¹² Benson 205. (The Shipman’s Tale l. 175-176), Chaucer, trans. N. Coghill, 162.

¹³ Benson 276. (The Canon’s Yeoman’s Tale l. 1044-46), Chaucer, trans. N. Coghill, 463., Bowden 44.

Ne knyght in armes [...]
was [...] lustier [...] to doon an hardy dede,
To stonden in grace of his lady deere.
(The Canon's Yeoman's Tale p. 280 l. 1345-1348)

(Nor knightly soul [was] more eager to do good
In deeds of arms to please his chosen lady.)¹⁴
(Chaucer, trans. N. Coghill, 471)

These references confirm the commonplace presence of chivalric culture within the society and the society's esteem of it. Chivalric virtues were alive and respected therefore the trickster boasts of them to enhance his credibility and chances for success. We can see that the presence and acceptance of chivalric virtues was so habitual that they became popularised and got into comparisons used in everyday life.

Chapter 3 aimed to reveal the reflection of the ethos or virtues of the knights across genres within *The Canterbury Tales*. It pursued the virtues in knightly and non-knightly characters throughout the tales except romances and analysed their reflection with respect to the narrators of the tales. We could trace that Chaucer shows the middle classes as attracted by the chivalric culture but only rarely able to fully grasp its ideal. Nevertheless, it was obvious that virtuous qualities and grandeur were commonly associated with chivalry and the knightly class. The character of a knight appears in several tales and he usually has some traditional characteristics of a knight but his virtues are often in some way distorted and are not the central motif of the tale. The narrators who come from the middle-class environment seem to elevate their stories by the knightly characters but at the same time they produce plots

¹⁴ Bowden 44.

that are close to their mentality. The manifestation of diverse forms of chivalric ideals in non-knightly characters further illustrates the spreading of chivalric virtues into the middle-classes, the attempts of the middle-classes to adopt or at least to imitate some elements of chivalry, and the intermingling of chivalric and middle-class values. Chapter 3 gave evidence that although the golden age of knights was already past chivalry and its values were not only still alive in the society but they even started to affect other social classes than the aristocracy.

Chapter 4: Romance

Chapter 4 brings the climax of the study of the reflection of chivalry in the *Canterbury Tales*. It shall analyse the peak genre of chivalric literature embodying the complex spirit of chivalry and its ideals, the genre of romance. Chivalric literature, the genre of romance, and the mutual relation of chivalric literature and society have already been introduced in Chapter 2 and tales that might be classified as borderline forms of the romance genre have been dealt with in Chapter 3. Chapter 4 shall pursue the reflection of chivalry in romances within the *Canterbury Tales* and shall analyse it with respect to the narrators of the tales and the genre of romance per se. The analysis shall proceed from tales dealing with themes close to romance proper to its didactic and satiric variants.

While the non-knightly narrators in the *Canterbury Tales* attempted various genres including chivalric ones, both honourable knightly characters of the Knight and the Squire characteristically choose the genre of chivalric literature par excellence, the genre of romance. “**The Knight’s Tale**” is the so-called romance of antiquity developing a new version of a classical theme and thus falling into the previously mentioned group referred to as the Matter of Rome. (Illustration 7.) It was inspired by Boccaccio’s *Teseida* but transformed the classical epic poem into a romance. As Hussey explains the classical poem was medievalised in a customary way. Its setting remains Ancient Greece but “Theseus becomes a duke and Palamon and Arcite young knights.”¹ The customariness of such practice further illustrates the medieval association of grandeur with the

¹ S. S. Hussey, *Chaucer An Introduction* (London: Methuen&Co Ltd, 1971) 129.

chivalric state. Theseus is the first knightly character that we encounter in the tale. Theseus's characteristics and actions manifest his courage, courtesy, goodness, wisdom, generousness, and his sense of honour and justice. He is introduced as such a great conqueror who had won many rich countries that "gretter was ther noon under the sonne." ("There was none mightier beneath the sun.")² Despite his glorified status he does not hesitate a minute to help the defenceless and inquires about the widows' grief, kindly comforts them, and without delay sets off to restore order. After hearing Arcita and Palamon's story in the grove he considers the women's plea and the influence of love on men and generously forgives them: "I yow foryeve this trespas every deel" ("I pardon you your fault. You are forgiven") and suggests the tournament, a just and honourable resolution of their distress.³ He spares no expense in feasts, in the spectacular tournament, nor in Arcita's funeral. Theseus is depicted as an ideal knight and ruler. He is a brave warrior, a kind protector, a generous and wise master of the court pursuing the social etiquette and excelling in eloquence, he demonstrates inner qualities as well as courtly royal behaviour, he is an archetype of a nobleman in a broad cultural sense.

Arcita and Palamon are the other two knightly characters that we encounter in the tale. They are sworn brothers in arms and we encounter them when they are found on the battlefield:

Two yonge knyghtes liggyng by and by,
Bothe in oon armes, wroght ful richely, [...]

² Benson 37. (The Knight's Tale l. 863), Chaucer, trans. N. Coghill, 26.

³ Benson 49. (The Knight's Tale l. 1825), Chaucer, trans. N. Coghill, 52.

they [...] weren of the blood roial.
(The Knight's Tale p. 39, l. 1011-12, 1018)

(Two pale young knights there, lying side by side,
Wearing the self-same arms in blazoned pride. [...]
[T]hey were Princes of the Royal Blood.)
(Chaucer, trans. N. Coghill p. 30)

When they are imprisoned they successively happen to catch sight of Emily and each immediately falls in love with her, first Palamon and shortly after Arcita. When Arcita yields to his love to Emily Palamon reminds him of their vow:

[We have] Ysworn ful depe, and ech of us til oother,
That nevere, for to dyen in the peyne,
Til that the deeth departe shal us tweyne,
Neither of us in love to hyndre oother,
Ne in noon oother cas, my leeve brother,
But that thou sholdest trewely forthren me
In every cas, as I shal forthren thee
(The Knight's Tale p. 40-41, l. 1132-38)

([We have] Both deeply sworn and [are] bound to one
another, Though we should die in torture for it, never
To loose the bond that only death can sever,
And when in love neither to hinder other,
Nor in what else soever, dearest brother,
But truly further me in all I do
As faithfully as I shall further you)
(Chaucer, trans. N. Coghill p. 33)

and accuses him of breaking the vow and of dishonourable, false, and treacherous behaviour:

It nere [...] to thee no greet honour
For to be fals, ne for to be traitour.
(The Knight's Tale p. 40, l. 1129-30)

(It's no great honour [...] to you
To prove so false, to be a traitor too.)

(Chaucer, trans. N. Coghill p. 33)

Arcita defends himself:

Wostow nat wel the olde clerkes sawe,
That 'who shal yeve a love any lawe?'
(The Knight's Tale p. 41, l. 1163-4)

(Haven't you heard the old proverbial saw
"Who ever bound a lover by a law?")
(Chaucer, trans. N. Coghill p. 34)

Hussey claims that it is rather the situation than the characters that attract the readers. He reasons that they are interested in "the conflict between military comradeship and romantic love and in which knight will win the lady."⁴ Even for us it is the situation that is most interesting as it deals with the clash of traditional chivalric virtues and courtly love and their potentially incompatible demands. It has been already illustrated that keeping one's word was a principal question of honour, a cardinal chivalric virtue. But it has also been shown that it was generally acknowledged in compliance with the rules of courtly love that love brings inescapable grave suffering along with the natural obligation of devoted service and courtesy to win the favour of the lady. Palamon and Arcite shield themselves with the conflicting principles and both of them feel in the right. It cannot be easily decided whose argument is more valid. Hussey asserts that both knights have equal claim to Emily and therefore neither she nor Theseus can decide between them without the tournament. Each of them has to be brave and a devoted lover "suffering the torments of *fine*

⁴ Hussey 130.

amour.”⁵ Bowden notes that in the tale there is not shown “any actual disapproval of the breaking of the vow.”⁶ It is true that the absence of the disapproval by the other characters, the then customary courtly love conventions, and the balance in the knights’ faithfulness and unfaithfulness in the pursuit of chivalric virtues in their rivalry throughout the tale could support the understanding that they both have equal right to honourably win Emily’s love. On the other hand, Palamon’s perception of Arcita’s conduct as treacherous might also be determinant.

The tournament represents a typically chivalric, honourable, and just solution. A substantial part of the tale is dedicated to the exciting and spectacular description of the preparations for the contest and of the contest itself. It presents the archetype of a chivalric tournament and the tournament spirit. Its length shows that such occasions must have been very popular within the society. The temples represent the determining motifs of love and war, show their splendour and unmask their reverse side. The resolution of the situation disrupts the expected outcome as Arcita wins the tournament but when he triumphantly leaves the jousting-place he is mortally wounded and soon after dies and it is actually Palamon who in the end wins Emily. It is true that Palamon’s loss was reduced by the fact that he was not defeated directly by Arcita but still he was the one that lost. Hussey brings forward the fact that unlike “in a normal romance” where the solution might depend on the knights’ proficiency, in “The Knight’s Tale” it does not depend on Arcita’s or Palamon’s

⁵ Hussey 130.

⁶ Muriel Bowden, *A Reader’s Guide to Geoffrey Chaucer* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1964) 31.

“prowess in battle but on a blatant *deus ex machina*.”⁷ We should however remember that in the medieval understanding of the world it was always the supreme authority of God that decided the course of things and thus the divine interference did not cast doubt upon the justice of the solution. Hussey comes to the same conclusion when he deals with the philosophical material in “The Knight’s Tale”. He informs that the material is not part of the romance convention and that it comes from Boethius’s *Consolation of Philosophy* and he concludes that:

Throughout the poem man has been shown to be subject to Fortune, a deity whose behaviour towards men may seem to them fickle and unjust but whose power is in reality controlled by a divine foreknowledge.⁸

Strictly speaking, the tournament did not bring the coveted final solution as in the end it was not the victor who won Emily but it functioned as a catalyst and God’s interference induced Arcita and Palamon’s reconciliation. When Arcita dies he is not obstinate, he generously forgives Palamon and appraises his love and Palamon then wholeheartedly howls over Arcita’s death. They thus manifest the last act of their comradeship and vow. The tale ends with Theseus’s performance of the wedding between Palamon and Emily. A wedding, as Hussey and Burrow note, is a conventional happy ending of many romances.⁹

⁷ Hussey 134.

⁸ Hussey 134.

⁹ J. A. Burrow, “The *Canterbury Tales* I: Romance,” *The Cambridge Chaucer Companion*, ed. Piero Boitani and Jill Mann (Cambridge: CUP, 1986) 124., Hussey 135.

After a thorough reflection we can assume that the central theme of the romance is the conflict between traditional chivalry and courtly love and the triumph of courtly love. Love plays a key role in the tale. Although it is not explicitly said love wins over the warrior. Traditional chivalry with its victory of weapons is not dishonoured, it comes out with dignity, but everything is subordinated to love that proves to be the most powerful principle. Love does not defeat the traditional chivalry but it is above it and overlays it. Arcita and Palamon are both equally courageous knights, their military comradeship functions. In spite of several lapses we can feel their sense of honour, their mutual generousness, their will to solve the situation honourably. However, love, as they experienced it and as it was culturally comprehended, a passion to which a man devoted everything and without which he could not live, is above it. Following this logic the tale could not offer any other ending than Palamon's final triumph. Arcita twice broke his word, the vow to Palamon and Theseus's condition that he would never return to his country, and in both cases he used love as an excuse. He shielded himself with love but in the crucial moment before the tournament he does not go to pray to Venus, the Goddess of Love, but to Mars, the God of War. On the day of reckoning he chooses and worships the martial success, not love. From Arcita's words we can sense that he loves Emily but love does not have such weightiness for him as the victory in arms. It contrasts with his former claim:

Love is a gretter lawe, by my pan,
Than may be yeve to any erthely man.
(The Knight's Tale p. 41, l. 1165-6)

(Love is law unto itself. My hat!
What earthly man can have more law than that?)
(Chaucer, trans. N. Coghill p. 34)

He does not fully believe in love. If he did he would pray for victory in love to Venus. Palamon reasons the way to winning Emily leads through love and thus he prays to Venus for her. He does not want victory and in case he could not have Emily he rather wants to die. Arcita and Palamon switch their roles. Arcita in the beginning shields himself with love and challenges the value of traditional chivalric honour and military comradeship and in the end he worships it. Palamon in the beginning asserts the traditional chivalric honour and brotherhood in arms and in the end he believes in the universal principle of love. Palamon prays to Venus for love and he gets it. Emily prays to Diana either for no one or the one who loves her most and gets the one who most loves her. The moral principle of love wins. Rigorously speaking, Emily disturbs the doctrine of courtly love by her preference of remaining on her own, which can probably be ascribed to her Amazonian origin, thus in her case it is God's will that wins.

The Knight chose chivalry as the central theme for his tale. We can see that both the old warrior and the new courtly values resound within him. He esteems and respects them all and takes them very seriously. His thinking is very complex. He is an experienced warrior and man and certainly many times had to solve situations in which it was not clear how to behave or in which it was inevitable to break one virtue for another. The fact that he is concerned with it and that he sees it as a problem shows that he fully respected the values and strived to adhere to them. It is very important for him to behave

in compliance with the chivalric ideals and he can see the possible collisions between the individual virtues in real life and the ensuing burdensomeness in finding the right solution. As a proper knight he also believes in God's justice supreme to all earthly laws. Not only did the Knight choose for his tale a complex chivalric theme but he also chose a genuinely chivalric genre. He is obviously familiar with the genre of romance as he follows its formal as well as thematic convention. He is inevitably influenced by the romance ideals and as a narrator of a romance he in return influences the genre as he enriches it with his own experience and perspective and adds the philosophical dimension to it. Due to his experience the depiction of the characters in his tale is very complex. In comparison with the other narrators he best knows chivalric literature and the problems of knightly characters. The virtues in his tale resound the most and are depicted with greatest depth and complexity. The ideals clash with reality, the characters struggle with their weaknesses, their anger, jealousy, but despite that they strive to behave rightly in compliance with the chivalric virtues. The struggle makes them more human and credible. The tale as such is also more plastically chivalric, unlike the other tales that limit their focus to one or two virtues and situations, it is more complex. The Knight who is part of the chivalric world is more apt to plastically depict the complex spirit of chivalry. He illustrates the mutual reaction of the chivalric class and literature and implies that chivalric literature and culture with their values were current and alive within the knightly class.

“**The Squire's Tale**” is not finished and its character and message remain obscured. Severs reasons that the tale was

not inspired by one single source but combines elements from the legends of Prester John, the *Cléomandès* of Adenès li Rois, *The Arabian Nights*, and possibly also *Gawain and the Green Knight*.¹⁰ The romance takes place at Tzarev in the land of Tartary. An eastern setting, as Hussey comments, appears in a number of romances probably due to the Crusades that made the orient popular.¹¹ In the very beginning of the tale we are introduced to the knightly character of Cambuskan, a noble Tartarian king in all his excellence. He is described as a loyal believer, a powerful, wise, brave, compassionate and just man who keeps his word, is honourable, benevolent, stable, and “in armes desirous / As any bachelor of al his hous,” (“in a fight / As emulous as any squire or knight,”) and who “kept alwey so wel roial estat / That ther was nowher swich another man.” (“Maintain[ed] such a kingliness of state / There never [had been] his match in mortal man.”)¹² We learn that Cambuskan has two sons Algarsyf and Cambalo and an ineffably beautiful daughter Canace. Cambuskan celebrates the twentieth anniversary of his reign and organizes an opulent feast. Amidst the jubilee there appears another knightly figure:

In at the halle dore al sodeynly
 Ther cam a knyght [...]
 In al the halle ne was ther spoken a word
 For merveille of this knyght; hym to biholde
 Ful bisily they wayten, yonge and olde.
 (The Squire’s Tale p. 170, l. 80-81, 86-88)

(Suddenly at the door in sight of all

¹⁰ J. Burke Severs, “The Tales of Romance,” *Companion to Chaucer Studies*, ed. Beryl Rowland (Toronto: OUP, 1968) 233.

¹¹ Hussey 127.

¹² Benson 169. (The Squire’s Tale l. 23-4, 26-7), Chaucer, trans. N. Coghill, 389-390.

There came a knight [...]
In all that hall not one of them was able
To speak a word for wonder [...]
They waited, young and old, and watched the sight.)
(Chaucer, trans. N. Coghill p. 391)

This scene represents a typical beginning of a romance. It reminds us particularly of the mysterious and ominous Green Knight who disturbs the New Year's feast at Camelot. There is no wonder then that everyone in the hall fell silent and impatiently waited for what would happen.

Rider observes that: "An encounter between the central world and an other one is one of the most common ways of beginning a romance."¹³ The "central world" of romances is in his essay represented by the aristocratic society and the "other one" is a world that "most medieval romances establish or assume" to exist.¹⁴ Its members "may resemble the members of the central society" but their world is different and "Their motives and customs may be enigmatic or at least strange, and they themselves may be monstrous."¹⁵ The character and outcome of such encounter may be different. Rider argues that

When, as is often the case, the central society is in a state of peace and plenitude, a state often represented by a joyous court gathering, the otherworldly intervention comes as a threat to this aristocratic well-being that must be dealt with and resolved.¹⁶

¹³ Jeff Rider, "The other worlds of romance," *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Romance*, ed. Roberta L. Krueger (Cambridge: CUP, 2000) 116.

¹⁴ Rider 115.

¹⁵ Rider 115.

¹⁶ Rider 116.

However, it is not the case in “The Squire’s Tale”, at least as far as we can read. The knight that unexpectedly arrives to the celebration is described as deeply reverent, comely graceful, not less courteous than Gawain, and learned in the art of speech and he turns out to be an envoy of the King of India and Araby and brings salutation and magic presents that the king sent in honour of Cambuscan’s feast. The magic presents were a brass horse that could transport its rider wherever he wished, a mirror that could show the future and reveal falsity, a ring that enabled its wearer to understand and speak the language of birds and provided him with the knowledge of all herbs and their effect, and a naked sword that could cut any armour and that was the only cure for the wounds it had caused. Bruckner deals with “the storymatter of romance” and discloses “the use of recurrent patterns at all levels of the narrative.”¹⁷ Besides the typical opening and closing with a court celebration of the hero’s temporary successes he mentions the recurrence of standard characters, such as Gawain, or character types, such as the lady who needs a champion, and of typical scenes, such as a tournament.¹⁸ We can add that “many romances invoke magic or the supernatural” as Hussey claims.¹⁹ Burrow observes that “The Squire’s Tale” differs in the treatment of the marvellous from “The Wife of Bath’s Tale” and the “Tale of Sir Topaz”. Unlike in the latter tales where a fairy is accepted as “a potent source of marvels which require no further investigation or excuse,” the magic presents in “The Squire’s Tale” are not accepted as “commonplaces of romance[, ... they

¹⁷ Matilda Tomaryn Bruckner, “The shape of romance in medieval France,” *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Romance*, ed. Roberta L. Krueger (Cambridge: CUP, 2000) 19.

¹⁸ Bruckner 19.

¹⁹ Hussey 127.

may [...] have natural causes[...] and] the people of Tartary [...] look for explanations and precedents.”²⁰ Burrow adds that the truth is never disclosed as the tale is not finished. He deals also with “The Franklin’s Tale” where the marvellous may have natural causes as well since the magician learned the trick in his books of natural magic.²¹

A substantial portion of the first part of “The Squire’s Tale” is dedicated to the rather detailed discussion of the magic presents, otherwise it depicts the ritual of the feast and the glittering world of the nobility with its complex courtly etiquette. The knight pays an appropriate compliment, he is paid an appropriate compliment, reflecting the refined language and sense of hierarchy within the aristocratic society. There is also represented the motif of courtly love in the dance of the knight and beautiful Canace. The merit of the scene is supported by another allusion to a standard romance character, this time to Launcelot. The second part of the tale has a purely courtly theme. It is a story of courtly love although disguised in a bird allegory. Princess Canace hears it from a distressed falcon when she walks in a park wearing her magical ring. The falcon tells she gave her love to a tercelet who had first eagerly wooed her and served her and swore to give her his heart but then turned out to be treacherous as he left her for a kite. Before she starts to tell her story the falcon stresses the gentility of noble birth. The fact that the tercelet fell in love with the lowborn kite heightens her humiliation. The story is about courtly love and its betrayal but it is not much related to chivalry. It echoes the chivalric themes of honour and breaking

²⁰ Burrow 114.

²¹ Burrow 115.

one's word, of betrayed loyalty, of the service to a lady, but it does not focus on the chivalric virtues. It does not deal with the breaking of one's vow but with its consequence, the distress of the falcon. The tercelet has noble birth but he is never explicitly connected with chivalric ideals and only manifests courtly love conventions and because the story is told from the point of view of the falcon we do not know the motivations of his actions. At the end of the second part of the tale we learn that eventually due to Cambalo's help the falcon will get her love back and the plot of the upcoming story consisting of adventures, martial exploits, marvels, and ventures in the name of love is foreshadowed. However, the tale ends in the middle of the first sentence of the third part:

Appollo whirleth up his chaar so hye
Til that the god Mercurius hous, the slye –
(The Squire's Tale p. 177, l. 671-672)

(Apollo whirled his chariot on high
Up through the house of Mercury, the slye –)
(Chaucer, trans. N. Coghill p. 407)

The end of the tale is a subject of vivid discussions. Severs reports that Braddy suggested that the tale “would have developed as a framing tale with the exploits projected at the end of Part II presented as intercalary episodes similarly as in Oriental stories.”²² He says that Braddy speculated that the reason for Chaucer's not finishing the tale was his late discovery that the Oriental cycle included an incest motif. Severs reasons it is improbable because a writer like Chaucer would probably have planned the whole plot of the tale before

²² Severs 233.

starting it and even if he has not he would have been able to alter the immoral part as he had done in reworking other stories. Severs also mentions Root's suggestion that Chaucer "was at a loss as to how to complete the tale," Furnivall's opinion that Chaucer was bored with it, and Stilwell's argument that "the intellectual, realistic, humorous Chaucer discontinued what he was finding to be an insupportably romantic narrative."²³ Burrow contemplates the existent suggestion that the tale was not finished deliberately and that the words of the Franklin to the Squire should actually be read as an interruption of the tale similar to the Host's interruption of the "Tale of Sir Topaz". He points out that Franklin's comment does not sound like an interruption and that unlike the other undoubted interruptions in the *Canterbury Tales* it is not clearly signalled and would not be intelligible for the readers. Burrow concludes that "The Squire's Tale" contains some of the richest passages of poetic narrative by Chaucer and that even Spenser's and Milton's admiration of its noble wit

makes one hesitate to accept the opinion of some modern critics that [the tale] is unworthy of its author. It seems preferable [...] to suppose either [...] that the rest of [the tale] has been lost [...] or [...] that [it] was simply 'left half-told'.²⁴

Chaucer's supposed teasing of Gower for his *Confessio Amantis* in the "Introduction to The Man of Law's Tale" where the Man of Law says:

But certainly no word ne writeth [Chaucer]

²³ Severs 233.

²⁴ Burrow 115.

Of thilke wikke ensample of Canacee,
That loved hir owene brother synfully –
Of swiche cursed stories I sey fy! –
(Introduction to *The Man of Law's Tale* p. 88, l. 77-80)

(But certainly [Chaucer] never writes a word
Of Canace – that tale should not be heard,
She loved her brother in a sinful way,
Fie on such cursed tales as that, I say!)
(Chaucer, trans. N. Coghill p. 124)

makes the issue even more interesting.²⁵ Nevertheless, the mystery of the fragmentary character of the tale does not have much significance for our analysis of the reflection of chivalry within the extant part of it.

Owing to the fact that the tale is possibly not finished it is irrelevant to speak of its substance. However, in the fragment that we have the Squire provides a portrayal of courtly life, depicts its magnificence and accentuates its complex and stratified social etiquette. The most interesting motif for us is that of the magic mirror that can reveal falsity. The fact that someone gets the idea to give such present and that the one who gets it appreciates it shows that although the courtly environment and aristocratic society were on the one hand permeated with chivalric ideals on the other they were uncertain to what extent those ideals were authentic and to what extent pretended. The more they were externally stressed, often beyond the boundary of reasonableness and plausibility, the greater were the doubts about their genuineness and the suspicion of an outside social pose. In the Squire's mirror we can see the reflection of the complex reality in which love is not always love and words are not always sincere. It is echoed

²⁵ Allan H. MacLaine, *The Student's Comprehensive Guide to The Canterbury Tales* (New York: Woodbury, 1964) 90.

even in his story of the falcon. The Squire provides us with a picture of the intricate aristocratic society that accepted chivalric virtues as their convention but not always as their conviction.

In “The Squire’s Tale” we have come across allusions to Lancelot and Gawain and the Nun’s priest also alludes to Lancelot as Severs observes, but, as Severs and Burrow confirm, the only tale that actually draws from the Arthurian cycle is “**The Wife of Bath’s Tale**”.²⁶ (Illustration 8.) MacLaine informs that we do not know the direct source of the tale but it was essentially inspired by the widespread folk tales of the Loathly Lady or Transformed Hag and analogues survive in John Gower’s *Confessio Amantis* (“The Tale of Florent”²⁷), *The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnell*, and *The Marriage of Sir Gawain*.²⁸ Bowden comments that unlike the analogues “The Wife of Bath’s Tale” has less of a courtly background and is not concerned with knighthood as practiced at the court of King Arthur.²⁹ The Wife of Bath, a female and middle class narrator, shifts the focus of the plot of her romance from chivalric virtues to women’s issues and besides indirectly rebukes the aristocracy, which in fact applies also to chivalry. The protagonist of the tale is a knight and he proves to be honourable as he always keeps his word but it is necessary for the advancement of the plot and the characteristic is not accented. Otherwise he does not manifest any chivalric virtues or prominent chivalric features. Bowden emphasises that although he comes from the court of King Arthur he is

²⁶ Severs 234., Burrow 109.

²⁷ Bowden 39.

²⁸ MacLaine 102.

²⁹ Bowden 39.

introduced as a lusty figure of little importance and when we encounter him “he is returning merely from a day’s sport in hawking for river fowl, not from [a] knightly quest” and he even commits a crime. She asserts that the knight has little to do with chivalry but that “the chivalric enters in the [tale]” when the queen and other ladies implore the king to spare the knight’s life and she refers to the parallel of the imploring ladies in “The Knight’s Tale”.³⁰ It is true that there resounds the motif of courtesy, goodness, and generousness and similarly as when Theseus forgives Arcita and Palamon King Arthur satisfies the ladies’ pleading but closer examination makes the parallel disputable. While Theseus alleviates the punishment for the benefit of human justice (both Arcita and Palamon had a good and courtly motif for their trespass, love), King Arthur alleviates the punishment for the benefit of crime (the knight “saugh a mayde [and ...] maugree hir heed, / By verray force, he rafte hire maydenhed” (“saw a maiden [and ...] spite of all she said, / By very force he took her maidenhead”)³¹). It is in fact strange that King Arthur accedes to the women’s whim that, unlike in Theseus’s case, is in conflict with the law. His gesture negates justice and can hardly be regarded as a demonstration of courtesy or other chivalric virtues. The knightly characters in the tale thus do not have much in common with the chivalric ethos, nor do the themes.

There are echoes of the courtly love theme in the queen’s assigning of the task to the knight as it resembles the traditional testing of a knight’s devotion, genuineness of love,

³⁰ Bowden 40.

³¹ Benson 117. (The Wife of Bath’s Tale l. 886-8), Chaucer, trans. N. Coghill, 282.

and courage by his lady, but the queen's testing is of a different nature. She conditions saving his life by his ability to find the answer to the question what women most desire. Bowden reasons that the question itself implicates courtly love as well as the second principal question in the tale asked by the loathly lady (whether he wants her rather ugly, old, and faithful or fair and young and possibly unfaithful) as they are both in themselves demands of love. But she concludes that

the answer to the first question is such an integral part of Dame Alisoun's own special philosophy, that it tends to lose all other significance

and the second question is not answered by the knight himself and the answer therefore becomes only a variation of the first answer and "also tends to slip outside any chivalric classification."³² Hussey confirms the shifts in themes related to the personality of the narrator. Concerning the common theme of a quest he notes that the knight is not in search of love or adventure as was usual but of the answer, which according to him "gives the Wife of Bath an opportunity to suggest her own characteristic reply."³³ We follow the knight's twelvemonth and a day quest so he is the central hero of the tale but he is permanently governed by women. When he commits the rape the queen usurps the authority of an executioner when the law is passed from the king's hands to hers and analogically the hag gives conditions and demands their fulfilment, explicates gentility to him, and eventually

³² Bowden 40-41.

³³ Hussey 127.

rewards him in accordance with her own wishes and not until he submits to her. Her reproving explication of gentility and of what makes a man an aristocrat corresponds with what makes a man a knight, not a noble birth, inherited title and possessions but virtuousness. Thus even the traditional chivalric ideals are not reawakened by the knight but by a woman. “The Wife of Bath’s Tale” is a feminising story about men’s attitude towards women in which the knight experiences a journey from violent domination of women to the comprehension of women’s equality or in certain respect even superiority. He is punished for the assault of the maiden and any attempt to impose his own will on his wife would also result in his loss and humiliation but he submits to her decision and their relationship is harmonized and he is rewarded. “The Wife of Bath’s Tale” is a didactic story promoting women’s sovereignty addressed to men.

“The Wife of Bath’s Tale” supports the evidence of the popularity of the romance genre within the middle class medieval society and among medieval women. (Krueger reports that “romances comprise[d] the second largest genre owned and/or transmitted by [medieval] women.”³⁴) Ramsey explains that the spreading of the popularity of romances outside the aristocratic class brought about perceptible changes within the genre and the didactic character of “The Wife of Bath’s Tale” exemplifies the fourteenth century appearance of didactic and intellectualised romances. Ramsey clarifies that most popular literature is not principally didactic and when a

³⁴ Roberta L. Krueger, “Questions of gender in Old French courtly romance,” *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Romance*, ed. Roberta L. Krueger (Cambridge: CUP, 2000) 135.

popular genre does become didactic it is possibly because “the authors have lost sight of or interest in the original meanings of the form and are substituting other meanings.”³⁵ He asserts that this happened to the genre of romance when it started to be read by wider audiences including people who did not find the traditional chivalric values important. He adds that of course not all the late romances had the tendency toward didacticism.³⁶ Even the genre of romance as such thus offers a direct reflection of the popularisation and transformation of the chivalric culture in the time of the increasing importance of the bourgeoisie.

Another telling testimony of the popularity of chivalry and of romances within the middle classes and of the changes within the genre connected with its spreading outside aristocracy is given in Chaucer’s “**Tale of Sir Topaz**”. (Illustration 9.) Ramsey reports that in the late fourteenth century romances were still popular and vigorous but they were no longer written in French, became shorter, their themes shifted from the child exile and the troubled love stories to more domestic and fairyland motifs, the heroes from nobly born but alienated from their heritage to heroes of lower birth with real social advancement, and the destinies of lovers from tragic to happy ones. More romances were written in the rural areas far from the major centres of the court, and the preference in verse form changed from four-stress couplet to tail rime and alliterative verse. Ramsey reasons that all these changes are connected with the shift in the make-up of the romance audience:

³⁵ Lee C. Ramsey, *Chivalric Romances: Popular Literature in Medieval England* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983) 209-210, 214-215.

³⁶ Ramsey 215.

The stories that had once appealed to the nobility and the functionaries of the larger courts were now becoming the property of country families and the middle classes with their aspirations of dignity and courtliness.³⁷

He adds that as the romance audience broadened romances gradually became less appropriate for the more sophisticated and better-educated readers and purveyed “chivalrous dreams to those who had no real hope of associating with the increasingly magnificent European courts.”³⁸ As evidence that the broadening process of the audience was obvious already in the late fourteenth century Ramsey cites Chaucer’s “Tale of Sir Topaz”. In his tale Chaucer burlesques the form, heroes, stories, and audiences of the stereotyped popular tail-rime romances of the late fourteenth century.³⁹

In the beginning, the “Tale of Sir Topaz” seems to be a classical metrical romance. It has regular six-line stanzas rhymed AABAAB, but its regular rhythm as well as the number of lines and the rhyme scheme soon disappear. Five times there even appears an imitation of the pattern of “stock”, “bob”, and “wheel” structure. (A structure in which, besides others, one of the greatest romances *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* was written.) By the formal inaptitude Chaucer mocks a literary form that with increasing popularity with the middle-class burghers was adapted to their mentality and that became tedious and cliché. To emphasize it Chaucer uses several romance tags, for example: “Sire Thopas wax a doghty

³⁷ Ramsey 209.

³⁸ Ramsey 210.

³⁹ Ramsey 210.

swayn,” (“Sir Topaz grew a doughty swain,”)⁴⁰ and alliterations, for example: “His *fader* was a man *full free*.” (“His father was of high degree.”)⁴¹ In the same way as with the form Chaucer works with the depiction of the character of Sir Topaz. As if he portrayed a common hero of a romance, he gradually depicts a character who in fact does not at all correspond to such a hero. Chaucer’s (non)hero is called a knight and he manifests all the basic external attributes of chivalry such as noble origin and possession of a horse and armour. We can also see a series of chivalric motifs in his story: errantry and wayfaring, hunting, adventure, love to an elect mistress, a feast, a duel, and others. However, Topaz shows on any occasion that he is a knight in letter but not in spirit. He takes pleasure in expensive clothes and armature and wanders somewhere close to his home-town where the only danger are a buck and a hare:

Therinne is many a wilde best,
Ye, bothe bukke and hare.
(The Tale of Sir Thopas p. 214, l. 755-6)

(Where many a monster has its lair,
Such as the hare and buck.)
(Chaucer, trans. N. Coghill p. 178)

Yet, he experiences his afternoon rides equally to Percival who wandered in wastelands of woods and swamps for years. The contrast between what a knight is supposed to be like and what Topaz actually is can also be seen nicely in the manifestation of Topaz’s sturdiness and bravery:

⁴⁰ Benson 213. (The Tale of Sir Thopas l. 724), Chaucer, trans. N. Coghill, 178.

⁴¹ Benson 213. (The Tale of Sir Thopas l. 721 (*italics mine*)), Chaucer, trans. N. Coghill, 177.

Sire Thopas eek so wery was
For prikyng on the softe gras,
So fiers was his corage,
That doun he leyde him in that plas.
(The Tale of Sir Thopas p. 214, l. 778-81)

(Sir Topaz, so it came to pass,
Wearied of spurring o'er the grass;
So very fierce his courage
That down he lay as bold as brass.)
(Chaucer, trans. N. Coghill p. 179)

When Topaz falls in love, it does not seem to be out of passion but out of its need for a full-fledged knight life. No one but an elf-queen deserves his love, no other woman is worthy enough to be his. An intervention of Virgin Mary must not be missing just as an oath of allegiance in spirit of genuine courtly love. When Topaz encounters an enemy, he does not stand up to him in a struggle because he does not have his armour (of course a knight is supposed to ride in his armour) but he showers the enemy with threats and escapes home. Yet, it does not discourage him from feeling as Sir Gawain when he stood up to the green knight. When Topaz eventually sets out to fulfil his threats and undergo the duel, the thread of the story disappears as if he was not ever going to do so. Topaz seems to be merely enriching his otherwise comfortable life with such “adventures”. It is most transparently presented when he calls his minstrels to provide amusement for him:

Do come [...] for to tellen tales,
Anon in myn armynge,
Of romances that been roiales,
Of popes and of cardinales,
And eek of love-likyng.

(The Tale of Sir Thopas p. 215, l. 845-50)

(Come forth [...]
And tell me while I arm
Romances such as may befall
To Prince and Pope and Cardinal
And of a lover's charm.)
(Chaucer, trans. N. Coghill p. 181)

We can find even other hints in which Chaucer reveals further contradictions between Topaz and the traditional image of a knight. There is not so much sarcasm in the initial reference to Topaz's place of origin, Flanders, at that time one of the most urbanized parts of Europe, and in the description of his gentle, effeminate features and his saffron hair and beard, as later when he attributes to him characteristics, weapons, and entertainment that definitely belong to other, lower social classes, not the knights: his indulgence in luxury and comfort, his use of a goshawk and a short lance, archery, or wrestling. The depiction of Topaz's substance is openly finished when Chaucer lets him swear by ale and bread and then decorates his tournament armour with a porker's head. Topaz, regardless of his origin, is a character with a spirit of a bourgeois who is not formed by chivalry itself but by the romanticism of chivalric stories.

Chapter 4 has crowned the analysis of the reflection of chivalry in the *Canterbury Tales*. Following the presentation of knights and the study of chivalric ideals across genres beyond romance it pursued the reflection of chivalry in the romance genre within the *Canterbury Tales* and analysed it with respect to the narrators of the tales and to the genre of romance as such. We could witness that on the one hand chivalric culture and literature with their values were current and alive within

the knightly class but on the other although chivalric virtues had become integral part of the aristocratic society convention they had not always been part of their inner conviction. Similarly as Chapter 3 engaged with the spreading of chivalric virtues into the middle-classes and the attempts of the middle-classes to adopt or at least to imitate some elements of chivalry and the consequent intermingling of chivalric and middle-class values, Chapter 4 revealed the spreading of the popularity of chivalric romances outside the aristocratic class and the consequent changes within the genre connected with the shift in the identity of the audience. Chapter 4 reaffirmed the vigorous commonplace presence of the chivalric culture within the society and its spreading popularity comprising its gradual transformation.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

The aim of this thesis was to analyse the reflection of chivalry in Geoffrey Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*. The breadth of Chaucer's record that we could penetrate while following the reflection of the phenomenon of chivalry proved how outstanding work *The Canterbury Tales* are. Their exceptionality lies in the fact that although at first sight they deal with chivalry only marginally, when studying the stories and characters more deeply we find a network of relations and connections which eventually depict a rather plastic picture of chivalry and chivalric culture at that time. This quality naturally does not concern the chosen topic only but could be demonstrated on many other phenomena of the medieval world. Therefore *The Canterbury Tales* do still remain not only engaging reading but an indispensable source of information about the medieval society and culture as well.

Reading the *Canterbury Tales* in historical and literary contexts the thesis attempted to disclose the reflection of chivalry in all its meanings. It has revealed that while on the one hand the chivalric class with its martial role was undergoing deep transformation and decline although very slow and gradual, on the other hand the chivalric ideals and culture lived their own life, exceeded the limits of the warrior, were extended by faith and courtesy, and their influence and popularity broadened even beyond the aristocratic class. Chivalric culture flourished at prominent courts and as the golden age of heroism waned and the opportunities for traditional chivalric life decreased the emphasis shifted from the inner warrior values to the outer courtly forms. The centres

of chivalric culture became not only the magnificent courts but also towns. The spreading of chivalry into lower social and cultural classes entailed popularisation of its forms and virtues and the loss of former exclusivity and purity but it also brought the acquisition of new meanings and ramification of the chivalric culture. Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* gave us a telling testimony of the traditional warrior ideals, the flourishing courtly ideals, and the vital symbiosis of the chivalric culture and the bourgeois environment and the implicit alterations.

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