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Expressions of Divine Order in the Canterbury Tales

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The expression of divine order permeates much of Chaucer's Canterbury Tales. The methods used in the attempt to express divine order vary greatly, most notably from the "Knight's Tale" to the "Second Nun's Tale." In the "Knight's Tale," Theseus operates within the hierarchy of the patriarchal feudal system. Situated at the top of the human chain of being, Theseus tries to duplicate the "ordre" which he finds embodied in the works of the Firste Moevere (3003). Destruction and containment are used in these attempts at bringing about order which are characteristic of male attempts to impose order on that which seems chaotic. Theseus' construction of the lists epitomizes an attempt to establish order through this mode. Although Theseus thinks he understands his place in this hierarchy, he oversteps his authority and tries to place himself higher in the hierarchy than he belongs. Rather than recognizing his place as above his subjects but under God (or the Firste Moevere of his final speech), Theseus equates himself with the divine. However, since Theseus is human, he cannot fully understand the divine plan and as a result, his attempts at ordering do not achieve the desired effect.

So, in response to this unsuccessful attempt at expressing divine order, Chaucer proposes an alternate mode of ordering in the "Second Nun's Tale." Here we discover two hierarchies. The first is another traditionally patriarchal system, that of the Church. However, this system, unlike the more secular feudal system of the "Knight's Tale" is ecclesiastical. Rather than placing herself at the top of this structure as Theseus

does in his system, Cecilie realizes and accepts her position as servant of God. By admitting that she cannot fully understand the divine plan, and by educating others about what she does know, Cecilie is able to more closely approach divine order than Theseus. Her mode of expressing divine order starts in the containment resulting from the knightly attempt to order. Rather than destruction, production and the use of language characterize this method of expressing divine order. This mode is characteristically, but not exclusively, female, because women were often the ones enclosed due to a male fear of their sexuality. By breaking out of her enclosure and actively and non-violently using language to convert others to Christianity, Cecilie creates a hierarchy populated by her converts. This hierarchy spreads around her like a web of faith.

Chaucer tackles the knightly means of expressing divine order in the "Knight's Tale." The teller of this tale, the Knight, is a member of the feudal system. This system functioned by dividing people into different groups, each group performing tasks that were specific to the group, but necessary for the system to function as a whole. Liam Purdon and Cindy Vitto describe the feudal structure as not only divided into groups, but also as hierarchical and stemming from the divine:

> Living within a feudal structure meant knowing where one belonged and where one's duties lay. In addition, the entire system accorded with the concept of universal order decreed by God. As [H]e was master over all, making his claim on each soul and demanding

> certain obeisances, so feudal lords had the right to regulate their own kingdoms." (xvi)

In the General Prologue of the Canterbury Tales, we discover that the Knight was "Ful worthy... in his lordes werre" (47). The Knight serves his lord in this way as part of the feudal system. This type of service also demonstrates the Knight's commitment to chivalry. Chivalry is "the code of honor and ethics applicable primarily to knights and other nobles" (Purdon xvi). According to Helen Cooper, "The function of the knight was to fight" (34). So, the code of chivalry governed medieval knights' actions on the battlefield.

Although set in ancient Greece, the "Knight's Tale" also represents the feudal system to which the Knight belongs. The teller of the tale notes on several occasions that Theseus or the other knights of the tale are chivalrous. As Theseus rides with his army to Thebes, we hear that "in his hoost of chivalrie the flour" he rode (982). In addition, "every wight that lovede chivalrye" wishes to participate in the competition designed by Theseus for Palamon and Arcite (2106). The text contains an example of knights swearing their loyalty to Theseus, an action integral to the maintenance of feudalism (Purdon xvii). After Theseus discovers the fighting Palamon and Arcite, he tells them that in order for him to forgive them and let them go, they must swear an oath to not harm him or his country, but, instead, to act toward him as friends. In reply, "they hym sworen his axyng faire and weel, / And hym of lordshipe and of mercy preyde, / And he hem graunteth grace" (1826-28).

Though the similar social settings are integral to an examination of the "Knight's Tale," one of the most telling parallels between Theseus and the Knight is Theseus' function as a fighter. For, as a knight, Theseus attempts to order that which he sees as chaotic through violence. Theseus believes that both the lands of "Amazonia and [of] Thebes have perpetrated disorder" (Crane 16). As the tale begins, Theseus is returning from this land of Amazonia, a land formerly ruled by women. His return is marked by his having "conquered al the regne of Femenye" and having made the queen of the Amazons, Ypolita, his bride (866, 883). On the road nearing Athens, Theseus and his party encounter a group of wailing widows clad in black. Moved by these Theban widows whose husbands have been killed by Creon, the new ruler of Thebes, Theseus travels to Thebes and "faught, and slough hym [Creon] manly as a knight / In pleyn bataille" (987-88). Theseus conquers and destroys in an attempt to restore order. When it comes to mastering death and destruction, no one can surpass Theseus, who was "in his tyme swich a conquerour / That gretter was ther noon under the sonne" (862-63). Theseus paradoxically attempts to bring about rational order through irrational violence.

Chivalric knights in other works of the time also try to resolve problems through battle. Susan L. Clark and Julian N. Wasserman note that in "the physical terrain of the Arthurian world... battle is the accepted mode of behavior" (64). One work of the time that exemplifies this characteristic is the First Continuation of Chretien de Troyes' Percéval, written

not by Chretien, but by an anonymous author sometime around the mid-thirteenth century. In this Continuation, Gawain fights Guiromelant, a knight in love with Gawain's sister, Clarissant (Section 1, Episode 4). In so doing, Gawain is "embracing the chivalric code in which the right to a woman is won on the battlefield" (Aronstein 120). The system under which Gawain operates is the same as the feudal system to which Chaucer's Knight refers.

A similar situation arises in the "Knight's Tale" when Theseus employs this code to resolve Palamon and Arcite's dispute over the love of Emelye. Not only does the chivalric code designate the battlefield as the appropriate grounds for winning women, but also as the place where men can relate to one another and form relationships. For, as Susan Aronstein observes concerning this specifically male domain, "the bonds between men stem from the hierarchy of the battlefield" (120). So, violence not only served as conflict resolution during the medieval period, but it also unified men and reinforced the patriarchal structure of the feudal system.

Throughout medieval literature we see another prevalent feature of the knightly attempt to order. This feature is, women, and to a lesser degree, men, enclosed by male characters. This theme emerges in Marie de France's Lais, especially in her first lai, "Guigemar," written around the 1180's. In this lai, the protagonist lies down to rest in a mysterious boat. When he rises to leave, he discovers that the boat is spiriting him onto the open sea.

The boat eventually arrives in a secluded harbor where Guigemar sees "In a garden at the foot of the keep... an enclosure, with a thick, high wall made of green marble" (46). Guigemar discovers that a beautiful noblewoman lives in this enclosure where her husband has imprisoned her, for he is old and fears being cuckolded (46-7). Guigemar and the Lady fall in love and live happily until the husband discovers them. He then exiles Guigemar, and "her [the Lady's] husband imprisoned her in a tower of dark-hued marble" (52).

After finally escaping from her husband's second attempt at controlling her sexuality, the Lady sails to Guigemar's homeland. Unfortunately, the first knight she encounters, a man named Meriaduc, falls in love with her and keeps her prisoner in his castle. When Guigemar finally learns of his captured Lady's fate, he promises Meriaduc that he and a hundred of his knights will become Meriaduc's vassals for two or three years if Meriaduc will return the Lady to Guigemar. Meriaduc refuses and as a result, Guigemar resorts to violence to restore order, "captur[ing] and destroy[ing] the castle and kill[ing] the lord within" (54).

The male need to contain also appears in the First Continuation of the Perceval. In the section entitled "Carados," we encounter King Carados and his heir of the same name. (I will refer to the second Carados as Carados Jr. for the remainder of this discussion.) King Carados is married to Ysave, the beloved of a magician named Eliavres (Section 3, Episode 1). Carados Jr. is born to Ysave and all seems to go well until

Carados Jr. becomes one of King Arthur's knights. He then discovers that Carados Sr. is not his father. Upon making this discovery, Carados Jr. reveals his mother's secret to Carados Sr. and Ysave "is imprisoned in a tower" (Section 1, Episode 6).

Later in the narrative, yet another woman, named Guigenier, suffers containment at the hands of Carados Jr., though this time for different reasons. Guigenier, after saving Carados Jr.'s life, and in the process losing part of her breast, is married to him. When Carados Jr. gains a magical device that allows him to restore body parts with gold, he replaces the tip of Guigenier's breast and then forbids her to reveal the secret of her golden breast to anyone, including ladies-in-waiting (Section 1, Episode 15). These actions lead to a woman who was "Once a (relatively) free maiden, wandering through the forest with her brother on adventures... [becoming] a married woman, bound to her husband's house and lands, and then a woman denied the usual solace and company of feminine society" (Aronstein 124).

In the last Episode of this Section, Carados actually exiles and imprisons Guigenier, not for infidelity, but for faithfulness, fearing the unfaithful queen's jealousy. Whatever the reason, though, the fact remains that Carados encloses both his mother and his wife in an effort to control their sexuality and maintain social order.

Returning to the "Knight's Tale," we see that Theseus also uses enclosure to impose order upon chaos. Theseus first

discovers Palamon and Arcite lying in a heap of bodies. His response to the disorder that could result from having two members of Theban royalty running around is not to kill them, but to have them "sente / To Atthenes, to dwellen in prisoun / Perpetuelly" (1022-24). Rather than eliminating these two potential disruptors of his order, disruptors because "they remain a threat to the state" (Kolve, Imagery 98), Theseus encloses them.

According to Peter Brown, Chaucer does more than Boccaccio, his primary source for the "Knight's Tale," to emphasize this containment. Not only does "Chaucer... [pay] attention to the restrictive experience of imprisonment," but "At the mimetic level, Chaucer departs from his source, Boccaccio's Teseida, and goes to considerable lengths to represent the harsh circumstances and wretchedness of prison" (148, 147). So, Chaucer emphasizes the suffering rather than the order that supposedly stems from Theseus' enclosure-oriented ordering system.

Theseus also contains Emelye for, when the cousins first see her from their prison tower, she is "Yond in the garden" (1099). Though formed from nature, the garden is a construction that does not actually represent nature, but, rather, man's attempt to control nature. This need to control nature stemmed from the fear of "the wild woods, where everything uncivilized, uncodified (illegal), natural, fantastic, and unpredictable could happen" (Haskell 194). In other words, the woods were a place where apparent chaos ruled. As such, "Emily [was]

captive... within the walls of the garden" much as the young knights are captive within the walls of the tower (Haskell 196). In fact, as V.A. Kolve notes, "the prison and garden are 'evene joynant' [1060]: they share a common wall" (Imagery 87). Theseus not only encloses the cousins but also Emelye.

An even better example of Theseus' attempt to instill order through destruction and containment is his construction of the lists. To create the lists, Theseus destroys part of the forest. He feels the need to raze the forest and contain the dispute between the cousins because of the previously discussed "medieval sense of such places [forests] as... beyond law" (Imagery 111). (Interestingly enough, the part of the forest that Theseus destroys contains the glade where he discovers Palamon and Arcite fighting, the same glade that Chaucer later says Theseus destroys to build Arcite's funeral pyre--reemphasizing Theseus' inability to accept what he cannot understand [Imagery 131].)

After leveling the forest, Theseus builds a circular enclosure within which Palamon and Arcite can resolve their conflict in an "orderly" fashion. This enclosure contains three altars, one to Venus, one to Mars, and one to Diana. The first images depicted in Venus' temple are "The broken slepes, and the sikes colde, / The sacred teeris, and the waymentynge, / The firy strokes of the desirynge" that those under her sway must experience (1920-22). The entire description of Mars' temple is wrought with images of war, death, and destruction such as the personifications of "Felonye," "Drede,"

"Meschaunce," and "Outrage" and the numerous accounts of murder. Paintings of those Diana has metamorphosized, like "woful Calistopee... turned from a womman til a bere," fill her temple (2056-58). It is in this amphitheater, decorated with instances of humans' lack of control, that Theseus attempts to impose order upon the love conflict between Palamon and Arcite. Though he has moved their feud from an un-lawful setting into a supervised tournament arena, he still uses irrational violence to resolve the argument. In fact, while Theseus has sanctioned this battle, and thus reduced the types of injuries permissible, his allowance for hundred-man armies increases the total amount of violence possible. Theseus' effort to impose order through the tournament works in the opposite direction, though, for "Disorder is intrinsic to such a ceremony" (Imagery 131).

Instead of reinforcing divine order, though, many of Theseus' attempts act counter to divine order. When he cuts down the forest in preparation for the lists, rather than moving toward the divine, he "destroys the very design he celebrates" (Taylor 217). With the construction of the lists,

> For all the perfection of its form, his great amphitheatre can only encircle what is selfish, destructive, and violent in man's nature... It is able to contain, but not to alter or exclude, the passions and influences that make us what we are. (Imagery 130)

In other words, Theseus can enclose that which he sees as chaotic, but he does not have the power to exert any real control

over human nature or what happens in his enclosure. As a human hierarchically situated under the divine, "Theseus can only work toward order. His will can be frustrated, his best-laid plans miscarry" (Imagery 129). We see this frustration once he has finished constructing the lists. He rules that whoever can "Sleen his contrarie, or out of lystes dryve, / Thanne shal I yeve Emylye to wyve" (1859-60). Arcite first fulfills this requirement. In accordance with Theseus' mandates, Arcite and Emelye should now live happily ever after. So, if Theseus attempts at order actually paralleled divine order, then it would make sense for events to unfold according to his plan. However, Arcite is struck down by Saturn and soon dies, rendering Theseus' attempts at order "playfully useless" (LaFarge 71).

These attempts are useless because Theseus does not share in the "'wise purveiaunce'" belonging to the First Mover of his closing speech (3011). For, if Theseus' "'heigh discrecioun' partakes of the wisdom and mercy of Providence, how is it that Arcite's blood, once again chosen without desert, is mortally shed anyway?" (LaFarge 70-1). The answer is that as a human Theseus cannot possess divine Providence. For, Providence is outside of time. Since only God can see the past, present, and future, only He can see the divine design behind everything. As Helen Cooper notes, "Providence, according to Boethius [another one of Chaucer's sources], is God's view of what men can perceive only as destiny or blind chance" (79). Theseus' problem is that he thinks he partakes of Providence similarly to God. As such, he thinks he can understand divine order.

For example, with the construction of the lists he attempts to reconstruct the celestial realm. He aligns his temples to Venus, Mars, and Diana with each of their respective planets. Instead of truly mirroring celestial order, though, Theseus overlooks Saturn's inclusion in his appropriate place in the amphitheater and thus creates an incomplete replica of the celestial realm. Then, when Theseus tries to salvage some kind of structure by commanding the marriage of Palamon and Emelye, his final effort "does not reflect 'divine harmony,' but is rather a reflection of human chaos" (Frakes 5).

However, the "Knight's Tale" is not utterly devoid of hope. Harkening back to the scene immediately prior to the tournament, we see Palamon, Emelye, and Arcite praying to Venus, Diana, and Mars, respectively. After Palamon's prayer, "atte laste the statue of Venus shook / And made a signe, whereby that he took / That his preyere accepted was that day" (2265-67). We see a similar interpretation of signs after Arcite's prayer--a demonstration that both knights mistakenly think that they have understood the divine and now know what the outcome of the tournament will be. Emelye, on the other hand, receives a much stronger sign than either Palamon or Arcite, but rather than attempting an interpretation that she cannot be sure of, she admits to herself that "she ne wiste what it signyfied" (2343). Since Theseus cannot see his place in the hierarchy and oversteps his authority, and since Palamon and Arcite both believe that they too can understand the divine, the task of expressing divine order is left to the women.

One scene in particular foreshadows the mode of working toward order later proposed in the "Second Nun's Tale." This episode occurs when Theseus, Emelye, and Ypolita discover Palamon and Arcite fighting in the woods. In his anger, Theseus almost kills Palamon and Arcite, announcing that they soon "shal be deed" (1747). Before their excursion into the woods, the women might not have been very effective in persuading Theseus to desist from this irrational course of action. For, as noted earlier, Emelye was contained within the walls of the garden and Ypolita, once the queen of the Amazons, is now contained in the bonds of marriage. However, the women are no longer enclosed within the "olde walles wyde" of Thebes (1880), the man-made boundaries of the city which are counter to, rather than suggestive of, the divine order inherent in nature. So, the women actively persuade Theseus to spare the lives of the cousins. Instead of irrationally killing Palamon and Arcite, Theseus "in his resoun he hem bothe excused" (1766). The women in this passage work toward order by first questioning the conventional mode of ordering and by then using language to convince Theseus not to kill the cousins.

Though language was seen as "the characteristic feminine weakness" in the Middle Ages (Ho 106), Chaucer uses the above passage to gender language as a tool used by women in their expression of order. One of the authorities who supported the male dominance of language in the Middle Ages was St. Thomas Aquinas. In his Summa Theologica, Part I, Aquinas attributes this dominance in language to man because "woman is naturally

subject to man, [for] in man the discretion of reason predominates" (881). In the interchange between Theseus and the women, though, Theseus' reason emerges only after Emelye has used her power over language to convince Theseus to act rationally. In addition, Emelye and the other women see the bigger picture that Theseus' rage prevents him from noticing. All Theseus sees are two knights who have violated his laws and the laws of chivalry. This disruption of social order is unacceptable to Theseus. The women, on the other hand, realize that "no thyng but for love was this debaat" (1754). The women realize that the conflict is based upon something that can never be truly tamed or understood, but, having realized this, they can accept it and move on.

As I mentioned earlier, in order to affect change, Emelye had to leave the enclosures of the garden and of the city. This idea of women enclosed in towers and dungeons permeates much of the romance literature of the time. But, in addition to the romance figures whose husbands imprisoned them to guard their sexuality from possible male rivals, we also find enclosed religious women. Elizabeth Robertson examines this idea in an article focused on the Ancrene Wisse, a medieval guide for anchoresses. First of all, an anchoress was "confined to the room into which she was bricked for life" (111). In addition, "From a medieval perspective,... a woman's spiritual nature was defined by her inescapable corporeality" (112). So, in order to grow spiritually, women had to transcend not only brick and wood enclosures, but also their own bodies.

Chaucer examines the idea of spiritual women and enclosures more closely in the "Second Nun's Tale." We do not know much about the Second Nun except that as a nun she would have lived in a cloister. The word cloister stems from the Latin word "claustrum" which meant "a shut-up place" (OED), an enclosure. Rather than remaining in her cloister and concentrating on trying to transcend the enclosure of her body and grow closer to the divine there, the Second Nun ventures out on a pilgrimage. By leaving her enclosure and telling of St. Cecilie's life, the Second Nun demonstrates her understanding of her place in the religious hierarchy. Though she serves God actively, she realizes nonetheless that she is a servant of the divine rather than an organizer of the divine.

In the section of the Second Nun's prologue dedicated to the interpretation of the name "Cecilie," Chaucer takes the relationship between language and the idea of order flowing outward from containment one step further. In this section the Second Nun examines the different meanings of "Cecilie" and its component syllables. According to Augustine, "these verbal extenuations" result in words "now 'unrestrained by syllabic bonds" (Frese 158). Once these words, in this case the name "Cecilie," have moved beyond the constraint of syllables, "when they are phonemically stretched and broken... such words reach their highest register of articulatory expressiveness" (158). So, the Second Nun's examination of "Cecilie" frees this name from linguistic containment. As the name's positive meanings increase, so does the power of the

saint to affect order.

Examinations of the meanings behind the name "Cecilie" also demonstrate why Cecilie's order, unlike Theseus' order, holds. Though no human, including Cecilie or the Second Nun, can ever truly understand Providence, Cecilie's name brings her closer to the Providential foresight that eludes Theseus. Her name inherently means "'they wey to blynde'" and "'Wantynge of blyndnesse,' for hir grete light / Of sapience and foe hire thewes cleere" (92, 100-01). Her wisdom and morals keep her from losing sight of the path to Providence and this clear sight makes her a guide for those still in the dark. In addition, according to Catherine LaFarge, "Providence never changes" (72), much like Cecilie who: "nevere cessed... / Of hir preyere and God to love and drede" (124-25). Her faith, and with it the decisions she has made, are unflagging.

In her Prologue, the Second Nun invokes the Virgin Mary: "To thee at my bigynning first I calle" (31). This invocation is appropriate, for Christ's birth from the Virgin Mary provides a prime example of the correct method for expressing divine order. The Second Nun says that Christ's appearance in this world began "Withinne the cloistre blisful of [Mary's] sydis" (43), the enclosure of her womb. According to Margaret Hallissy, this description of Mary's womb as an enclosure was not uncommon, for, "architectural metaphors in Medieval literature often refer to the biological structure of the female body" (94). Hallissy cites Hildegard of Bingen's "Responsary for the Virgin," part of which reads:

Sweet as the buds of the spring, her
son opened paradise
from the cloister of her womb.
And the Son of God came forth
from her secret chamber like the dawn. (95)

These references to Mary's womb highlight the difference between the comparisons made by men of female bodies to enclosures and the comparisons made by women of female bodies to enclosures. Men, such as the author of the Ancrene Wisse, characterized the female body as a corporeal prison that needed to be transcended if spiritual growth was to occur. Those like the Second Nun and Hildegard of Bingen see the female body as a sort of container from which divine order can pour -- a vehicle for the expression of divine order rather than an instigator of divine order. As Sarah Stanbury puts it, God used Mary "as vessel for the Word" (273), the "Word" meaning both the physical manifestation of God as well as the teachings of God, including the way to best serve the divine. This description of Christ as the "Word" further demonstrates the connections between divine order and language. With Christ's birth, divine order was introduced to the world. As Christ spread His message, His order affected more and more people expanding outward exponentially.

This example highlights the productive nature of the female ordinal system, the female power to give life as opposed to the male power to take life. This ordering through fruitfulness reflects the Christian ideal to "'Be fruitful and multiply'"

(Genesis 9:1). The killing in the knightly mode stands in clear opposition to the commandment "Thou shalt not kill."

Within the "Second Nun's Tale," Saint Cecilie herself employs this alternate method of working toward divine order. Her closeness to the Virgin Mary first suggests that she will use the method of organization associated with the Virgin. In the Second Nun's prologue, "Cecelia is referred to as 'thy' maiden, Mary's, suggesting a direct connection between the two, a connection strengthened by the references to virginity" (Sturges 49). However, unlike Mary, Cecilie never physically gives birth. Instead, Cecilie works toward divine order by actively and non-violently converting those around her to Christianity. With Cecilie's conversion of her husband Valerian, V.A. Kolve notes that "God has impregnated Cecilie with the seed of chastity, and she has born him a spiritual son" (Iconography 15). In fact, Valerian is only "the first of... numerous spiritual offspring" (Kooper 216).

Once Cecilie has converted Valerian, she moves outside of the structure of her marriage to convert others. She and Valerian convert Valerian's brother Tiburce. Then, the two brothers convert the magistrate Almachius' clerk, Maximus. Maximus and the brothers convert others, including the executioners. Cecilie converts the ministers who bring her to Almachius. The scope of Cecilie's conversions is also "gradually expanded" according to Robert Sturges who maintains that "Tiburce's conversion takes Cecilie's influence out of her immediate sphere. The conversions of the officer Maximus

and of the ministers... move it into the political realm" (50).

By moving outside of her immediate sphere of influence, Cecilie effectively takes Emelye and Ypolita's persuasion of Theseus one step further. Not only do her conversions prevent violence among her followers, Valerian progresses from being "Ful lyk a fiers leoun" to "meke as evere was any lomb" (198, 199), but she produces full-fledged changes in those she converts. They are reborn through baptism (217, 299, 380) and ever after, they work as Cecilie does, teaching the message of Christ and converting those around them. Not only does Cecilie spiritually multiply in the service of divine order, but each person she converts does the same. The nature of these conversions, this asexual reproduction, necessarily results in a web of faith. For, one person can convert two people, these two people can each convert two more, these four new converts can lead to eight new converts, and on and on. This mode of ordering naturally results in exponential growth and an organically spreading web made indestructible by its method of expansion. Because the web spreads outward exponentially and because each convert is dependent on his or her converter solely for the purposes of being converted, even if a link in the web is destroyed, the other parts can continue producing spiritual offspring. So, as Cecilie teaches and converts, she creates a web of faith, furthering divine order in the process.

Not only does Cecilie use language to teach others about Christianity, but she also uses language as a means for verbal, rather than violent, conflict resolution. When Almachius

questions Cecilie, about her faith they engage in a verbal duel in which Cecilie constantly bests Almachius. He first asks her, "'What maner womman artow?'" (424). Cecilie demonstrates Almachius' lack of linguistic command when she answers his question truthfully, but in a completely different manner than he expected. Cecilie responds, "'I am a gentil womman born" (425). Though true, Almachius had been attempting to ascertain her religion. This verbal dueling continues in the same vein with "Thise wordes and swiche othere seyde she" (512), until Almachius grows furious and resorts to imposing a false order akin to that promoted in the "Knight's Tale." So, because he cannot understand or control her, Almachius encloses Cecilie "in a bath / And nyght and day greet fyr they under betten" (517-18). Rather than die from the intense heat or an attempted beheading, though, for "Thre dayes lyved she in this torment, / And nevere cessed hem the feith to teche" (537-38), spiritually multiplying until she dies.

The mode of ordering utilized by Cecilie comes closer to expressing divine order in a myriad of ways. First of all, the association of this mode with Christ's emergence from Mary's womb, coupled with Cecilie's associations with the Virgin, signal the similarity between divine order and the order for which Cecilie is striving. In opposition to the knights who exemplify Theseus' faulty attempts at order in the "Knight's Tale," Cecilie calls her first converts "Cristes owene knyghtes leeve and deere" (383). These knights, unlike Theseus, "earn their knighthood" in the service of God (Taylor 217). In addition, Cecilie's

death, rather than signaling defeat as Arcite's death did in the "Knight's Tale," signals a triumph, for her faith is based upon the knowledge that "ther is bettre lif in oother place" (323).

Although Cecilie has died, the doorway that she has opened to the divine still remains ajar here on earth. Cecilie's teachings remain for others to learn from in the same way, albeit on a smaller scale, that Christ's teachings lived on after his crucifiction. Right before she dies Cecilie asks "that I myghte do werche / Heere of myn hous perpetuelly a cherche" (545-46). Erik Kooper points out that:

> These lines show a clear parallel with the way in which the Church was established. In Matthew 16:18 Christ says to Peter: "And I say this to you: You are Peter, the Rock; and on this rock I will build my church, and the <u>powers of death will never conquer it</u>. (217, my emphasis)

The powers of death cannot unravel the order that Cecilie has established during her lifetime -- for the most part because her order spreads out around her like an expansive web. Through its exponential nature, this web sustains itself when one of the connections dies. This web is supported by too many people to collapse when Cecilie dies.

I would like to close by suggesting that Chaucer not only demonstrates which method of ordering comes closer to expressing divine order, but that he also uses this system to organize the <u>Canterbury Tales</u>. His obvious medium in telling the tales

is language. Though he uses language to tell both the "Knight's Tale" and the "Second Nun's Tale," in the Canterbury Tales, Chaucer has designated language as one of St. Cecilie's tools for expressing order. In addition, since it seems that he used the tales to teach a lesson, namely, how to express divine order most closely, he utilizes another device of St. Cecilie's -- teaching.

He also organizes the Canterbury Tales as an entity that starts in enclosure and then moves outward. He sets the precedent for stories that defy containment in his "Legend of Good Women [which] is, at least in part, about how stories break out of prescribed patterns" (Kruger 220). In the Canterbury Tales, the "Knight's Tale," being the most formal tale as well as a tale about enclosure, defines the enclosure from which Cecilie's method of ordering stems. So, the "Knight's Tale" must come first. After this tale, in the "Miller's Prologue," Chaucer states that it is perfectly permissible for "whoso list it [a particular tale] nat yheere, / Turne over the leef and chese another tale" (3176-77). In other words, it is not necessary to read the tales successively, from first to last, a method which follows a set, predetermined pattern. Because tales of different genres share similar themes and because each genre usually has several diverse examples, the tales must be read in the context of one another -- relationally, as a web. In addition, the scope of the Canterbury Tales moves from smaller to larger as Chaucer creates what Julia Bolton Holloway describes as "a plurality of characters who in turn create a plurality

of characters" (200). Chaucer structures the Canterbury Tales not in a limited, straight line, but in an expansive web similar to Cecilie's web of faith.

As a poet, Chaucer would also have been concerned with the conversion of words into something more expressive than the words themselves -- an expansion outward from a word's "syllabic bonds" to a complex text composed of words. As Robert Longsworth points out, "Transformation, after all, is the central business of literature" (87). This transformation of words is similar to the examination of the name "Cecilie" in the prologue to the "Second Nun's Tale." However, the idea of transformation goes even deeper than simple manipulation of words, for "The poet, then, is no less concerned than... the saint with the process of transformation" (87). Perhaps composing the Canterbury Tales was Chaucer's attempt to partake of divine order in whatever way he could, and to then share it with the rest of us.

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