

“THE KNIGHT’S TALE”

“The Knight’s Tale” portrays the concepts of chivalry and divine providence that were popular during the Middle Ages. The conventions of courtly love are depicted by the gallant knight who adores the beautiful, yet unattainable, noblewoman from afar. As time passes, the knight suffers from an unrequited love that does not wane.

Chaucer combines Christian and pagan elements in “The Knight’s Tale.” Theseus makes reference to God and His providence; ironically, an allusion is also made to the mythological tale of Theseus’ confrontation with Hades, god of the underworld. Theseus also puts aside his pagan-based traditions of war and vengeance to promote the Christian ideologies of love, peace, and forgiveness; despite his efforts, the outcome is determined by Greek gods.

Chaucer’s tale is a shortened version of *Teseida delle nozze d’Emilia* by Giovanni Boccaccio. Over two centuries later, “The Knight’s Tale” would serve as inspiration for William Shakespeare in writing *The Two Noble Kinsmen*.

“The Knight’s Tale” demonstrates Chaucer’s facility with writing a romance. A romance is a long narrative about chivalric heroes.

ELEMENTS OF CHIVALRY

Chivalry was the code of conduct and manners associated with knights in the Middle Ages. Although the system developed over time, certain elements and themes are typical of chivalric romances:

- a wise and just leader
- trustworthy knights who were loyal, courteous warriors
- people who behaved with honor and kept promises
- a struggle or contest, often to win the hand of a lady
- detailed descriptions of clothing, discussions, or other elements
- an unattainable woman who was often loved from afar
- an idealized rather than realistic or physical love
- the involvement of destiny, fate, chance, or the gods
- ceremonial events, such battles, tournaments, weddings
- a dragon, a monster, or some other supernatural element

Not every feature is found in every story. However, as you read these tales, you may be surprised by how many elements do appear, even though they might be cast in an unexpected setting, such as ancient Greece.

VOCABULARY PREVIEW

amity n. friendship

boon n. favor, especially one given in answer to a request

lamentation n. wailing to show grief