

Like Chaucer, he experimented with literary form and narrative voice, and was in his early years a frank humorist who at the same time helped elevate the vernacular to literary status.

Boccaccio's *Il Teside* or the *Book of Theseus* tells the story of the competition between the royal kinsmen and prisoners of war, the knights Palammon and Arcites, for the same woman. It is the direct source for Chaucer's Knight's Tale in the *Canterbury Tales* and provides the Theban setting of "Anclida and Arcite." Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* has its origins in Boccaccio's *Il Filostrato*, and the *Decameron*, Boccaccio's masterpiece, is a collection of stories in the spirit of the *Canterbury Tales*, though whether Chaucer knew the *Decameron* remains uncertain. It is also unknown if Chaucer and Boccaccio ever met, though Chaucer did make a trip to Italy in 1372-73, where he could have encountered Boccaccio and also the great poet Francesco Petrarca (1304-1374 C.E.).

The passage below describes the ascent of Palammon's prayer to win the fair Emilia's hand in marriage as it travels through the Temple of Venus: Here we see the inspiration for Chaucer's own account of Venus's shrine in the *Parliament of Fowls*. Also included is an excerpt from a gloss or note, traditionally attributed to Boccaccio himself, instructing the reader on how to interpret the Temple. As the glossator indicates, there are two Venuses—one lawful and one lewd—and it is the second that he depicts.]

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As the Prayer of Arcites sought out Mars, so the Prayer of Palammon¹ went to merciful Venus on Mount Cithaeron where the temple of Cythera, and her dwelling place, rests somewhat shaded among very tall pines. As the Prayer approached it, Yearning was the first one that she saw on that eminence.

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As she went along farther with Yearning, she saw that which is sweet and pleasant to every sight, in the guise of a leaty and beautiful garden full

1. The reason why the author gives a certain form to the Prayer is shown above, and so I do not care to repeat it. Just as he described the house of Mars earlier, so here he intends to describe that of Venus. Since he does not care to describe the kind of place where the house is located and the things that belong to the said house, in order and succession, still they can be considered in order by anyone who wants. The kind of place where the said house is, who they are who dwell in that house, what forms and functions they have, how the house is constructed, and what the adornments of this house are can be readily determined.

First therefore, the kind of place will be seen. The author says that it is on Mount Cithaeron, among pines, etc., as appears in the text. To clarify this matter it must be realized that just as Mars, as was said above, consists in the insatiable appetite, so Venus consists in the conspicuous. This Venus is twofold, since one can be understood as every chaste and felt desire, as is the desire to have a wife in order to have children, and such like. This Venus is not discussed here. The second Venus is that through which all lewdness is desired, commonly called the goddess of love. Here the author describes the temple of this goddess, and the other things that belong to it, as appears in the text. So the author describes this temple of Venus as being on Mount Cithaeron, for two reasons. One, because it was, in fact, there, since Mount Cithaeron is near Thebes and the Thebans celebrated a solemn feast thereon in certain seasons of the year, and they offered many sacrifices to the honor of Venus. The second thing is because of the quality of the place, which is very appropriate to Venus, because it is a temperate region as regards the heat and the cold. This is seen very clearly by anyone who considers it carefully, since those parts of Greece in which Mount Cithaeron is located are not too far north nor too far south, but almost between the one and the other.

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of very green plants, of fresh grasses, and of every new flower, and she saw clear fountains springing there, and it seemed to her that among the other shrubs the myrtle flourished most.

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She heard birds of almost every kind singing through the branches. She watched them with delight, too, as they made their nests. She also saw rabbits darting about here and there through the young grass, and timid little deer, and roe buck and a great variety of many other little animals.

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She seemed to hear, besides, delightful singing and every musical instrument. As she passed along with a quick step, somewhat rapt out of herself and gazing about, she saw that every corner of the lofty and beautifully adorned place was filled with spirits who flew about here and there and returned to their places. As she watched them,

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among the shrubs on the side of a fountain she saw Cupid with his bow placed at his feet, making arrows. Those which his daughter Voluptuousness selected she tempered in the waters; and the Prayer saw Idleness seated beside them; and she saw that with Memory he barbed the shafts which she first tempered.

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She also saw Comeliness strolling with Elegance and Affability while Courtesy was in their midst entirely concealed. She saw the Arts that have the power to force others to commit follies, and these were very different in their appearance from our idea of them. And she saw Vain Delight standing alone with Nobility.

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Next she saw Beauty pass near by, without any adornment and gazing at herself. And she saw Charm walking with her, and each one was praising the other. Then she saw like and lovely Youth standing near them, making merry. On the other side she saw mad Boldness, Flattery, and Pandering walking together.

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57 In the center she saw a temple with tall copper columns, and she saw youths and ladies dancing before it; the latter were either beautiful in their persons or comely because of their attire. They were ungrided and bare-foot, with hair and gowns flowing, and they passed the whole day in this way. Then she saw many sparrows and doves flying about and nesting on top of the temple.

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And she saw Madonna Peace sitting quietly near the entrance to the temple with one hand holding a curtain lightly before the portals. Patience sat discreetly near her, very wretched in appearance and pale of countenance. And she saw Promises and Arts everywhere around.

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When she entered the temple, she heard a storm of Sighs bursting into flame with hot Desires. This fire enkindled all the altars with new flames born of Martyrdoms, and each of these flames shed tears caused by a cruel and wicked lady called Jealousy whom she saw there.

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And she saw that Priapus held the highest place there, in such a garb that anyone who wanted to see him at night could do so, as when, with its braying, the most slothful of animals aroused Vesta whom Priapus desired not a little and toward whom he was advancing. She also saw garlands of many different flowers throughout the great temple.

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She saw there the bows of many of Diana's devotees hung up and broken. Among these was that of Callisto who was transformed into the northern Bear. And there were the apples of disdainful Atalanta who excelled in running, and the weapons, also, of that other haughty one who gave birth to comely Parthenopaeus, grandson of the Calydonian Oeneus.

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She saw stories painted everywhere, and among these, traced with consummate skill, she saw all the works of the bride of Ninus made clear. She saw Pyramus and Thisbe and the mulberries, already stained, at the foot

of the wall. She saw the great Hercules on the lap of Iole among them, and sorrowful Byblis piteously on her way to entreat Caunus.

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When she did not see Venus, she was told—she did not know by whom—"She takes her delight in the most secret part of the temple. If you want her, enter through that quiet door." So without any other regard, for she was humbly garbed, the Prayer drew near to enter there to fulfill the mission entrusted to her.

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When she first approached, she found Opulence guarding the door, at which she marveled greatly. When she was permitted by Opulence to enter, she saw that the place was dark when she first went in. As she remained there, however, she found that there was a little light, and she saw Her reclining naked on a huge bed that was very beautiful to see.

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She had golden curls, unbraided and bound about her head. Her countenance was such that those who have been most praised have no beauty to compare with hers. Her arms and her bosom and her elevated breasts were completely visible, and the rest of her body was covered by a robe so flimsy that it scarcely concealed anything.

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The place was scented with a thousand perfumes. Bacchus sat on one side of her, and Ceres with her delicacies on the other. She held Lust by the hand, and she also held the apple which she had won in the Ilaean vale when she was chosen over her sisters. And when the Prayer had seen this, she submitted the petition, which was granted without demur.

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