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Paper #1

### **Love & Happiness in the Knight's Tale**

Can you imagine dedicating your life to a single cause and still being the source of complete irony? You are about to find out how this could happen to two brave knights from Greece. I will explain to you my definition of love, analyze the actions of the main characters in the Knight's Tale and compare them to my own ideal of love.

My idea of love goes actually draws on the teachings of the ancient Hawaiians. Some years ago, I read a book about Hawaiian Shamanism and stumbled upon the best definition of love that I have ever heard: To love is to be happy with. In Hawaiian, this means Aloha. In his book "Kahuna Healing" Dr. Serge King explains that "according to the roots [the word Aloha] means 'to grow and thrive joyously together,' 'to share the experience of life,' and 'to be happy with.'" Dr. King says that "of course anything can be *called* love, but the real test is whether it encourages growth and happiness". (56) For me, Aloha sums up what my idea of love is all about. So, when I compare the characters of The Knight's Tale to this definition, I will apply the test whether they inspire growth and happiness.

I would like to start my exploration with the ruler of Athens, Duke Theseus. I think plays an important yet minor role in *The Knight's Tale*. In the beginning, he meets a group of widows who "were weeping and wailing, making a lamentation the like of which no living creature ever heard." Their husbands were slain in another city, Thebes - but worse, they were denied a proper burial and instead "give(n) .. to the dogs to eat. (20)" The noble Theseus, who was just returning from battle, immediately went to war against Thebes. Such caring conduct of Theseus can be seen throughout *The Knight's Tale*. He fulfills his best friend's wishes, no matter the cost, and even forgives some of his enemies. Theseus admits: "Shame upon a ruler without mercy". (34) To me, Theseus represents a modern, caring, and intelligent person. He looks at life with his own sense of humor. "Is there any bigger fool than a lover?" he asks, before admitting that he used to be in love too once and that "a man's either a young fool or an old fool." (34) I think Theseus is a perfect example of the Aloha spirit. With courage, pride, and humor he tries to bring happiness to his fellow citizens.

Arcite and Palamon, two knights from Thebes, do not seem to hold up to my definition of love too well. I have chosen to combine them in one paragraph because their actions and views are so much alike. Both Arcite and Palamon were imprisoned in Athens and at first they accepted their fate without lament. But when they see Emily, Theseus' sister, they fall in love with her beauty and their friendship is ruined by jealousy. They grow to hate their confinement and even each other. When Arcite is allowed to leave Athens, under the condition he never come back, they still pity their destiny. Arcite is saddened because he will never see Emily again. He says to Palamon: "How happily may you remain in prison – not prison, but paradise!" (25) On the other

hand, Palamon suffers because he is “dying in a cage.” (26) If Palamon were to be released, he would raid Athens and capture Emily. Despite their dissimilar fate, they live an unhappy and hateful life. Even when they meet several years later, their first reaction is to try to kill each other in the name of love. One year after their meeting, they fight each other in a tournament for Emily’s love. Each brings along 100 warriors. Arcite wins, but has a fatal accident after the tournament. In the end, Palamon gets to marry Emily. I briefly summarized their actions to demonstrate how neither of them holds up to my idea of love. Ever since they laid eyes on Emily they were driven by a selfish lust for her radiance. My biggest criticism of Arcite and Palamon is that they felt so in love, but never thought about what would make Emily happy. They could have kept their friendship and their lives with an easy agreement: let Emily decide whom she wants. But instead they never bother to inquire about her and even endanger the life of 200 men in the tournament. As Theseus said: “When you come to think of it, isn’t it the height of folly? Is there any bigger fool than a lover?” (34)

To perfect the irony, we find out that Emily “wish[s] to live as a virgin, never, never a wife or mistress.” (42) It is with such a vivid irony in mind that I would also like to come to my conclusion. No matter how strong our feelings of love might be, we need to concern ourselves with the needs of our subject of desire. Because only when our actions are aimed at happiness and growth can we be sure that we have truly loved.