That Emelye, that fairer was to sene,
Than is the lylie upon his stalke grene [...] (I.176-86).

The images of May and lily are, in Benson’s own words “commonly associated with a traditional type of romance heroine”. In contrast, Alisoun is described in an extended portrait:

As brood as is the boos of a bokeeler,
Hir shoes were laced on hir legges hye.
She was a prymerole, a piggesnye [...] (I.158-162)

Her description is specific and physical. However, she is compared not to a lily but to a “piggesnye”, reminiscent of a pig. According to Benson, “this portrait concentrates vivid imagery, whose effect is comically reductive”. (76)

The poetic tone of each tale is substantially different. In the Knight’s Tale the events follow a definite and expressive order. However, in the Miller’s Tale, the tone is much quicker. Each tale encloses an unpredicted tragedy at the end: on the one hand, the fall of Arcite from his horse (III.2201-2206), which is conveyed as a heroic death. On the other, the fall of John from the rafters, which is described in a satirical tone, portraying John’s hurt and humiliation (I.343-349).

Finally, the contrast between the two tales is also manifested in terms of vocabulary. For example, chivalric words like “pitee”, “honour” and “chivalrie” appear in the romance, but those words do not appear in the fabliau; conversely, words of pleasure and deception like “joly”, “gay” and “derne” appear only in the fabliau. In the same way, words that appear in both stories have different senses. According to Benson, “Lord, for example, occurs many times in the Knight’s Tale to describe Theseus and his authority. However, in the second tale the word has different senses. For instance, it is used once in Absalom’s description of himself: “a lord at alle degrees” (I.616)” (83).

To conclude, variations between the two tales prevail in genre and style. As Benson states in his work, Derek Brewer considers that “the contrast between the two tales is very refreshing, and very typical of Chaucer” (64).

Bibliografía