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CHAUCEL’S SQUIRE’S TALE AND THE DECLINE OF CHIVALRY

by Stanley J. Kahrl

Romances appear to be extraordinarily difficult works to assess properly. The difficulty seems to be, in part at least, a matter of tone. Just how seriously are we to take the vicissitudes of the Chevalier de la Charette, for example? Is Lancelot a hero, or a fool? In discussing Gawain and the Green Knight, Morton Bloomfield admitted puzzlement at the style of that poem, and proposed that we might have there an example of a humorous romance. Whether or not this is so, he is certainly right in asserting that “romance is not a simple genre but a highly complex one. . . . There are comic as well as serious, religious as well as amorous, psychological as well as objective, episodic as well as tightly organized romances. The romance genre is by no means a unified monolithic type.”

If we have trouble assessing the great romance, how much more at sea are we when we are faced with obviously less effective examples of the form, such as Chaucer’s unfinished Squire’s Tale. Here opinion varies from F. N. Robinson’s description of the tale as a “perfect expression of the joy and wonder and simple human feeling which gives enduring charm to the numerous metrical romances, many of them defective in form, of medieval Europe,” to D.A. Pearsall’s sense of a “vivid incoherence about the tale.” Gardiner Stilwell was perhaps the first to recognize that admiration for the tale as an example of medieval romance derives from the laudatory comments of Spenser, Milton, and Warton, rather than from a reading of the tale itself, and that those who find the tale unsettling do so from a sense that Chaucer had “difficulty in maintaining unity of tone.”

More recently, Pearsall, in the article cited above, as well as Robert S. Haller and John P. McCall have proposed that the person who has difficulty in maintaining a proper tone is not Chaucer, and that many of the stylistic gaucheries of the tale are in fact quite deliberately

1. Morton W. Bloomfield, “Gawain and the Green Knight,” PMLA, 76 (1961), 17. I am indebted to this study for a number of suggestions which seemed pertinent to a study of Chaucer’s Squire’s Tale.

included by Chaucer for a particular effect, that is, the portrayal of the Squire as a rather inept story-teller.\footnote{Robert S. Haller, “Chaucer’s Squire’s Tale and the Uses of Rhetoric,” \textit{MP}, 62 (1965), 285-93; \textit{a→} John P. McCall, “The Squire in Wonderland,” \textit{ChauR}, 1 (1966), 103-09. I am particularly indebted to the suggestions of Haller, which form the basis for one section of this study. See also Joyce E. Peterson, “The Finished Fragment: A Reassessment of the Squire’s Tale,” \textit{ChauR}, 5 (1970), 62-74.} I would propose further that because Chaucer has so carefully associated the Squire with his father, both in the \textit{General Prologue}\footnote{See, for example, Arthur W. Hoffman, “Chaucer’s Prologue to Pilgrimage: Two Voices,” \textit{ELH}, 21 (1954), 1-16.} and through verbal echoes within his tale,\footnote{The parallels can be found in Robinson’s notes, and in such places as R. M. Lumiansky, \textit{Of Sondry Folk} (Austin, Texas, 1955), pp. 179-80.} we are permitted, indeed forced to conclude that if the \textit{Knight’s Tale} is a celebration of classical order in the chivalric world,\footnote{The classic exposition of this interpretation is that given by Charles Muscatine, \textit{Chaucer and the French Tradition} (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1957), especially pp. 175-90; to which may be added Robert M. Jordan, \textit{Chaucer and the Shape of Creation} (Cambridge, Mass., 1967), pp. 152-84.} the \textit{Squire’s Tale} presents the growing impulse toward exoticism and disorder at work in the courts of late medieval Europe.\footnote{The best general discussion of this phenomenon is still that of J. Huizinga, \textit{The Waning of the Middle Ages} (London, 1924), despite the fact that it is primarily concerned with France and Burgundy rather than England.} 

The Squire’s taste for the exotic is of course immediately apparent in the subject matter of the tale. In the introduction to his edition of the \textit{Squire’s Tale}, A. W. Pollard had stated in 1899: “The genesis of the Squire’s Tale has baffled investigation more than any other, and the fact that it is unfinished, that the six hundred lines which we possess leave us still at the threshold of the story, suggests that we are here in the presence of one of Chaucer’s rare attempts at a more or less original plot. He seems, if we may hazard a guess, to have read or heard several Eastern tales, and to have formed the ambitious project of combining them into a single story, which would have required many thousand lines for its proper development.”\footnote{A. W. Pollard, ed., \textit{The Squire’s Tale} (London, 1899), pp. vii-viii.} Subsequent to this statement came the great period of source hunting in Chaucer scholarship; yet at the end of this period, one of those most active in searching for sources or analogues for the \textit{Squire’s Tale}, H.S.V. Jones, was still forced to admit that Chaucer apparently “worked inventively with a free hand.”\footnote{H. S. V. Jones, “The Squire’s Tale,” in \textit{Sources and Analogues}, pp. 357-76.} However, the efforts of the researchers had turned up a number of “striking parallels to many of its features in stories of oriental origin.”\footnote{Ibid., p. 357.} The studies contributing most directly to the establishment of these parallels fall into three groups, as follows: (a) Prester John legends:
The parallels, which are worth noting briefly, are as follows. The gifts sent by “The kyng of Arabe and of Inde” (F 110) to Cambyusk-kan, with the exception of the brass horse, are similar to those described as being sent to the Emperor Emmanuel by Prester John, styling himself the King of Arabia and India in the twelfth-century Epistola Presbyteri Johannis ad Emmanuelem regem Graecorum. The brass horse is similar in operation to the last of three gifts offered by three suitors to the three daughters of Marcadigas, king of Sartaigne, in the romance of Cléomadès. Cléomadès, Marcadigas’ son, uses the horse in a series of adventures culminating in his marriage to Clarmondine, daughter to the king of Tuscany. Finally, Haldeen Braddy has made a strong case for believing that lines 1-346 are simply an introduction to a common Eastern type of tale known as the “box within a box” story, in which an animal exemplum (in the Squire’s case, the tale of the “faucon peregryn”) acts as a frame for a series of intercalary episodes. Thus Canacee could be expected to acquire a faithless lover in the sequel, were the tale to follow the standard form.

The trouble is that the Squire does not seem to be able to follow any form at all. It is the Squire, not Chaucer, who has “formed the ambitious project of combining [several Eastern tales] into a single story,” without possessing the ability to maintain a coherent narrative thread. As McCall says, “The elaborate but meaningless way in which the Squire deals with the magical paraphernalia of his tale is closely linked with his whole performance. He creates, in fact, a series of expectations without fulfillment.” We will not find sources for the elements of this tale because Chaucer’s Squire is clearly more interested in creating an esoteric effect than in constructing a coherent narrative.

To take but a single detail, in Cléomadès the ugly suitor Crompars, who offers the youngest daughter the marvelous steed in order to marry her, maliciously fails to tell Cléomadès where the stop button for the horse is when Cléomadès demands to test it out, thus sending him off on a lengthy journey. For the Squire, the mere existence of the mar-


velous pins is enough. Thus, at the end of the lengthy, inconsequential debate over the workings of the horse on the part of the “lewed peple,” which provides a considerable build-up for the disclosure of the horse’s workings: and after an afternoon of dancing and supping has passed, adding further to the suspense, King Cambyuskan eventually musters sufficient curiosity himself to descend to the courtyard and view the horse. The stranger knight goes to the horse

And seyde, ‘Sire, ther is namoore to seyne,  
But, whan yow list to ryden anywhere,  
Ye mooten trille a pyn, stant in his ere,  
Which I shal telle yow bitwix us two.  
Ye moote nempne hym to what place also,  
Or to what contree, that yow list to ryde.  
And whan ye come ther as yow list abyde,  
Bidde hym descende, and trille another pyn,  
For therin lith th’effect of al the gyn,  
And he wol doun descende and doon youre wille,  
And in that place he wol abyde stille. . . .  
Or, if yow liste bidde hym thennes goon,  
Trille this pyn, and he wol vanysshe anoon  
Out of the sighte of every maner wight,  
And come agayn, be it by day or nyght,  
Whan that yow list to clepen hym ageyn  
In swich a gyse as I shal to yow seyn  
Bitwixe yow and me, and that ful soone.  
Ride whan yow list, ther is namoore to doone.  

(F 314-34)

Not only does Cambyuskan learn precisely the location of the controls, but there are three, not two. And what is the effect of all this? Cambyuskan sends the bridle (which apparently causes the horse to dance [312-13]) to his treasury together with the magic healing sword and the warning mirror, and then the Squire tells us that “The hors vanysshed, I noot in what manere, / Out of hir sighte; ye gete namoore of me” (342-44). Has he forgotten the third pin’s function? In any case, seldom has there been such a build-up for so little effect.

Other details included apparently for their exotic effect alone are not hard to find. Only Canacee’s ring, of all the gifts, seems to have any point for the narrative. Yet the gifts form the basis for all the narrative “action” of Part One. The ring itself provides a link between Part One and Part Two, in that through its assistance Canacee understands the tale of the falcon, but otherwise nothing in what Braddy calls the “introduction” has anything to do with the first section of the “boxes.” The falcon is sitting in a tree “for drye as whit as chalk”
(490), a detail possibly suggested by the Epistola Presbyteri Johanninis,13 but certainly not functional in the later narrative.

Of course the clearest indication of the Squire’s penchant for the exotic is his choice of an Eastern setting—"Sarray, in the land of Tartarye" (9). Dorothy Bethurum has summarized what was known of the realm of Cathay from such sources as Marco Polo’s account of his travels, or from the travel account of Sir John Mandeville.14 Interest in the East in Chaucer’s day was real, and there were travelers’ reports to stimulate that interest. But travelers’ reports, fascinating though they might have been, hardly qualified as equal in value to the matter of Rome. C.S. Lewis, in The Discarded Image, stressed the fact that Hector, Aeneas, Alexander, or Caesar, or, we might add, Troilus and Theseus, are far more representative heroes of the Middle Ages than the knights errant of romance and ballad. “It looks as if the Romances and such Ballads [as The Wife of Usher’s Well] were in the Middle Ages, as they have remained ever since, truancies, refreshments, things that can live only on the margin of the mind, things whose very charm depends on their not being ‘of the centre.’”15

While one might debate the fact that the knights of the Round Table are not “of the centre,” there can be no question that those of Cambyuskan are not there at all. Now the Squire’s choice of such exotic subject matter is of some importance. Robert O. Payne has quite properly called attention to the Prologue to The Legend of Good Women as a text establishing Chaucer’s views on the means a poet uses to produce a good poetry.16 Since we know that the Squire is a poet—“He koude songes make and wel endite” (A 95)—it is worth quoting the relevant passage cited by Payne:

> Thanne mote we to bokes that we fynde,  
> Though whiche that olde thynges ben in mynde,  
> And to the doctrine of these olde wyse  
> Yeven credence, in every skylful wyse,  
> And trowen on these olde aproved storyes. . . .  
> And if that olde bokes weren aweye,  
> Yloren were of remembrance the keye.  
> Wel oughte us thanne on olde bokes leve,  
> There as there is non other assay by preve.  
> (LGW, G 17-28)

As Payne says, “the books in which the past is preserved for remembrance are not simply storehouses. They have—whether rightly or

wrongly—selected and evaluated the past. . . . they supply the remembrance with a history unified and significantly ordered." Chaucer stressed that this historical matter which he derived from books was the fit subject for poetry rather than verbal reports because at least you can believe what you read in books. To paraphrase the opening lines of the *Legend of Good Women*, no one living in the England of Chaucer’s day had brought back an eye-witness report of the “joye in hevene and peyne in helle” (G 2); the only authority we can trust in such cases is the old books on the subject. Chaucer reiterates the point later in the Prologue:

But wherfore that I spak, to yeve credence
To bokes olde and don hem reverence,
Is for men shulde autorites believe,
There as there lyth non other assay by preve.

(G 81-84)

As we have long known, authority, not experience, “is right ynogh” for Chaucer. Mandeville’s *Travels*, albeit fascinating reading, hardly fall into that category.

There are two specific indications within the tale that the Squire’s purpose in choosing his novel setting was in fact to outdo the more traditional Arthurian romances. Some time ago B. J. Whiting pointed out the parallels between the Squire’s Tale and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, particularly in the descriptions of the opening feasts at the beginning of the two poems and the entry of the stranger to the feast, as well as the fact that “one who read widely in Arthurian romance would come away from no other work with as clear and concentrated an impression of Gawain’s courtesy as he would have after putting down Gawain.” The reference to Gawain’s courtesy, of course, is to the Squire’s assertion that the stranger knight’s message was of “so heigh reverence and obeisaunce . . . That Gawayn, with his olde curteisy, / Though he were comen ayeyn out of Fairye, / Ne koude hym nat amende with a word” (F 93, 95-97). Whiting’s study has demonstrated that Gawain, whatever else he may have been, was certainly a paragon of courtesy; anyone more courteous would be a paragon indeed. Similarly, the reference to Lancelot (F

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17. Ibid., p. 64.
sustains that the dances and "dissymulynges" at Cambyseskan's court outdid those at Arthur's. How the Squire viewed his father's tale is not altogether clear. Two direct quotes (cf. A 1761 and F 479, also A 3041-43 and F 593-94) do suggest that he had it very much in mind, possibly with the same object in view.

Originality in the choice of subject matter, whether to surpass other tales or for its own sake, was not, as we have already seen from the evidence of the Prologue to the Legend of Good Women, a virtue in Chaucer's eyes. Nor was it one of the medieval poetic virtues. Inventio, the first of the five divisons of rhetoric in the classical period, had considerably decreased in importance by the time of Geoffrey of Vinsauf's Poetria nova in the thirteenth century. In one of the first modern studies recognizing the importance of a knowledge of rhetoric for the study of Chaucer, J. M. Manly proposed that the reason for the lack of emphasis on inventio by medieval rhetoricians was that "Practically everything had already been said. All the tales had been told, all the songs had been sung, all the thoughts of the mind and feelings of the heart expressed. The modern writer, they held, could only tell a thrice-told tale, only echo familiar sentiments." Anyone reading Manly's essay would agree with Payne that Manly did not like rhetoric or rhetoricians. Thus his explanation, though still accepted, must be greeted with a good deal of scepticism. C. S. Lewis, and more recently, Robert M. Jordan, have suggested much more positive explanations for the medieval fascination with "thrice-told tales." Jordan insists that medieval Christian aesthetic theory begins with the same postulate as did Plato: "The postulate of finitude, that is, of a perfection [in the universe] which is knowable and divisible, is central to Plato's mode of thought and has relatively little to do with direct observation and measurement of the

21. The reference to Lancelot involves a "modesty topos," to which I shall return later. Pearsall (UTQ, 34 [1964], 87) believes that the "implicit comparison between [the Squire] and Lancelot ("and he is deed") gives to the Squire's assumed modesty more than a tinge of fatuously admiring self-regard." Haller, on the other hand, accepts the modesty at face value, but does support my view that "he is modeling himself, and his tale, on the old romances" (MP, 62 [1965], 289). The problem, again, is one of tone.

22. M. Neville, "The Function of the Squire's Tale in the Canterbury Scheme," JEGP, 50 (1951), 167-79, feels that the Squire is trying to please the "gentils" as did his father, and attempts to do so by doubling or trippling the Knight's effects. In Miss Neville's view, the Squire is holding to the "olde curteisye" of Gawain and Lancelot, an attitude which appeals to the Franklin.


24. Payne, p. 43.


cosmos.”

Given a finite knowable universe, it becomes the function of the artist “not to express himself and not to express a new, unique way of viewing reality, but to shape and adorn the materials of his art” so that reality might be more clearly perceived. Or, as Lewis puts it, “The achieved perfection was already there. The only difficulty was to make an adequate response.”

Even to his exotic subject matter the Squire’s response is hardly adequate. He himself seems, at first glance, to be aware of the problem. Quite early in his tale, when it comes time to describe the beauty of Canacee, the Squire demurs as follows:

But for to telle yow al hir beautee,
It lyth nat in my tonge, n’yn my konnyng;
I dar nat undertake so heigh a thyng.
Myn English eek is insufficient.
It moste been a rethor excellent,
That koude his colours longynge for that art,
If he sholde hire discryven every part.
I am noon swich, I moot speke as I can.

(34-41)

We must not take this statement at face value, however. Like lines 278-90, invoking Lancelot, this is a “modesty topos,” couched in the form of an occupatio, a figure used, by the way, “ad jocum excitandum,” according to Geoffrey of Vinsauf. Geoffrey defines occupatio as the color of rhetoric used “when we say that we do not want to say what we are saying.” Manly noted that this figure was particularly prevalent in the Squire’s Tale, and cited as examples the passage above, the reference to Lancelot, and the Squire’s refusal to describe the birthday feast held by Cambysusan. D. A. Pearsall has pointed out that “Not describing feasts is one of the more time-consuming activities of the medieval romancer,” but he feels that the Squire goes well beyond the limits of convention in the number of reasons he offers for not telling of this particular feast. Haller, on the other hand accepts the list of reasons at face value, but suggests

27. Jordan, p. 16.
28. Ibid., p. 9.
29. Lewis, p. 204. Payne stresses as well that the response was also meant to include the past: “As a body of source material and as a significant process, the past was immediately available to be amplified and animated in the best art so that it might become a part of present moral experience” (p. 81).
31. Manly, PBA, 12 (1926), 282.
32. Pearsall, UTQ, 31 (1964), 85. For a general discussion of the modesty topos, see Curtius, pp. 83-85, 407-13. Those wishing to learn what the feasts were like may consult William E. Mead, The English Medieval Feast (London, 1931). (It has recently been reprinted.)
that "since the Squire is yet to begin any narration, his use of the figure serves little purpose except to show that he knows it and can use it. It is [a] set piece which serves to delay the beginning of the story another thirteen lines." This seems to me the more valid criticism. The Squire does indeed know the figure. He uses it in at least two other places, once in beginning the descriptio of the peregrine falcon—

For ther nas nevere yet no man on lyve,  
If that I koude a faucon wel discryve,  
That herde of swich another of fairnesse,  
As wel of plumage as of gentillesse  
Of shap, of al that myghte yrekened be.  

(423-27)

This parallels the non-description of Canacee. And he uses it once within the tale of the falcon itself, where it is used somewhat more appropriately. There the falcon, on hearing that she and her love must part, says,

Wher me was wo, that is no questioun;  
I kan nat make of it discrisioun;  
For o thyng dar I tellen boldely,  
I knowe what is the peyne of deeth therby. . . .  

(579-82)

I have said that the assessment of romances involves us in a determination of tone. The Squire's use of the rhetorical figure of occupatio will serve as an excellent instance of the problem. It will be instructive to return for the moment to his first disclaimer of poetic ability and analyze the reason he gives for not presenting just such a descriptio as he has already given for Canacee's father Cambyuskan. For here we may particularly feel the tone of voice we are to respond to in the Squire's Tale. He first tells us that neither his "tonge" nor his "konnyng" is adequate to his task. Of his actual lack of skill we have already had some indication; yet it is doubtful that a writer using a modesty topos is, in fact, modest. As for the Squire's "tonge," it seems at least possible that he is referring to his language, particularly the English language, which he tells us two lines later "is insufficient" for so "heigh a thyng" as the description of a lady. One wonders whether his French, still the language of court,

33. MP, 62 (1965), 288.
34. See also the "drunk scene" which opens Pt. Two: "Hire dremes shul nat now been told for me" (357).
35. As Haller says, "as with all such modesty in poets, it serves to call the reader's attention to the skill which he does indeed show" (p. 287).
as the Prioress knew, was felt to be sufficient for a _descriptio_ of a lady in the high style of poetry.\(^{36}\)

The hint of snobbery here is more than borne out by the numerous sneering references to the speculations of the "lewed peple" on the nature of the marvelous gifts (189-262). These speculations are given at some length and include a deal of learned lore, but all couched in a markedly supercilious tone.\(^{37}\) The crowd's murmurings are like those of a swarm of bees as they "maden skiles after hir fantasies" (202-6), their talk is repeatedly called "janglyng" (220, 257, 261); in fact, their entire activity is summed up as meaningless!

Of sondry doutes thus they jangle and trete,
As lewed peple demeth comunly
Of thynges that been maad moore subtilly
Than they kan in hir lewednesse comprehende;
They demen gladly to the badder ende.

\(\text{(220-24)}\)

Furthermore, this snobbery is laced with a good dose of anti-intellectualism.\(^{38}\) The Squire reports that some of the "prees" offered as possible sources of explanation for the magic mirror the writings of Ibn al -Haitham, called in Latin Alhazen, his translator Witelo, and Aristotle.\(^{39}\) These are the writers to cite on "queynte mirours" and "perspectives," says the Squire, "As knownen they that han hir bookes herd" (234-35). Heard not too attentively at that, for the Squire is not even sufficiently interested in matters scientific to know how metal is tempered (236-46). One would think that at least on that subject he, as a warrior, would take more than a passing interest. It is clear that as far as the Squire is concerned, the wonderful gifts are simply too subtle for the most advanced learning of the ordinary folk; "he assumes that the wonders will be self-explanatory to the gentils, though they remain, in his story, meaningless and useless paraphernalia."\(^{40}\) The proper, off-hand, "gentil" approach to the _exotica_ of romance must be that of Cambyuskan, whose casual response we have already noted.

Returning to the other aspects of tone in the opening modesty _topos_, we may note that it closes with a clear reference to the art of

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36. On the other hand, see Chaucer's own disclaimer, _Troilus and Criseyde_, IV, 799-805.

37. Joyce Peterson goes so far as to make the Squire's snobbery "a lesser manifestation" of his "sin," in basing his morality "on a distinction between vulgarity and elegance," but this seems carrying things a bit far. See her discussion, _Chaucer_, 5 (1970), 68-70.

38. On this point see Fearsall, _UTQ_, 34 (1964), 87-88 and Haller, ibid, 290.


40. Haller, p. 290.
rhetoric, of which we have said a good deal already. The Squire disclaims knowledge of the proper "colours longyng for that art" for describing a lady. Merely on the evidence of the other instances of the color occupatio that we have already noted, this disclaimer is suspect. An even clearer indication that the Squire is in fact quite familiar with the colors of rhetoric is his reference to the Horatian injunction, a rhetorical commonplace by the Middle Ages, that a speaker's aspect should accord with the words of his speech. In describing the speech of the stranger knight who presents the wonderful gifts, the Squire tells us that

And, for his tale sholde seme the bettre,  
Accordant to his wordes was his cheere,  
As techeth art of speche hem that it leere.  

(102-4) 41

He then goes on to make the rather forced paranomasia on the word "style" which, as Haller says, "was doubtless as embarrassing in the fourteenth century as it is now." 42 Clearly the Squire is not only acquainted with the colors of rhetoric, but proud of that acquaintance.

We need not assume that the other pilgrims missed this point. Of particular interest is the Franklin's response to this occupatio. In the Prologue to his tale, the Franklin uses exactly the same figure, with obvious, heavy irony. After excusing himself for his "rude speche" (not his colloquial English, be it noted), he too disclaims any knowledge of rhetoric, and then goes on to place heavy emphasis on the words "colors of rhetoric," even to the point of using a pun of his own.

Colours ne knowe I none, withouten drede,  
But swiche colours as growen in the mede,  
Or elles swiche as men dye or peynte. 
Colours of rethoryk been to me queynte;  
My spirit feeleth noght of swich mateere.  

(F 723-27)

Nor is the Franklin telling the truth any more than was the Squire. Benjamin Harrison, counting seventy different figures of rhetoric used in the course of the Franklin's Tale, conclusively disapproved the Franklin's lack of rhetorical expertise. 43 Perhaps the Franklin's aping of the Squire in his use of this figure is a result of his admir-

41. For an example of such a teacher's instruction, see Geoffrey of Vinsauf's Documentum de arte versificandi, II, 3, 171 (Faral, p. 318).
42. MP, 62 (1965), 290. Haller cites Matthew of Vendôme's Ars versificatoria, III, 9 (Faral, p. 169), for a discussion of this figure. For examples of the other figures of rhetoric used by the Squire, see Haller, passim.
tion for the young man,\textsuperscript{44} though I find it hard to believe that he would have been insensitive to the Squire's snobbery. I would argue that the interruption is deliberate,\textsuperscript{45} possibly to save the Squire from further entangling himself in a tale he was manifestly unable to unfold, but possibly also because he wished to set both the matter of true eloquence and also true gentility straight.\textsuperscript{46} The Franklin says that he admires the Squire's eloquence (678), yet he seems to be trying to outdo him in the use of colors of rhetoric, which the Squire handled as badly as he has handled the exotic elements in his tale.\textsuperscript{47}

The Franklin would have equal reason to offer a different definition of the concept of gentilesse, which the Squire has handled equally badly.\textsuperscript{48} The term begins to appear only in Part Two of the Tale, though the handling of it accords with the snobbery we have already noted as present in Part One. We are first told that the peregrine falcon is undescribable "As wel of plumage as of gentilesse" (426). Canacee, perceiving the hawk's pain, wonders as she waits under the tree with her skirt held out for the hawk to drop into it, whether the hawk is suffering "for sorwe of deeth or los of love? / For, as I trowe, this be causes two / That causen most a gentil herte wo" (450-52). After the falcon has shrieked, fallen from the tree, and missed Canacee's lap, she revives, complimenting Canacee with the much-used line "That pitee renneth soone in gentil herte" (479) as


\textsuperscript{45} As support for this theory, note that the Squire is interrupted shortly after the beginning of a new section of his tale, at the end, or near the end, of a "till" clause. Chaucer's tale of Sir Thopas likewise is interrupted at the beginning of the "second fit," at or near the end of a "till" clause. I am indebted to Robert E. Kaske for pointing out this correspondence. For a contrary opinion, see M. Neville, \textit{JEGP}, 50 (1951), 167ff. Most recently Charles F. Duncan, Jr. has also argued for the Franklin's interruption as deliberate. See "'Straw for Youre Gentilesse': The Gentle Franklin's Interruption of the Squire," \textit{ChauR}, 5 (1970), 161-64.

\textsuperscript{46} That he does not do so has recently become more apparent. See Peck, and Alan T. Gaylord, "The Promises in the Franklin's Tale," \textit{ELH}, 31 (1964), 331-65.

\textsuperscript{47} See, in addition to those examples cited above, the ridiculous \textit{prosopopoeia}, or personification, of the figure of sleep with his "galpyng mouth" (347-56), cited by Haller, \textit{MP}, 62 (1965), 290-91; or the misunderstanding of the Horation injunction not to delay too long before reaching the "knot" of a tale (401-8), discussed by Haller, p. 291.

\textsuperscript{48} What \textit{gentilesse} means in Chaucer has recently been discussed \textrightarrow D. S. Brewer, "Class distinction in Chaucer," \textit{Spec}, 43 (1968), 290-305, especially 297ff. With respect to the Squire's snobbery and the conclusions reached later in this paper, it is interesting to note that Brewer feels that "It is probably because the Knight and the Parson fulfill so well their \textit{functional} ideal, rather than for any \textit{gentilesse}, that they seem to have no class-feeling, and are no respecters of persons" (303).
explanation for her intuitive perception. She goes on to reiterate that only “gentil herte kitheth gentillesse” (483), and then tells a tale of gentilesse and love which concludes with a long exemplum illustrating that even gentilesse is no protection against “newefangelnesse” in love (600-20), as a prelude to the disclosure that the peregrine’s lover, the tercelet, had forsaken her for a kite.

The exemplum as presented by the Squire is a complicated muddle of Book III, metrum 2 of Boethius’ Consolation of Philosophy.49 Boethius’ poem celebrates Nature’s use of the fair chain of Love to induce all created beings to seek their proper end. For example, says Lady Philosophy, no matter how well you feed a caged wild bird, it will immediately leave the cage and foul its unnatural food the moment it has a chance for freedom. For men the equivalent of the unnatural food is “moneye, or honours.” These Man must learn from the example of the animal world to spurn. The sententia to be drawn from the exemplum is that “&alle thynyng, repeirynge to his knyde, / Gladeth hymself” (608-9). What the Squire does with the exemplum, however, is to turn it on its head. The tercelet, who only “semed welle of alle gentillesse” (505), like all men loved “of propre kynde newefangelnesse, / As briddes doon that men in cages fede” (610-11). The Squire’s peregrine is saying, in other words, that Nature (“propre kynde”) causes birds, and men, to be fickle, or at any rate, not to love the “sugre, hony, breed and milk” (614) with which she identifies herself, preferring instead “novelries” (619). More importantly, “No gentillesse of blood ne may hem bynde” (620).

There are a number of problems here. In the first place, the peregrine has identified herself with the false goods of Boethius.50 Secondly, she has turned the exemplum “up-so-doun” by saying that the bird’s natural food—“wormes”—is an example of “newefangelnesse,” when in fact in the original exemplum it was an example of the traditional, the appropriate, and thus the true road to happiness. Thirdly, she has violated her own principle that “gentil herte kitheth gentillesse.” Either she is “gentil,” but failed to recognize that the tercelet was not (remember, he only had the “appearance” of gentilesse, and besides, his choice of a low-bred bird seems proof that he was in fact a “churl”), or she is not “gentil,” a patent absurdity since the Squire already has told us that she is a paragon of gentility. Finally, if gentilesse is no guarantee of steadfastness in love, what earthly good is it? It is this point, it seems to me, that the Franklin picks up and tries to set right. Whatever other errors his characters make, they are

50. So indicated by Haller, p. 292. I do not draw quite the same conclusions from the Squire’s exemplum that Haller does, nor do I see the case as quite so rigidly drawn as does Peterson (ChauR, 5 [1970], 72-74).
genteelly steadfast to an abstract value, even though it is not the abstract value of love.

By now it should be sufficiently apparent that the Squire's Tale is characterized by disorder and a taste for exoticism. It remains only to indicate what Chaucer may have intended the tale to represent, to suggest the general sententia of which it may be an exemplum. In the first of two chapters in The Waning of the Middle Ages entitled "Verbal and Plastic Expression Compared," Huizinga proposed that "In the poetry of the fifteenth century the relation of the essential to the accident is reversed. The poet is generally free as regards his principal subject; something novel is expected from him. As to accessories, however, he is tied down by tradition; there is a conventional way of expressing each detail, from which, though he may be unconscious of it, he can hardly deviate." 51 This appears to be precisely the situation we find in the Squire's Tale. The subject matter is novel and, to reiterate, is leading nowhere. The details are conventional but handled without grace or a feeling for their fitness in a particular context. This is precisely the reverse of what we have been taught to see in the Knight's Tale, where virtually every descriptio, every occupatio, is organized as carefully as are the structured elements of Theseus' lists to provide "a noble storie. / And worthy for to drawn to memorie" (A 3111-12), precisely what Chaucer had said, in the Prologue to the Legend of Good Women, should be the task of the artist.

We are seeing here, then, an example of formlessness where form in life no longer follows function. To be specific, the Knight's "campaign ribbons" refer to a series of crusading campaigns which were among the last to be fought "in his Lordes werre" (to remove the Chaucerian ambiguity) under the original ideals of chivalry. In an essay on "Chivalry and its Place in History," F.J.C. Hearnshaw cited Chaucer's Knight's ideals—"Trouthe and honour, fredom and curteisie" (A 46)—as those of chivalry at its best, in the period from 1100 to 1300. 52 Hearnshaw proposed that the crusading ideal of aiding the helpless, and fighting the Infidel, was in fact a practical solution to the problem of what to do with the feudal knight whose function as a military police force preventing anarchy within Christendom had atrophied. The first chivalric orders were those of the Hospitallers, the Templars, and the Teutonic Knights, with the last of whom Chaucer's Knight apparently had served ("Ful ofte tyme he hadde the bord bigonne / Aboven alle nacions in Pruce" [A 52-54]). To the first goal of chivalry

51. Waning of the Middle Ages, p. 259.
was later added the idea of “gallantry” making the distinctive qualities of the chivalric knight in “the Golden Age of Chivalry . . . at their best, honour, piety, and love; at their worst, ferocity, superstition, and lust.”53 No one pretends that the ideal was ever realized more than occasionally in practice. Yet quite evidently up until the end of the thirteenth century in France, and into the reign of Edward III in England, these ideals were still operative. One of the last figures to seek to continue the crusading spirit in fact was Pierre de Lusignan, king of Cyprus, who instituted the Order of the Sword in collaboration with his idealistic chancellor, Phillipe de Mézières, and toured Europe seeking volunteers for a new crusade against the Infidel. Chaucer’s Knight joined that crusade, for he was present at the sack of Alexandria in 1365. It ended in dismal failure, however; and Philippe’s hero Pierre de Lusignan was assassinated soon after, in 1369. From then on, the crusades were dead.

If the Knight was one of the last of the defensores fidei, his son was certainly cast in the mold of one of the “new men” of the court of Richard II. His “crusade” was the miserable affair led by the bishop of Norwich for purely political reasons, ostensibly against the Clementists in northern France, but more particularly to relieve the French pressure on Flanders. In neither aim was it successful.54 The new recruits to the expedition, consisting largely of London apprentices and others of the same sort, could hardly be considered “gentil,” and in fact are described by Professor McKisack as “an undisciplined rabble, interested only in loot.”55 The Squire’s participation in armed raids, or “chyvachie / In Flaundres, in Artoys, and Pycardie” (A 55-86) is a good example of much of the highly unchivalrous fighting of the Hundred Years’ War.

Arthur B. Ferguson, in his book The Indian Summer of English Chivalry, suggests that “the vitality of the chivalric tradition depended upon the preservation of those points of contact between the ideal and the actual in the world of affairs. As soon as they were broken, the current of reality that is necessary for the life of the social ideal ceased to flow.”56 One means of maintaining that contact had been the function of the crusading knight. Hearnshaw cites as the causes of the decline of chivalry the advent of gunpowder, which unquestionably changed the nature of war, the increased use of indentured

53. Ibid., p. 18.
54. For a full description of the campaign, see May McKisack, The Fourteenth Century 1307-1399 (Oxford, 1959), pp. 427-33; also Alan Gaylord, “A 85-88: Chaucer’s Squire and the Glorious Campaign,” PMASAL, 45 (1959), 341-61. I am indebted to McCall’s comment (ChauR, 1 [1966], 109) for calling this detail to my attention.
55. McKisack, p. 432.
knights, particularly by Edward III, in place of the undisciplined feudal levies (the disastrous French defeats at Crécy, Poitiers, and later Agincourt stemmed largely from the continued French reliance on the feudal knights rather than professional indentured knights backed by efficient bowmen and foot-soldiers), and finally (and this is of particular interest considering "the wordes of the Frankeleyn to the Squier") the indiscriminate knighting of persons not "gentil" by birth, such as "wealthy burgesses (who were prepared to pay heavily for the titular honour.)" With the loss of its function, "Chivalry had thus become a sort of game, whose participants, in order to forget reality, turned to the illusion of a brilliant, heroic existence. From their earliest youth the aspirants were trained in the rules of this elaborate social convention, which for them was more absorbing than the athletic contests of modern youth." The results of this training, heavily dependent on the romances proliferating in England from the mid-fourteenth century on, can be seen in Chaucer's Squire. One is tempted to believe that Chaucer, like Shakespeare, perceived the futility of Richard II's attempt to reassert the full panoply of a feudal court. Certainly he did not build lists for Richard's tournaments for very long. Yet such speculation can be, after all, only speculation. What is certain is that the Squire's Tale contains in miniature many of the symptoms of the waning of the middle ages.

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57. Chivalry, p. 25. See also Raymond L. Kilgour, The Decline of Chivalry as Shown in the French Literature of the Late Middle Ages (Cambridge, Mass., 1937), who also notes the breakdown of chivalry caused by the extension of knighthood to the bourgeoisie. "The chief complaint in the fifteenth century seemed to be that the state was too lax in punishing the assumption by the bourgeois class of knighthly dress and ornaments, indicating that chivalry had lost most of its prestige and was trying to maintain its position by certain peculiarities of garb" (pp. 31-32). Is the Squire's gay costume then so innocuous?

58. Ibid., p. 8. See also Huizinga, ch. 5.

59. See, for example, the life of Youth in The Parlement of the Thre Ages, ed. M. Y. Offord, EETS, 246 (Oxford, 1959), who, after he has jousted and hawked, says that

Than kayre to the courte that I come fro,
With ladys full louely to lappyn in myn armes,
And clyp thaym and kysse thaym and comforthe myn hert;
And than with damesels dere to daunsen in thaire chambirs;
Riche Romance to rede and reken the sothe
Of kempes and of conquerours, of kynges full noble,
How th[a]y wirchipe and welthe wanne in thaire lyues.

(Thornton, 11. 246-52)