

## **"It lyth nat in my tonge, n'yn my konnyng": Chaucer's Squire's Instruction in Virtue and Eloquence**

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### **Abstract**

*Scholars have long analyzed Chaucer's use of rhetoric in The Canterbury Tales in regards to either stylistic or historical concerns. Much of the discussion, then, only touches on the superficial nature of rhetoric in The Canterbury Tales, for those concerned with style examine the tropes employed by Chaucer, and those concerned with history seek to prove which rhetorical sources with which Chaucer was familiar. However, discussions of Chaucer and rhetoric need to return to the key debate in which rhetoric has been involved since its inception in ancient Greece: the debate between philosophy and rhetoric. In this paper, I examine the relationship between philosophy and language as presented in the Knight's use of rhetoric and the Squire's use of rhetoric in their respective tales, specifically through the rhetorical device occupatio. The Knight imparts both his philosophy on nobility and rhetorical eloquence to his son through the occupationes in his tale, and the Squire shows his humble attempt at acquiring his father's philosophy and eloquence through the telling of his own tale.*

“Really, now you ask me,” said Alice, very much confused, “I don’t think—”  
“Then you shouldn’t talk,” said the Hatter.

—Carroll, *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* (66)

In one letter to a friend, the famed Italian humanist Francesco Petrarch explores the eloquent expression of the virtuous man’s virtuous thoughts. To Petrarch, a man virtuous in action and in speech will lead to personal improvement, which in turn leads to a stronger society. Petrarch argues that thought and speech have a mutually dependent relationship, since while the mind guides and adorns speech, speech “declares what the mind is like” (15). This symbiotic relationship, though, does not happen by chance. Rather, the virtuous man must carefully manage mind and speech both; or, as Petrarch writes, the “mind may learn to be reasonably severe in managing speech [while] speech may learn to be truthfully magnificent in expressing the mind” (15). Eloquence, then, becomes Petrarch’s recommendation for the virtuous man. This eloquence comes not only from the writings of Cicero and other classical rhetoricians (who Petrarch believes merely teach ornate speaking) but also through the improvement of the mind. Indeed, Petrarch thinks ornamental rhetoric creates speech that is charming, sweet, and lofty, but rarely leads to speech that is also grave, wise, and consistent (15). Furthermore, even though virtuous actions can demonstrate a man’s personal virtue as well as inspire his acquaintances to virtue, virtuous speech can inspire people to virtue both now *and* in the future, since speech can be recorded in writing. Finally, in a seemingly last-ditch effort to sway his audience, Petrarch notes that eloquence—this careful management of thought and speech—benefits the self.

In his *Canterbury Tales*, Geoffrey Chaucer appears to view the relationship between rhetoric and philosophy in the same way as Petrarch, a contemporary whom Chaucer revered. Of course, this is no surprise. Chaucer spent much time in Italy in the service of King Edward III, and David Wallace speculates that, in Chaucer’s trips to Italy, he “gained sophisticated, first-hand knowledge of the social and political settings from which the writings of Dante, Boccaccio, and Petrarch had emerged” (36). William Rossiter agrees, noting that Chaucer not only translated two of Petrarch’s works but also may have been influenced by Petrarch in other aspects of his writing (2). Perhaps a Petrarchan influence extends to Chaucer’s own use of rhetoric, since Chaucer shows a concern with the connection between the thoughts, words, and actions of men, especially as evidenced by the Knight and his Tale in relation to the Squire and his Tale.

However, much of the scholarship on Chaucer’s use of rhetoric tends

to focus on rhetoric as a style guide rather than as a means to convey ethical ideas to others. While Chaucer's use of rhetoric has been studied for centuries, the first modern (and most frequently cited) study of Chaucer's use of rhetoric is John Manly's "Chaucer and the Rhetoricians" (1926).<sup>1</sup> Manly asserts that Chaucer relied on rhetoric early in his writing career as a stylistic device for either expanding or abbreviating his text; however, Chaucer later used his imagination rather than rhetoric as a means to expand upon his ideas. Manly, then, concludes that Chaucer was familiar with treatises on rhetoric, especially since he uses several rhetorical figures within his writing, and he surmises that Chaucer may have been familiar with the three main classical texts of rhetoric that were used in the Middle Ages: Pseudo-Cicero's *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, Cicero's *De Inventione*, and Horace's *Ars Poetica*. In addition, Chaucer may have used two contemporary rhetoricians: Matthieu de Vendome and Gaufred de Vinsauf (Manly 273). Manly does acknowledge that this is merely an assumption, for there is no proof of Chaucer's knowledge of these rhetoricians (aside from the reference to Vinsauf in the "Nun's Priest's Tale"), and it is this assumption that is at the crux of the debate regarding Chaucer's use of rhetoric. However, Manly feels quite comfortable with making this assumption since Chaucer demonstrates such a vast knowledge of several subjects and, at the time of his writing of the article, there was more proof to indicate that Chaucer had been educated at the inns of court, which was a highly liberal education (272).

In a direct response to Manly, Murphy reports that "concrete evidence of the teaching of formal rhetoric in English universities does not appear until 1431, while lower schools apparently taught no rhetoric until the fifteenth century" (2). Murphy argues that Chaucer and his contemporaries most likely followed a grammatical tradition instead of a rhetorical one, since there is very little evidence for a rhetorical tradition in England during Chaucer's lifetime (4). Even though Chaucer could have encountered rhetoric through his reading of continental works, Murphy argues, instead, that Chaucer must have "possessed only a very general concept of rhetoric"

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1. Most current scholarship follows Manly's lead as viewing Chaucer's use of rhetoric as a creative tool to more effectively reach his audience. Like Manly, Russell sees Chaucer as using rhetoric creatively, as Chaucer seems to dance the line regarding the practical use of rhetoric and the infamous misconceptions of rhetoric (53). Similarly, Payne views Chaucer as moving from the prevalent contemporary concept of a two-way relationship between idea and poem to the more classical idea, an idea that first began with Aristotle, of the three-way relationship between idea and poem to the more classical idea, an idea that first began with Aristotle, of the three-way relationship between speaker, language, and audience (272). This model, as Payne sees it, makes for a more "organic" poem since the speaker takes account of his language in order to best influence his audience (285).

(8). If Chaucer did read of these rhetorical figures, he may have read of them only from “the ordinary grammar texts or from his French models, without ever resorting to rhetorical treatises or the medieval manuals” (15).

Although at this point it is impossible to conclude which rhetoric texts Chaucer was familiar with, if he were familiar with any at all, a general discussion of Chaucer’s use of rhetoric may still be beneficial. However, this general discussion needs to extend beyond a mere stylistic examination of Chaucer’s use of rhetorical figures. Rather, this discussion needs to return to the key debate in which rhetoric has been involved since rhetoric’s inception in ancient Greece: the debate between dialectic and rhetoric. Largely, the debate centers on the superiority of the one over the other.<sup>2</sup> Confronting scholars like Murphy, Rita Copeland asserts that medieval understanding of rhetoric extended beyond “narrow technical rules” (124), since Chaucer and other medieval writers did not see philosophy and rhetoric in binary opposition, but, rather, “they worked with that binary, using rhetoric as the site from which they would negotiate the conflicting claims over the authority of knowledge and the power of representation” (125). Rhetoric, then, serves to allow thought, through language, to reach a wider audience: “it is through rhetoric that one thinks about language, truth, form, embodiment, time, history, intention, authority, the social construction of meaning, and the very human problem of being in the world” (139). Rhetoric, through language, can give form to philosophical thought.

While rhetoric certainly plays a large part in the entirety of *The Canterbury Tales*, the relationship between the Knight’s and Squire’s use of rhetoric demonstrates quite clearly the connection between philosophy and language. Rather than severing the ties between philosophy and rhetoric, Chaucer demonstrates the link between the two through both the Knight’s and the Squire’s use of rhetoric, particularly the rhetorical figure *occupatio*, or false omission. For example, the Knight uses *occupatio* seventeen lines into his tale:

And certes, if it nere to long to heere,  
I wolde have toold yow fully the manere  
How wonnen was the regne of Femenye  
By Theseus and by his chivalrye.

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2. In Plato’s *Gorgias*, Socrates comments on the lack of ethics in Sophistic rhetoric, especially in regards to the potential corruption of the youth that can occur through the Sophistic use of language. He argues that a rhetor does not need to know the Truth about the topic at hand; he merely needs to know the best way to persuade his audience (458c-459c).

[And certainly, if it were not too long to hear,  
I would have told you fully the manner  
How the reign of Femininity was won  
By Theseus and by his Chivalry.] (I.875-78)

Chaucer says he will not tell of the story, but he does, and the tale continues for eleven lines. This device is a particular favorite of Chaucer's, as he can quickly provide the full details of a seemingly tangential tale without overwhelming his audience. Often, though, these secondary narratives serve to highlight a character trait or to heighten the pathos of a scene.

As the chief educator of the Squire, the Knight instructs his son in the ways of being a knight. For the Knight, a true knight is one who is virtuous in both word and deed. The Knight, then, can be seen as an educator in the art of rhetoric, particularly when rhetoric is viewed in a Petrarchan sense of control of the mind and speech, to his son the Squire. The Knight stresses the importance of control in terms of thought and action through his narrative, but he further emphasizes this theme of control in thought through his own use of *occupatio*, in which he uses the device to stress a knightly virtue as a quick aside so as to not overwhelm his audience. The Squire, as a knight-in-training, lacks the eloquence of his father. He rambles his way through his tale, and he is unceremoniously interrupted by the Franklin, who graciously saves the audience of pilgrims from having to endure a seemingly ceaseless and wandering narrative. The Squire, unlike his father, lacks the ability to control his thoughts in an eloquent manner, and his failure is especially noticeable by his inept use of *occupatio*. The Squire says he will not tell of a topic, but instead of using *occupatio* correctly, he goes on at great length on the very topic he just promised not to tell, and often, the topic is one of opulence rather than virtue. The Knight imparts both his philosophy on nobility and rhetorical eloquence to his son through the *occupationes* in his tale, and the Squire shows his humble attempt at acquiring his father's philosophy and eloquence through the telling of his own tale.

### **"I wolde have toold yow...": The Knight's Instruction in Nobility and *Occupatio***

Chaucer scholars have long viewed Chaucer's Knight as a noble character, primarily centering on the Knight's virtuous disposition. Schofield nicely explains why the Knight has received such lavish praise from scholars when he writes that "[the Knight] was not simply a man of great

physical courage and brilliant achievement in war, but the embodiment of very high spiritual excellence” (35). The Knight, as many scholars have also noted, desires to extend his chivalric ideals to the rest of the world through the telling of his tale. Muscatine, when considering the structure, form, and meaning of the tale, submits that “the Knight’s Tale is essentially neither a story, nor a static picture, but a poetic pageant, and that all its materials are organized and contributory to a complex design expressing the nature of the noble life” (919). Furthermore, scholars also tend to agree that the Knight tries to create order within the world. Kahrl reads the Knight as celebrating “classical order in the chivalric world” (195). The Knight lives the very values he wishes his son to inherit: worthiness and wisdom.

Any reader of *The Canterbury Tales* would not have to go too far in order to see why the Knight has been described as a paragon of virtue. In the “General Prologue,” Chaucer highlights the Knight’s appreciation for virtue and chivalry within the first four lines of his description of the Knight:

A Knyght ther was, and that a worthy man,  
That fro the tyme that he first bigan  
To riden out, he loved chivalrie,  
Trouthe and honour, freedom and curteisie.

[A Knight there was, and he was a worthy man,  
That from the time that he first began  
To ride out, he loved chivalry,  
Truth and honor, freedom and courtesy.](I. 43-46)

Firstly, the Knight is a “worthy man” (I. 43), a word that Chaucer uses five times in some form to describe his Knight. This excessive use of the word *worthy* seems to indicate that the Knight comes from a class of aristocratic knights, and perhaps not a mercenary knight as Terry Jones reads him, since *worthy* seems to indicate that the Knight has earned the epithet. Furthermore, this Knight is worthy in that he has practiced the rules of chivalry since he first became a knight. Chaucer, thankfully, supplies his readers with his perception of the qualities of chivalry: “trouthe and honour, freedom and curteisie” (I. 46). The Knight celebrates key virtues that an officer of the peace, as many knights were, would encourage. Like the Parson, as Schofield notes, the Knight first practices what he preaches (35).

Chaucer then describes the battles in which the Knight has participated. No matter the Knight’s reason for entering into battle, whether as



a faithful follower of his lord or a self-serving mercenary, Chaucer uses the battles to further expound upon the Knight's worthiness. The Knight, again, is a worthy man when he fights in "his lords werre" [his lord's war] (I. 47), and in this war, he is "evere honoured for his worthynesse" (I. 50). He rode in more raids than any other "Cristen man so ofte of his degree" [Christian man of his degree so often] (I. 55), and he faithfully worked for his lord, which earned him a "sovereyn prys" [highest prize] (I. 67). Chaucer holds his Knight in such high esteem that he gives the Knight a great reputation amongst his peers.

But Chaucer has not finished elaborating on the Knight's worthiness. This Knight is also "wys" [wise] (I. 68) and "as meke as is a mayde" [as meek as a maid] (I. 69), and "[h]e nevere yet no vileynye ne sayde" [he never yet said any villainy] (I. 70). Chaucer concludes his description of the Knight's character with the oft-quoted "He was a verray, parfit gentil knyght" [He was a true, perfect gentle knight] (I. 72). The word *gentil* deserves the most attention here. The word is glossed as "noble" in the *Riverside Chaucer* (24), but the word extends beyond mere nobility on the battlefield or in the court. Peterson views the *gentillesse* of the Knight as "grounded in worthy deeds and spiritual values" (68). Terry Jones describes the *gentil* knight on more general terms, interpreting him as "a man of culture as well as a soldier" (11). Even though Jones believes that Chaucer's Knight operates as a mercenary, Chaucer's description of the Knight matches this general description of *gentillesse* that Jones provides. The Knight is clearly cultured, for he has traveled over Christendom in the service of his lord in order to protect the virtues of chivalry, and he clearly supports peace with his proper language, wisdom, and humility. If the Knight behaves in such a manner, then surely he would wish for his son, his own squire, to learn these true traits of knighthood. Chiefly, the Knight is concerned with noble thoughts and noble deeds, as evidenced by the content of his tale, but he also understands the importance of eloquence. Through his expert use of *occupatio*, the Knight can highlight his message of self-control without getting bogged down in the details of his tale all in an effort to teach his son how to show control in his speech.

Russell particularly emphasizes the connection between the "Knight's Tale" and the Knight's use of rhetoric. To Russell, "the *Knight's Tale* is manifestly the story told by a person who has ostentatiously embraced traditional chivalric virtues," which he wishes to impart to his son the Squire through the telling of the tale (100). Russell particularly emphasizes the words and deeds of the men in the "Knight's Tale," and he sees the *occupationes* in the tale as Chaucer's way to revise Boccaccio's *Teseida* so

that the Knight could stress both the irrational behavior of youth and the rational nature of adulthood (100). To Russell, the Knight employs *occupatio* so that the frivolous details of the Boccaccio's *Teseida* may be left far from the Knight's well-controlled tale. Russell seems to read the Knight as exacting a cold control over life.<sup>3</sup> The Knight certainly desires for control in the world, and one form of control is that between thoughts and words. Since the Knight desires to teach his son to be a virtuous Knight, he must teach his son both in the actions and eloquence of a Knight. He teaches the Squire the proper actions through the plot, as Russell observes, but the Knight both stresses his philosophy on nobility and teaches his son the importance of eloquence through his controlled *occupationes*.

The Knight, by my count, uses the trope eight times, while his son uses it only five times. The Knight's frequent use of *occupatio* allows him to tell the tale in full without compromising his main plot. Rather than completely omitting the details, he nicely provides his audience with a brief summary of the action that he will not elaborate on, so even though the Knight says he will not tell of it, he tells enough to satisfy his audience without ruining the message of his own tale. The Knight seems to employ *occupatio* on two main occasions. Firstly, the Knight uses the device to tell of a heroic venture or courtly life that does not quite fit with his overall message. This is the most frequent use of *occupatio* in the "Knight's Tale," and thus, the Knight can impart his philosophy of nobility as an earned rather than an inherited trait through eloquent asides. Secondly, the Knight employs *occupatio* in order to highlight the pathos of a scene, which demonstrates the Knight's awareness of his audience.

Throughout his tale, the Knight tells of peripheral heroic qualities via *occupationes* as a way to further instruct the Squire in the truly *gentil* life, and all of these *occupationes* concern Theseus's character in order not to detract from the main plot of Arcite and Palamon. The first *occupatio* within the tale belongs to this first type of *occupatio*, and it occurs seventeen lines into his tale. Here, the Knight refuses to describe Theseus's conquering of the Amazons (I. 875-85). The Knight says that he will not tell how Theseus won "the regne of Femenye" [the reign of Femininity] (I. 877), nor will he tell of the "grete bataille for the nones" [great battle of the time] (I. 879); he will not tell "how asseged was Ypolita" [how Hippolyta was as-

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3. Russell is not the only scholar to see the Knight as attempting to exert control over the action in the tale. Jones reads the Knight's use of *occupatio* in the tournament scene as a way to strip the tournament of "every vestige of chivalry or romance" (178). Helterman takes an even more cynical approach to the Knight's use of *occupatio* by reading the Knight's use of *occupationes* as a way to be truthful, a virtue adored by the Knight, while still exacting control in the world (504).



sailed] (I. 881), and he will not share the details about the "feste that was at hir weddyng" [feast that was at their wedding] (I. 883) or of "the tempest at hir hoom-comyng" [the tempest during their homecoming] (I. 884). Although he does not provide elaborate details on Theseus's conquest, the Knight does provide his audience with enough information so as to not leave his audience wanting more. Clearly, this scene has nothing to do with the story of Palamon and Arcite, but it does show a "heroic" venture of conquest. Even though he conquered a tribe of women (a questionable act even by medieval standards), and even though the deed causes the reader to question Theseus's martial abilities, the deed could still be read as heroic, for Theseus sought to conquer, and he did, and he also gained a renowned bride in the process. Of course, the Knight could gloss over this event so as to appease his audience (who would be familiar with Theseus's conquest of the Amazons) while still trying to uphold Theseus's nobility. Either way, the Knight paints a picture of a conquering hero, which serves as a description for his son, but he does not dwell on it so that he can focus on the Palamon and Arcite's plight.

The Knight uses *occupatio* to highlight the virtuous quality of loyal friendship through the quick note on the relationship between Theseus and Perotheus. Theseus loved his friend so much, that when Perotheus died, Theseus sought his friend in hell (I. 1198-1201). The Knight seems to suggest that a noble man would do anything for his friends, even venture to the depths of hell, and this quality further elaborates on the virtuous man that the Knight desires for his son to become. This swift mention of true friendship occurs immediately before the strife between Arcite and Palamon, and so the quarrel between the two knights is magnified. The Knight's brief reference of a good friendship provides a striking note of virtue within the current cacophonous strife in the tale.

The Knight again uses *occupatio* to stress Theseus's worthiness as a knight, which echoes the Knight's own worthiness (I. 2197-2207). The Knight describes Theseus as "this worthy knyght" (I. 2190), and even though this description happens a few lines before the actual *occupatio*, the details of the *occupatio* are concerned with Theseus's worthiness. The Knight omits the feast given before the tournament, but the Knight does so only so that he might move on with the plot. As the Squire later proves, one can wax on about feasting for far too long, for much happens at a feast, and so the Knight only gives the highlights. But the Knight must give the details of the feast, for the audience has not seen Theseus as a gracious host, which further elaborates on his virtuous character. Theseus provides minstrels and good service (I. 2197) and "grete yiftes to the meeste and

leeste” [great gifts to the most and least] (I. 2198) of his guests. Dancing, talk of love, and hunting animals also grace the feast, which provide entertainment for all, but through these events, knights can further display their proper knightly behavior. The Knight declares that even though he plans to make no mention of the feast, he does desire to give “th’effect” of the feast, which he quickly does. Like the other instances of *occupationes* involving Theseus, the Knight elaborates on another quality of noble worthiness that his son can learn to emulate.

In the final example of *occupatio* as a tool to expand on proper heroic behavior, the Knight does not discuss Emelye’s preparations to go to the temple of Diana (I. 2282-86). No mention of Theseus and his heroic deeds or worthiness is mentioned here. Instead, the Knight seems to be imparting another aspect of nobility that he holds important: modesty. Rather than going on about her preparations for the day, he simply tells his audience, “Hir body wessh with water of a welle. / But hou she dide hir ryte I dar nat telle, / But it be any thing in general” [She washed her body with the water from a well. / But how she did her rite, I dare not tell, / Unless it were any thing in general] (I. 2283-85). Instead of saying he will not tell, as is his usual device, the Knight instead says he “dar nat telle” (I. 2284). With this statement, the Knight indicates that it is immodest to discuss a woman’s preparation, and so he gives the basic details to it so that the audience can see a small detail in the life of a courtly woman while the Knight can still maintain his modesty and preserve hers.

The Knight also uses *occupatio* in order to emphasize the pathos of a scene. The Knight first uses this type of *occupatio* when he describes the mourning of the widows as they watch their husbands honorably burn on the funeral pyre early in the tale (I. 994-1000). This scene demonstrates the honorable actions of the women, for they mourned for their husbands, and the scene also shows the importance of dying in a noble fashion, in this case, battle. The men deserved a proper burial, and Theseus provides them with that, but truly no more needs to be said of the mourning. His brief summary, however, is eloquently done. The Knight succinctly describes the “grete clamour and the waymentynge” [great clamor and lamenting] of the women (I. 995), he only mentions the “brennynge / Of the bodies” [burning / Of the bodies] (I.996-97), and he quickly reminds the audience of “the grete honour / That Theseus, the noble conquerour, / Dooth to the ladies” [the great honor / That Theseus, the noble conqueror, / Does to the ladies] (I. 997-99). Theseus, again, performs an honorable task, but while that is a focus of the scene, the mourning of the women, though briefly mentioned, seems to be heightened. The Knight does not have the

time, and perhaps he does not have the words, to describe their lamenting. The Knight quickly gives his readers an emotional moment without overwhelming them.

Since the strife between Arcite and Palamon shows how a Knight should *not* behave, it is no wonder then that the Knight would use *occupatio* to show the emotion of the strife. In the shortest *occupatio* in the "Knight's Tale," the Knight quickly summarizes in only three lines the strife between Arcite and Palamon after they have declared their love for Emelye while imprisoned: "Greet was the strif and long bitwix hem tweye, / If that I hadde leyser for to seye; / But to th'effect" [Great was the strife and was long between the two of them, / If I had less to say; / But to the effect] (I. 1187-89). This *occupatio* comes after Arcite and Palamon have argued about who loved Emelye first, and so it serves to heighten the emotion of the scene. If they have spent almost 100 lines declaring their love for Emelye and then arguing about who loves her more, then it would not be hard for the Knight's audience to imagine how much longer this argument could have lasted. The Knight and his audience both know that since Palamon and Arcite are enchained in a prison that the two most likely have little else to discuss than their love of Emelye and their worthiness for her hand, and the Knight confirms that suspicion with a telling and succinct *occupatio*. The Knight, in his seventh form of *occupatio* (I. 2817-26), turns again to Emelye, but instead of showing one of Theseus's virtues, he instead glosses over Emelye's sorrow: "What helpeth it to tarien forth the day / To tellen how she weep bothe eve and morwe" [What helps it to tarry away the day / To tell how she wept both evening and morning] (I. 2817-18). He then moves from the specific, Emelye's grief, to the general by describing how widows experience sorrow that can ultimately lead to a "maladye" (I. 2825) and death (I. 2826). With this expansion to widows in general, the Knight both heightens and clarifies Emelye's grief. She shares in the pain with many women; her grief is not insufficient, nor is it melodramatic. The universal pain that she shares might resonate more with the pilgrims, and so the Knight can appeal to their emotions without diverting from the tale.

The Knight makes his final use of *occupatio* his longest; the passage extends for forty-eight lines (I. 2919-66). Here, the Knight says he will not discuss Arcite's funeral, but with this *occupatio*, the Knight provides great details of the funeral. The *occupatio* begins with:

But how the fyr was maked upon highte  
Ne eek the names that the trees highte,

As ook, firre, birch, aspe, alder, holm, popler,  
Wylugh, elm, plane, assh, box, chasteyn, lynde, laurer,  
Mapul, thorn, bech, hasel, ew, whippeltree—  
How they weren feld shal nat be toold for me.  
[But how the fire was made up high

Nor also the names that the trees are called  
Such as oak, fir, birch, aspen, alder, holm, poplar,  
Willow, elm, plane, ash, box, chestnut, linden, laurel,  
Maple, thorn, beech, hazel, yew, dogwood—  
How they were fell shall not be told by me.] (I. 2919-24)

Here, the Knight first says that he will not name the trees, but then he proceeds to name not one tree, but one and twenty trees. This brief sample from the forty-eight-line *occupatio* provides a good example of the rest of the section, for the Knight continues to remind his audience that he will not tell of an aspect of the funeral by placing “Ne” at the beginning of the line in order to remind his audience, a tactic he uses fifteen times. In this lengthy *occupatio*, the Knight plays to the pathos of the scene in an effort to stress an honorable burial for a good knight. His initial refusal to state these claims emphasizes the burial for his audience. When the Knight has said in the past that he will not tell of a certain event, his audience had become accustomed to a concise summary of the event. By continuing to mention that he will not tell of aspects of the funeral, he further emphasizes the importance of the event by continuing to do the opposite of what his audience has come to expect with his *occupationes*. In a sense, he has a reverse *occupatio*. By saying he will not call attention to it, he in fact draws more attention to this scene. With this device, the Knight shows his son the glory a worthy knight receives in burial, the earthly ultimate desire for a virtuous knight.

Even though the Knight provides clear examples of noble worthiness in the tale proper for both his son and his audience, the Knight can further direct his son in noble virtues through the use of *occupationes*. The Squire, as a student of rhetoric, would be alerted to these nods from his father, and he could learn of eloquence through observing the construction of a proper *occupatio*. Furthermore, a few of the *occupationes* enhance the emotions within the tale, which heightens the tale from a tale of virtue to a romance. The Knight can both instruct his son and please his general audience through his use of rhetoric.

### "...but I wol seye as I kan": The Squire's Noble Attempt at *Occupatio*

Like his father, the Squire has received much scholarly attention, largely focusing on either the tale's exotic setting and its connection to contemporary travel narratives or the aspects of courtly love and life found in the tale. Regarding the Squire's telling of the tale, scholars have responded fairly negatively to his use of rhetoric. The Squire, unlike the Knight, acts as an exuberantly romantic courtier. Because of his youth, the Squire does not have the same control in thought and words as his father. However, several scholars have noted that the Squire understands rhetoric and that he makes an honest attempt at practicing the rhetoric of his father the Knight, particularly the *occupatio* trope. Peterson describes the Squire as a "wonderfully bad storyteller, and his efforts keep recoiling against him" (66). However, Peterson sees the Squire's telling of the tale as revealing "his snobbery, his ineptness, and his essential cupidity" (68). Francis argues that the Squire uses rhetoric to make fun of his father: "The Squire takes after his father in his fondness for the *occupatio*, but where the Knight is solemn, as befits his character and station, the Squire gently pokes fun at the device—and perhaps indulges in a bit of mild parody of his earnest parent" (1140). Berger reads the Squire as having the "inability to keep his story moving, his tendency to use the fable as an excuse to entertain his own preferences, his feeling that every detail should be fully described and explained" (91). Berger does not condemn the Squire's performance, though: "The performance is fresh, charming and immediate: we see the various and not quite clearly distinguished ideals by which the Squire is moved, and we see also his youthful, therefore callow, interpretation of them" (93). The Squire, even though he has good intentions, often lets his mind and language wander to the material and romantic lives at court.

Haller views the Squire in a similar manner, noting his flawed use of rhetoric. However, like Berger, Haller interprets the Squire as learning the art of expression from his father since such eloquence was important in knighthood: "As an aspirant to knighthood and member of a court society, he would be expected to have the grace of writing pleasing and socially correct songs. His training in the art would be not only a part of manners but also a preparation for the formal rhetorical skill required in diplomatic correspondence, should he ever hold high office" (286). Haller determines that rhetoric would make him a *gentil* man, and so the Squire displays those skills so that he might be perceived as the kind of knight he aspires to be. However, the Squire does not correctly use rhetoric like his father. Haller confirms that the Knight uses *occupatio* to move the narrative along,

while the Squire's incorrect use of the device delays the narration (288). The Squire, although he revels in the joys of youth, strives to practice the virtue of eloquence so that he might mature into as "worthy" a knight as his father.

Berger further elaborates on the Squire's youthful exuberance in relation to his father's sober worthiness: "...the Squire is a potential knight, the Knight was once perhaps like the Squire. If the Squire needs experience and discipline, the Knight must surely have depended on that spring-time energy which, while still unbridled, canters self-confidently toward half-understood goals and wrong conclusions" (93). Indeed, in the "General Prologue," Chaucer presents Squire as the polar opposite of his father. Instead of focusing on virtue and nobility in battle, the Squire's love for romance takes center stage in the second line of the Squire's description: "A lovyere and lusty bachelor" [A lover and lusty bachelor] (V. 80). Also unlike with the Knight's description, a description that largely focused on the Knight's virtuous aspects, the narrator describes the Squire's physical appearance:

With lokkes crulle as they were leyd in presse.  
Of twenty yer of age he was, I gesse.  
Of his stature he was of evene lengthe,  
And wonderly delyvere, and of greet strengthe.

[With locks curled as if they were laid in a press.  
He was twenty years old, I guess.  
Of his stature he was of even length,  
And wonderfully agile, and of great strength.] (V. 81-84)

The Squire is the paragon of a young lover. He is young, he has lovely curly locks, his body is well made, and he is agile and strong. The narrator then turns to the battles in which the Squire has participated with his Father (V.86), and here the Squire resembles his father, since the narrator mentions that the Squire "born hym weel, as of so little space" [bore himself well, for so little space of time] (V. 87). However, the Squire's motives are not the same as his father's. While his father fights for his lord(s), the Squire fights "[i]n hope to stonden in his lady grace" [with the hope to stand in his lady's grace] (V. 88). The Squire participates adequately in battle, but he does it for the love of a lady instead of loyalty to a lord, as he aspires to be a good courtly lover. To earn the love of a lady, the Squire spends his days "[s]yngyng" [singing] (V. 91) and "floytyng" [fluting]



(V. 91), and he dresses in the courtly fashion of the day (V. 93). The narrator further describes the Squire as "fresh as is the month of May" (V. 92), which is very different from the "verray, parfit gentil Knight" (I. 72). The narrator further observes the Squire's love for composition. Though the Squire practices this activity for the same reasons he goes to war, his love for speaking and writing predisposes him towards the philosophical and rhetorical life his father wishes the Squire to attain. In an effort to save this romantic picture of the Squire from slipping into total frivolity, the narrator concludes the Squire's description with a note of praise: "Curteis he was, lowely, and servysable, / And carf biforn his fader at the table" [Courteous he was, lowly and humble, / And carved before his father at the table] (V. 99-100). Even though the Squire desires to serve the ladies, he also knows that he should serve his father, too.

The Squire, then, appears to be in quite the liminal space. He is not a young man fully consumed by the fires of love, even though he does desire to fight and obtain the grace of a lady, but he hasn't accepted totally the somber responsibilities and virtues of full adulthood/knighthood. He seems to be in a position of "two steps forward, one step back." He makes great strides in learning the craft of knighthood, but his love for romance often pulls him back from the virtuous life of worthy knighthood and into the fantastic arms of romance and imagination. The Squire's use of *occupatio* highlights his liminal space. As a student of his father, he practices the language and virtues of knighthood, but as a lover of the ladies and the world of the court, his focus often returns to material, and perhaps even carnal, thoughts, as Peterson suggests (74).

Although the Squire lacks complete eloquence in thought and words, he does desire to practice his skills. The author of *Rhetorica ad Herennium* states that the five faculties of rhetoric (Invention, Arrangement, Style, Memory, and Delivery) can only be acquired by three means: Theory, Imitation, and Practice (1. 3). The Knight provides the Squire with the theory and the tale for imitation, and so, in the spirit of rhetorical training, the Squire must practice his skills. The specific lesson for the day is *occupatio*. The Knight demonstrates the theory of *occupatio*, that it is a device used to enhance a story's message through asides that do not distract from the story itself, and so the Squire must practice *occupatio* through imitation. Largely, though, the Squire fails in his attempt at *occupatio*. Rather than highlighting his tale, his rhetoric detracts from the tale since the *occupatio* often returns to the Squire's own interests, as Berger also notes (91).

The Squire, though, knows of his limitations in speech. When the Host requests for the Squire to tell a tale, the Squire immediately acknowledges

his lack of eloquence with a humility *topos*:

...but I wol seye as I kan  
With hertly wyl, for I wol not rebelle  
Agayn youre lust, a tale wol I telle  
Have me excused if I speke amys;  
My wyl is good, and lo, my tale is this.

[...but I will say as I can  
With a hearty will, for I will not rebel  
Against your lust, a tale will I tell  
Excuse me if I speak amiss;  
My will is good, and lo, my tale is this.] (V. 4-8)

Even though the Squire knows he cannot tell a tale as well as other pilgrims, especially his father the Knight, he will still do his best. Because his intent is good, the pilgrims should excuse his missteps in his use of language. The Squire understands the connection between thought and speech, and he is also aware that he has not yet learned how to have his speech reflect and then present his thoughts. Through this acknowledgement of his lack of skill and then his honest attempt at speaking before a group, the Squire presents a level of maturity that was not seen within his description in the “General Prologue.”

The Squire performs the humility *topos* again within the first forty lines of his tale (after he has accurately applied the *descriptio* trope in his presentation of Cambyuskan):

It lyth nat in my tonge, n'yn my konnyng;  
I dar nat undertake so heigh a thyng.  
Myn Englissh eek is insufficient.  
It moste been a rhetor excellent  
That koude his coulours longynge for that art,  
If he sholde hire discryven every part.  
I am noon swich, I moot speke as I kan.

[It lies not in my tongue, nor in my cunning;  
I dare not undertake so high a thing.  
My English also is insufficient.  
It must be a rhetor excellent  
That knows his rhetorical devices belonging to that art,

If he should write here every part.  
I am not such an one, I must speak as I can.] (V. 35-41)

Again, the Squire admits his insufficiency in speech, but his admittance in this humility topos expands his original admittance in his introduction. Here, the Squire connects his language use to rhetoric, and he admits that only a "rhetor excellent" could provide an accurate description of Cambyuskan's (Genghis Khan's) daughter's beauty. He echoes his first humility trope that he will do his best, but when used in a humility trope, this admission proves that the Squire is practicing his skills, and that he clearly understands rhetorical devices. While this trope could be read as insecurity, the Squire perseveres by continuing to tell the story, which further demonstrates strength in character.

The Squire's use of the rhetorical *occupatio*, however, does not go over as smoothly as his uses of the description and humility tropes. When he tells the audience that he will not, or, in some cases *cannot*, tell, he appears to spend far more time telling his audience what he *cannot* tell rather than expanding on the main story line. The real problem, though, seems to stem from two contrasting story lines in his head. The first story line seems to be an epic romance that covers two damsels in distress, Theodora and Canacee, and the men who must rescue them via the aid of the three magical gifts brought by the strange Knight (V. 663-69). The second tale is the only complete tale the Squire tells: the story of the wronged female falcon. Because he has not shaped his thoughts, his tale comes out a jumbled mess. The one thing that can connect his two competing tales is the "quick" mention of courtly life through *occupationes*, for courtly life and romance play into both the competing narratives, and yet these visions of courtly life disrupt his narrative rather than complete it. Fortunately, the Squire only uses the device four times before the Franklin mercifully interrupts him.

Like his father, the Squire uses *occupatio* to describe a feast. Unlike his father, the Squire's description of the feast focuses only on the food rather than the actions of the court (V. 63-75). He does seem to indicate the exotic aspects of Cambyuskan's court, but because he has presented only the exotic physical descriptions of the court instead of descriptions of Cambyuskan's purpose in the tale, this first instance of *occupatio* contains no moral or virtuous aspect as his father's description of the feast does.

In the second—and lengthiest—*occupatio* (it spans an impressive sixty-three lines), the Squire presents the strange knight's speech (V. 105-67). Here, the Squire uses the device incorrectly. He begins by correctly using another humility trope (this trope must have been an earlier lesson for the

Squire), but this trope quickly takes on the form of an *occupatio* when he indicates that he will summarize the knight's words:

...I kan nat sowne his style,  
Ne kan nat clymben over so heigh a style,  
Yet seye I this, as to commune entente:  
Thus much amounteth al that evere he mente,  
If it so be that I have it in mynde.

[...I can not sound his style,  
Nor can I climb over so high a style,  
Yet I say this, as to communicate intent:  
Thus much amounts all that ever he meant,  
If it be so that I have it in mind.](V. 105-09).

While not in the true fashion of an *occupatio*, the content indicates that the Squire, because he cannot imitate the style, will not present the speech. Rather, he will provide a summary, which often occurs in an *occupatio*. However, the Squire gives the strange knight's whole speech rather than a brief summary. The speech greatly interrupts the flow of the tale, but the Squire does indeed affect the high style, and so perhaps the Squire uses this space to practice more of his rhetorical training.

Like the first use of *occupatio*, the Squire's third use of the trope focuses on the dancing and jealous glancing that occurs at the court (V. 283-90). The Squire's use of *occupatio* more closely matches his father's use of the device. The Squire briefly summarizes an aspect of court life while trying to play to the audience's emotions. Unfortunately, his attempt at pathos is a tad melodramatic. The Squire believes that only Lancelot could adequately describe this courtly scene, but alas, "Launcelot is deed" [Lancelot is dead] (V. 287). Haller views the Squire's mention of Lancelot as demonstrating the Squire's devotion to the knights of old romances instead of to his father, the realistic portrayal of knighthood (289). But Haller does not blame the Squire for preferring Lancelot and Gawain over his father, for Haller recognizes the Squire's youthful exuberance (289). By making an aside about Lancelot and his capabilities for describing courtly love, the Squire does indeed prove his youth, but since he tries to emulate his father's use of *occupatio* in both form and content, the Squire demonstrates willingness to learn to be an eloquent knight like his father.

The Squire uses *occupatio* to exercise modesty when he refuses to describe the dreams of the court (V. 357-59). While this could be a modesty

element, like his father's refusal to describe Emelye's preparations for the temple of Diana, the Squire just does not want to explain the dreams because there are no dreams. The courtiers are too drunk to have any dreams of "charge" (V. 359). The Squire must have hoped the dreams would have been of courtly love and romance, but after a night of feasting, there are no dreams to report. The Squire would have been better served not to mention this fact, but he does, and it detracts from his narrative because of its triviality.

The Squire "concludes" his tale with an *occupatio*, and this *occupatio* inspires the Franklin to interrupt the Squire, for the Squire lists the things he does not have the time to discuss because he would rather tell of other tales (V. 650-60). In this *occupatio* he says that he will not tell of Canacee's ring and the falcon's regaining of her love via Cambalus. He then adds all that he will tell of the tale of Algarsif's rescuing of Theodora before he will return to Cambalo and Canacee (V. 661-670). The Squire's audience has a clue as to how long this tale will take. If it has taken the squire 650 lines just to describe Cambyuskan's court, the strange knight and his gifts, and Canacee and the falcon, then his final tale in full must extend to an extravagant length. This final *occupatio* appears to be the last straw for the Franklin, who interrupts the Squire after he has only told the first two lines of his new tale. Because of the rambling that has occurred due to his incorrect use of rhetorical devices, particularly *occupatio*, the narrative must end. The "Squire's Tale" is not incomplete; Chaucer purposefully created a fragment so that the Squire's lengthy tale might end. The "Squire's Tale" has served its purpose: the Squire had the ability to practice the rhetoric device *occupatio* while also perfecting his skills in *descriptio* and the humility *topos*. Throughout the telling of his tale, the Squire proves that he is learning eloquence. His *occupationes* move from trivial descriptors to attempts at describing knightly virtue (the Lancelot scene) and modesty (the dreams of the courtiers). Although he ultimately fails in his storytelling, his practice in eloquence was not done in vain.

### **"...ther is noon that is heere / Of eloquence that shal be they peere": The Franklin and Chaucer's Prediction for the Squire's Future**

The Franklin kindly interrupts the Squire by praising the Squire's use of rhetoric: "In faith, Squier, thow hast thee well yquite / And gentilly. I preise well thy wit" [In faith, Squire, you have acquitted yourself well / And gently. I praise your wit well] (V. 673-74). The Franklin qualifies the Squire's success, though, by remarking that his success is good for his

youth (V. 675). To the Franklin, the Squire has performed as a student-knight should, and his performance appears to be *gentil*, which proves that the Squire is beginning to attain the nobility that his father desires for him. The Franklin's qualification of the Squire's skill, though, is not negative, for the Franklin declares that eventually the Squire will have no peer in eloquence later in life (V. 677-79). Furthermore, the Franklin indicates the successful instruction by the Knight when he says that his son does not have the same values as the Squire, and so the Franklin has "snybbed" [rebuked] (V. 688) his son because of his fondness for gambling and his lack of "gentillesse" (V. 694).

The Franklin's praise of the Squire and the Squire's future continues into the "Franklin's Tale." In the tale, the Franklin shows the great lengths that Aurelius, the "lusty squier, servant to Venus" [lusty squire, servant to Venus], goes to in an effort to win the married Dorigen's heart (V. 937). Aurelius, like Chaucer's Squire, pines for Dorigen for two years, and he only expresses his love through writing songs (V. 940-50). When he does confess his love for Dorigen, Dorigen gives him the great task of removing all the rocks from the coast of Brittany as the feat he must complete to win her (V. 992-98). Aurelius accomplishes the task through the help of a clerk who studies "magyk natureel" [natural magic] (V. 1125). The Squire goes to Dorigen and exclaims that she must keep her promise to him (V. 1311-38). Dorigen tells her husband Averagus of her promise, and Averagus, a knight who believes in the high virtue of keeping a promise (not unlike Chaucer's Knight), tells her to follow through with her promise to Aurelius. When Dorigen offers herself to Aurelius, Aurelius releases her from her promise, for Aurelius now sees Averagus's "grete gentillesse / To yow" [great gentleness / To you] (V. 1527-28). In the end, Aurelius the squire finally says and does the right thing; he gives up his own dream of courtly love in order to preserve the marriage of the woman he loves. Through the telling of this tale, the Franklin proves that Chaucer's Squire will possess eventually the skills of eloquence that will allow him to say and do virtuous deeds like Aurelius, and like Aurelius, the Squire will earn nobility.

Chaucer displays a full picture of the Squire's education in the proper thoughts and words of a knight of the court, reflecting a Petrarchan-esque view of rhetoric. Through the "Knight's Tale," "The Squire's Tale," and the "Franklin's Tale," Chaucer proves that even though the Squire still immaturely obsesses over courtly romance, he will eventually attain the nobility of his father. Schofield interprets the Squire's "gentle, feeling speech" as evidence of the Squire's eventual donning of knightly virtues: "The Squire had evidently taken to heart the idealistic precepts of the order of



chivalry, which he was later to adorn" (46). Perhaps Chaucer's education of the Squire extends beyond these three tales. Many of the stories in *The Canterbury Tales* provide moral messages that seem to be directed towards the young, particularly young men. The Pardoner presents a tale of three greedy young men who meet death because of their greed. The Wife of Bath instructs a young knight in "what women want." The other marriage pieces when read together provide a view of a happy and mutual marriage (the Franklin's Tale seems to convey this portrayal of marriage in the most concise way). Finally, the religious tales largely serve as a warning on false love for the Church. *The Canterbury Tales* could be a manual for the young squires with whom Chaucer was familiar. If Chaucer truly does appreciate that cultured knight as much as Jones thinks he does (11), then he certainly could have written a text for a squire on how to achieve "grete gentil-lesse" (V. 1527) in a mad world.

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