THE SQUIRE’S TALE

The Squire’s Tale dramatises a sensibility for which courtliness is an end in itself. The Tale is appealing in its naive enthusiasm, but it exposes the Squire’s arbitrary assumption of the social superiority of court culture and calls into question the ethical values of his courtly idealism. Is this idealism vacuous, unthinking, uncritical?

The idealising tone is constantly marred by mundane details. Canacee leaves the feast so she doesn’t get drunk. When she weeps for the falcon, the bird just tells her to be quiet. The \textit{fumositee} which produces confusing dreams with drunkenness, like the morning haze when she meets the falcon. The Squire sneers at the conjectures of the common folk. But their speculations are quite sophisticated.

Is Canacee’s response to the falcon like the Prioress’s response to the mouse? What are we told about the value of breeding in her story of the tercelet? The image we are given of a caged bird which returns to worms is one of a creature returning to its own nature, kind, acting appropriately for its estate. But for the falcon it is a matter of leaving virtue for the sake of novelty. The simile of comparing the tercelet to a bird is appropriate, but the falcon doesn’t recognise this. This is in part due to the confusion of the ring which allows birds to understand humans and humans to understand birds. Or does it? The paradox illustrates the danger of viewing life through courtly vision: the courtliness can itself become a cage. Everything in the tale is treated with equal seriousness, so in the end, can we take anything seriously?

Why does the Squire choose the Far East as the setting for his tale? It was a realm of wonder, perhaps influenced by his father’s travels.

Canacee plot resembles the Hindu \textit{K·dambari} and some associated stories in the Arabian Knights. Both have to do with the apparent or real infidelity of birds, and the first with speaking birds. The story in the Arabian Knights suggests that Canacee was to have been warned by the falcon, and she does in the story conclude that the bird’s unhappy experience is applicable to human beings, for she builds a cage to show the faithfulness of women and the fickleness of men (ll. 643-7).

Birds were conventionally represented as lovers in the Middle Ages, and unfaithful lovers was one of his favourite subjects.
Examples of the Squire’s Rhetoric

But for to tell yow al hir beautee,
It lyth nat in my tonge n’yn my konyng.
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 kan. (34-41)

He claims to speak plainly, but the claim itself is dubitatio, a rhetorical device. The whole tale his highly rhetorical in nature. For the importance of eloquent speech in courtly culture (see ll. 95f. for the messenger’s dexterity of tongue).

But the Squire seems to get ridiculous with the knot metaphor in ll. 400-409:

The knotte why that every tale is told,
If it be taried til that lust be coold
Of hem that han it after herkned yoore,
The savour passeth ever lenger the moore
For fulsomnesse of his prolixitee.
And by the same resoun, thynketh me,
I sholde to the knotte condescende,
And maken of hir walkyng soone an ende.

The Squire uses *circumlocutio*: complex syntax to delay his point.

Other Details

385f. The date of Canacee’s walk is about 16 March.
426f. The peregrine is the wandering, pilgrim bird and hence comes from a *fremde* land. This fits in with the exotic theme.
450: Canacee says the two causes of woe to a gentil heart are sorrow of death and loss of love. Does she have some special insight?

Gentillesse

479: Pity runneth soon in gentil heart. Compare KnT 1761.
482: Proved by work as well as auctoritee, / For gentil herte kitheth [reveals] gentillesse. Compare WoB 1170 (‘He is gentil that dooth gentil deedis’). Does the Squire’s formulation answer or improve upon the WoB’s?

What characteristics of gentillesse does the tercelet feign of violate? Go through this passage closely.
References to *trouthe*: 528, 537 (seurtee), 541 (trewe), 541 (trewe), 563, 588, 626

568-571

That my wyl was his willes instrument,
This is to seyn, my wyl obeyed his wyl
In alle thyng as fer as reson fil
Kepyenge the boundes of my worship [honour] ever

How does this relate to the end of the WoB’s tale?

What would the WoB make of the falcon’s decision to make a virtue of necessitee (593). Compare KnT 3042). What would she make of the assertion that men love ‘of propre kynde newfangelness’. The caged bird metaphor is wonderfully ironic coming from the mouth (beak) of a bird.

620: The falcon says that men cannot be bound by ‘gentillesse of blood’. What does she mean? Is she connecting gentillesse with feminine compassion? [Refer back to Canacee’s possible insight, l. 450.]

Compare l. 645, where she makes a cage covered with blue velvet as a sign of women’s trouthe, and painted outside in green with false fowls. For the colour symbolism, compare Against Women Unconstant.

**The Falcon’s Speech as a Complaint**

The bandaging of the falcon is a bizarre play on the convention of lack of remedie (629).

For other conventions, compare Amorous Complaint (especially 1143f.) and Merciless Beauty.

Read the beginning of the Franklin’s Tale to see what was considered significant about the Squire’s Tale (assuming that the Franklin’s Tale was meant to follow the Squire’s Tale as a response..)