

CHAUCER'S MOUNTED MENAGERIE: AN INTERTEXTUAL EXAMINATION OF  
HORSE AND RIDER ARCHETYPES IN *THE CANTERBURY TALES*

A Thesis by

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I have examined the final copy of this thesis for form and content, and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Arts with a major in English.

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William Woods, Committee Chair

We have read this thesis  
and recommend its acceptance

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Donald Wineke, Committee Member

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Anthony Gythiel, Committee Member

## DEDICATION

To Mom and Dad, with love and thanks

Greet was the prees that swarmeth to and fro  
To gauren on this hors that stondest so,  
For it so heigh was, and so brood and long,  
So wel proporcioned for to been strong, . . .  
For certes, fro his tayl unto his ere  
Nature ne art ne koude hym nat amende.

*(Squire's Tale 189-97)*



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## PREFACE

While many works delve into different aspects of *The Canterbury Tales*, few chose to recognize and give credit to some of Chaucer's least mentioned characters—the horses. My project attempts to bring these often overlooked and neglected characters a new significance and realization and thus fill an important, though perhaps not large, fissure in understanding and appreciating Chaucer's great work.

Since few authors and critics address the horses mentioned in *The Canterbury Tales*, the research for this project has lead me to a variety of interesting sources and materials. Not only have I focused on Chaucer scholars and critics, but also on authors of horse history and symbolism. Several of the equine authors wrote lengthy pieces covering the significance of horses in the medieval world. Horses offered status, power, and mobility to those who used them—such themes are also apparent in *The Canterbury Tales*. Arthur Vernon, an equine scholar, asks, "where would human history have been in the whole provinces of war and commerce, continental expansion and sports, in a horseless world?" (ix). Society, prosperity, and chivalry (since cheval originally meant horse) was born and borne on the back of the horse. Chaucer's pilgrims rode to Canterbury, more than likely, because it was easier and faster than walking. And the pilgrims rode the type of horse that they, by their meager, modest, wealthy or prideful means could acquire and afford. It is this relationship and its reflection on character that I wish to examine.

The start of my project will focus on the eight mounts and their riders mentioned in the *General Prologue*—though I will just briefly mention the Squire and the Reeve, as they will be analyzed more in-depth with their tales in a later section. I will look at the type of horse each pilgrim rides (a stot, an ambler, a jade, etc.) and by pairing them with their historic and societal

significance, will examine how they represent the status, life, and disposition of their riders as presented through Chaucer's descriptions. I also plan on exploring the symbolic significance of the horse in medieval lore and history and see how this relates to the pilgrims themselves as well as their mounts.

For the last half of my project, I plan on focusing on two pilgrims—the Reeve and the Squire—and their respective tales. These two tales are the only two within *The Canterbury Tales* that involve a prominent horse character. I will examine these horse characters in relation to the plot and action and to the human characters of the tales. And since the tales somehow reflect their storyteller and/or companioned audience, I will study how each tale reflects the status, personality, and even the mount of its narrator.

The purpose of my project will be to show that Chaucer chose to mention the pilgrim's horses, not just for aesthetic detail, but also for actual narrative and figurative purposes. The horses tell as much about the pilgrims as do their manner of dress and physical features. While the horses suggest a pilgrim's social status, they also hint at a character's moral character. Though horses appear minimally throughout *The Canterbury Tales*, they provide insight into Chaucer's colorful menagerie.



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## CHAPTER 1

### Chaucer's Mounted Menagerie: An Intertextual Examination of Horse and Rider

#### Archetypes in *The Canterbury Tales*

Chaucer refers to the horse over one hundred and fifty times throughout *The Canterbury Tales*. These are concrete references, most often proverbial expressions or images which reflect common notions about the horse, thereby illustrating comparisons between characters and their animal passions, qualities, or stately status. Pilgrims often rode horses on pilgrimages, so it remains unsurprising that Chaucer's travelers should be mounted. However, Chaucer oddly specifies the mounts of eight pilgrims: the Wife of Bath rode an ambler, the Plowman a mare, the Cook a capul, the Shipman a rouncy, the Nun's Priest a jade, the Canon a hackney, the Monk a palfrey, and the Reeve a stot. Even though Chaucer still regards horses as mere animals serviceable to man, he would not describe them in such detail if that were his only purpose for them. More likely, Chaucer uses horse archetypes to illustrate, though subtly, a pilgrim's position in society as well as the true moral character of the individual. For instance, Chaucer places his Plowman upon a mare—a degrading mount ridden only by the very poor. However, since the Plowman humbly accepts his social status, he happily rides a mare and thus embodies a high level of morality because he does not pretend to be someone he is not.

Careful craftsman that he was, Chaucer appears to have a specific use for every detail, including the descriptions of the Pilgrims' horses, and Beryl Rowland has argued that "The mount often reflects the disposition of the rider" (139). Indeed, the type of horse issued to each pilgrim does seem to hint at different character traits. Rodney Delasanta adds that "seventeen of the pilgrims are at one time or another described in relation to their horses; some in a line or two, others like the Monk and the Canon in considerable detail" (30). In addition to the *General*

*Prologue*, Chaucer mentions horses within some of the tales themselves, most prominently in the *Reeve's Tale* where the actions of Bayard, a loose horse, depict the sexual desires, status, freedom, and nature of both the clerks and the miller.

One of the main attractions of *The Canterbury Tales* is Chaucer's ability to make his characters simultaneously unique and universal. Stating that "The medieval pilgrim is an Everyman, the stranger who is ourselves," (109) Julia Bolton Holloway explains that, though each pilgrim is a distinctive stranger, he/she holds great audience appeal because within each pilgrim lies certain fundamental aspects of humanity. These aspects of humanity tend to bring Chaucer's colorful cast of characters together, even though it is their oddities and peculiarities which remain the most appealing:

All pilgrims are severally distinguished from each other; and not only in their inclination but in their very physiognomies and persons. . . . The matter and manner of their tales, each of them would be improper in any other mouth. . . . [T]heir discourses are such as belong to their age, their calling, and their breeding; such as are becoming of them, and them only. Some of his persons are vicious, and some virtuous; some are unlearned . . . and some learned. (qt. in Ginsberg 134)

Through his individual characters, Chaucer creates a human, an Everyman, image. But since humankind "is . . . created in God's image," and since most of Chaucer's pilgrims are far from divine, moral judgment becomes an overlying theme, and the indirect preoccupation of the host, in *The Canterbury Tales* (Holloway 109). Horses provide the reader with important glimpses into each pilgrim's morality, for the chosen mount of each pilgrim reflects both the overt and hidden natures of the individual.

The specific type of mount illustrates a pilgrim's nature, while an individual's equestrian habits reveal, often more adequately, the pilgrim's inner nature or true self. Delasanta explains that "Almost without exception Chaucer introduces or confirms an oblique moral judgment of these characters by reference to their riding habits" (30). For example, Chaucer describes the Squire as an attractive, passionate young man who is "Curteis . . . , lowely, and servysable" (99). How appropriate then that the Squire "Wel koude . . . sitte on hors and faire ryde" (94).<sup>1</sup> Since it would be incomprehensible for a handsome, worthy son of an honorable knight to ride his steed clumsily, Chaucer gives the Squire accomplished equestrian abilities. Following "the social conventions of a young man of his class," Chaucer's Squire fits the archetype since all squires were "proficient in horsemanship" (Bowden 77). Chaucer employs other rider archetypes with his Merchant and Clerk. The Merchant, who speaks "his resons . . . ful solempnely" (274) and employs "wel his wit bisette" (279) suitably rides "hye on [his] horse" (271). The reserved clerk too, who rides "coy and stille as doth a mayde . . . newe spoused" (1-2) duly expresses how the pilgrims' ability to ride reflects their moral and personal nature.

The pilgrims' ability to control their horses may reflect their ability to control their emotions, relationships, and lives in general. For instance, a composed, dignified individual, such as the Knight, rides a well-mannered, well-bred steed, suggesting that since he is in control of horse, he is also in control of his life.<sup>2</sup> The Knight chooses to ride a superior animal which represents his high status. Medieval knights portrayed in chivalric art and literature ride large, glorious stallions with flowing manes and prancing hooves while high merchants ride decent saddle horses and peasants ride small, lowly bred carthorses. While Chaucer places a great steed underneath his Knight, he gives less distinguished characters less distinguishable mounts. For

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<sup>1</sup> All Chaucer quotations are taken from *The Riverside Chaucer*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., and will henceforth be cited by line only.

<sup>2</sup> See Fig. 1 on page 21.

example, the Clerk rides a horse "as leene . . . as a rake" (287).<sup>3</sup> Since the Clerk "hadde geten hym yet no benefice,/ Ne was so worldly for to have office," (291-292) his social status remains relatively low and since the Clerk prefers to spend most of his money on books, he cannot afford a well-bred, well-fed mount. In addition, the Clerk, much like his horse "nas nat right fat" (288) and rather emaciated looking. In this instance, the Clerk's horse precisely reflects his rider's habits, social status, and life.

Before addressing in detail the pilgrims whom Chaucer gave specific mounts, an examination of Chaucer's most aristocratic and noble characters, the Knight and his son, the Squire, is useful in understanding the horse's influence on status in medieval society. Although Chaucer chooses not to give his Knight (or his Squire) a specific mount (such as a courser or charger), "the importance of good horses for the Knight is emphasized" (Mann 109). The history of chivalry and the code of conduct surrounding a knight's occupation created a need for the possession of "goode" horses (74).

The history of knighthood began with the semi-barbaric tribes of Northern Rome—about the time of Julius Caesar's rule. These tribesmen were horseman by occupation, using their horses for raiding and hunting. As one tribe dominated another and as tribal culture advanced, "the horse became a symbol of pristine respectability and affluence" (Vernon 145). Within this tribal society, a rough version of chivalry evolved. The rider or the owner of the horse (not always the same) received certain privileges. However, with these privileges came obligations of the horseman and horse owner, especially in times of war. It was the horseman's duty to use his horse as an "instrument of war" and if he was to gain any more horses as spoils of war, he would be required to turn them over to the original owner of the horse, usually a member of the aristocracy (Vernon 146). This dual obligation was eventually adopted by the chivalry known to

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<sup>3</sup> See Fig. 9 page 23.

Chaucer's Knight. Its purpose was to limit fighting to men who owned horses and thus make war the business of aristocracy, since only men of means could afford horses. Due to this restriction, the nobility and their retainers constitute the essential fighting unit, giving rise to the fact as well as the fancy of the knight and knighthood.

Alan Baker describes the importance of the knight in medieval society:

[T]he single most enduring image of the medieval period is surely the mounted, armored knight: noble, battle-hardened, and courageous, sitting atop his powerful caparisoned warhorse, the magnificent animal snorting in anticipation for the next fight. It is the move to horseback that presents the most significant development in warfare from the end of the Roman Empire to medieval Western Europe. Although well-organized infantry still played a very important role . . . , the period of the Middle Ages was, as the historian Andrew Ayton says, "an equestrian age of war." (52)

Chaucer's Knight fits well into this archetype. He, like most knights, fights for a member of aristocracy, his lord: "Ful worthy was he in his lordes werre" (47). Chaucer's Knight serves his master well and fought many battles for him:

And therto hadde he riden, no man ferre, /  
As wel in cristendom as in hethenesse,  
And evere honoured for his worthynesse;  
At Alisaundre he was whan it was wonne. . . .  
At mortal batailles hadde he been fiftene,  
And foughten for oure feith at Tramysse. (48-62)



Due to his campaigns through Prussia, Lithuania, Russia, Grenada, Morocco, and Turkey, the Knight has become very well traveled. In order to cover these great distances and return victorious, the Knight needed good horses.

Initially the base word for chivalry, *cheval*, means horse. Even the word for knight in most languages means horseman. According to Frances and Joseph Gies, "the term chevalier (caballero, cavaliere, Ritter—the word in all languages, except the English "knight," means horseman) . . . connoted a superiority of class" (88). Thus through the possession of arms, horse, and armor, and through the patronage of a lord, the knight socially and economically represented Europe's noble class. In his description, Chaucer frames his Knight around this common image and thus the Knight, through the telling of his tale, upholds his chivalric archetype.

Chaucer only briefly mentions the Knight's horses in the *General Prologue*: "His hors were goode, but he was nat gay" (74). His horses are obviously of quality, but they are described in contrast with their master's battered clothing and equipment. Since the Knight was recently returning from an expedition, he was dressed accordingly: "Of fustian he wored a gypon / Al bismotered with his habergeon" (75-76). The Knight joins Chaucer's pilgrimage still in his battledress. His armor has become weathered and rusted during his last journey and he wears only a simple tunic. Like his horses, the Knight's appearance reflects his occupation and his virtues. Indirectly, in the Parson's sermon, Chaucer credits the Knight for not being overdressed or too "gay." In his tale, the Parson quotes Saint Gregory on the sin of superfluity: "'precious clothing is cowpable for the derthe of it, and for his softenesse, and for his strangenesse and degisynesse, and for the superfluitee, or for the inordinate scantnesse of it'" (414). After quoting Saint Gregory, the Parson adds, "Allas, may man nat seen, as in oure days, the sinful costlewe

array of clothyng" (415) thus noting that during the fourteenth century, the upper classes were continually censured and ridiculed by the church for their expensive, garish clothing.

More specifically, the Parson couples fine horses and clothing with "the synne of aornement or of apparaille" (431).<sup>4</sup> Just as it is sinful to possess and flaunt valuable clothing, it is sinful to own too many delicate horses and ornate tack:

Also the synne of aornement or of apparaille is in thynges that apertenen to ridyng, as in to manye delicat horses that been hoolden for delit, that been so faire, fatte, and costlewe; / and also in many a vicious knave is sustened by cause of hem; and in to curious harneys, as in sadeles, in crouperes, peytrels, and bridles covered with precious clothing, and riche barres and plates of gold and of silver.  
(432-33)

The Parson is even more adamant about the ownership of fine horses than of excessive clothing. He quotes from the prophet Zechariah: "[God] wol confounde the riders of swiche horses" (433). And he goes on to illustrate that Jesus, wearing only the poor clothes of his disciples, rode a donkey and no other animal. However, the Parson does admit that he speaks "this for the synne of superfluitee, and nat for reasonable honestitee" (435). And since it would be incomprehensible for a knight to ride into battle on his mighty donkey, Chaucer's Knight remains innocent and reasonably subdued. Bowden explains that "The Knight's horses were good, but since their owner is soberly clad, we realize at once that he has not an excessive number and that they are maintained only because a knight must be fittingly mounted" (50). Unlike the Monk, who owns a stable of fine horses solely for his beloved sport of hunting, the Knight possesses only the horses and clothing he needs for his occupation. Chaucer's Knight, therefore, upholds the noble, chivalric archetype of a knight and maintains both a high social and moral status.

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<sup>4</sup> See Fig. 16 on page 24.

Horses only briefly appear in the *Knight's Tale*, but their impact is great. Since Chaucer's Knight "loved chivalrie," (45) he included much of its tradition in his tale. Perhaps the most exciting tradition of knighthood and chivalry lies with the joust. Toward the end of his tale, the Knight, in a fond description, illustrates the excitement of watching knights and horses prepare for the joust:

And on the morwe, whan that day gan sprynge,  
Of hors and harneys noyse and claterynge  
Ther was in hostelryes al aboute,  
And to the paleys rood ther many a route  
Of lordes upon steedes and palfreys.  
Ther maystow seen devisynge of harneys  
So unkouth and so riche, and wroght so weel  
Of goldsmythrye, of browdyng, and of steel;  
The sheeldes brighte, testeres, and trappures,  
Gold-hewen helmes, coats of mail, cote-armures;  
Lordes in parementz on hir coursers. (2491-2501)

The horses, in this instance, are described in as much detail and given just as much credit to the joust as are the lords, squires, and knights. The Knight portrays this joust as an excitable event not only for men, but for horses such as "The fomy steedes on the golden brydel / Gnawyng" (2506-2507) with eager anticipation.

According to Arthur Vernon, a joust was most often arranged when "two contenders happened to be in . . . love with the same lady" (168). In the *Knight's Tale*, two cousins, Palamon and Arcite both fall in love with the beautiful Emelye. To decide which man shall wed Emelye,

the duke Theseus arranges a joust between the two. Although the Knight mentions several types of horses in his description of the event (steeds, palfreys, and coursers) he purposely places Arcite on a courser. Vernon states that during Chaucer's time, knights were equipped with four horses: a charger or destrier, a courser, a palfrey, and a packhorse. For war, a knight rode his charger (also called destrier) because chargers were large, heavy horses capable of carrying the weight of a fully armored knight. Though a charger was often a knight's most impressive mount, it also, due to its weight and size, was one of the slowest. Therefore, in events that required speed, such as a joust, knights rode coursers, their "most indispensable equine possession" (Vernon 167).

According to Vernon, "The courser was the type of horse that you read about in the tales of King Arthur's Knights of the Table Round" (167). It was the speediest and most agile of a knight's horses and though he did not ride it *into* battle, he rode it *to* battle. Since coursers covered ground faster than chargers, a knight rode his courser to battle while a squire or servant lead his charger which he rode in actual combat. However, the courser's speed proved necessary for most knightly business such as fighting in small-scale battles, jousting, or chasing after a "damsel in distress" (167). Since a joust requires speed and agility of both horse and rider, Arcite and Palamon ride coursers in their duel.

Although, in the *Knight's Tale*, no one technically wins the joust, Arcite's horse falls and crushes him into the ground. Shortly after the accident, in sad detail, Arcite dies of his injuries. With the death of poor Arcite, the Knight illustrates the dangers of the joust to horse and rider. The rules of the joust protected horses from injury simply because they were "too valuable in medieval times to be killed by lances in tournaments" (Vernon 169). Though no purposeful harm was allowed to befall a horse, it could, and often did, injure itself in falling. Anything could

happen to knights during a joust; there were no specific rules to protect them and they often incurred injuries. Though many knights spoke "bitterly of the needless deaths which resulted from these games" and though "[t]he danger to both horses and riders was great, . . . to invite risk in such adventures was a part of the tradition of gallantry" (Bowden 79). Therefore, Arcite and Palamon must risk injury and death to prove which one of them is worthy of Emelye.

Like many of Chaucer's characters, the Knight displays much of his life and his nature in his tale. He epitomizes honor, romance, nobility—chivalry—and he uses his experience and his "loved chivalrie" to tell a knightly romantic tale. However, since a knight, a chevalier, is by definition "a warrior . . . on horseback," the *Knight's Tale* must involve horses (Gies 88). Without horses, his tale would fail as a chivalric romance because without the horse "knights would never have existed" (Vernon 159). Knighthood and chivalry centered about the horse, and so does the Knight's description and tale.

The Monk, in sharp contrast to the Knight, is guilty of many of the sins the Parson preaches against.<sup>5</sup> Though Chaucer's Monk works for the church, his worldliness hampers true piety. As an outrider for his community, the Monk indulges in many pleasures outside the church. He enjoys fine food: "He was a lord ful fat and in good point," (200) fine clothing: "his sleves purfiled at the hond / With grys, and that the fyneste of a lond," (193-4) and fine horses: "Full many a deyntee hors hadde he in stable" (168). Though the Monk needs a horse to perform his outrider duties, he keeps his stable of fine horses solely for the sport of hunting. Along with his hunting horses, the Monk also keeps many greyhounds for the same purpose: "Grehoundes he hadde as swift as fowel in flight; / Of prikyng and of huntynge for the hare / Was al his lust, for no cost wolde he spare" (190-2). The Monk, through his love of hunting, shows utter disregard for the laws of the church. According to Sister Mary Ernestine Whitmore, these laws, "so strict in

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<sup>5</sup> See Fig. 6 on page 22.

relation to the observance of the vow of poverty that it forbade the monks to 'give, receive, or keep as their own, anything whatever; neither books, nor tablets, nor pen,' automatically prohibited the procession of dogs or horses for the purpose of hunting" (199). This disrespect for the church along with his superfluity reveals the moral corruption of the Monk. His love of fine attire and amusements makes him the direct moral opposite of the Knight.

The specific mount the Monk rides, the palfrey, also hints at his morality. The name palfrey derives from the word *paraveredi*. During the rule of Imperial Rome, *paraveredi*—similar to the early American pony express—referred to "the relay horses by which messengers traveled" (Rowland 113). Bred as pacers, palfreys tended not to trot and therefore rode very smoothly. For this purpose, palfreys were very popular among knights, ladies, and sportsman and are mentioned again in both the *Knight's* and the *Reeve's Tale*. The Monk's choosing to ride a popular ladies' mount hints at other worldly pleasures he may enjoy while performing his churchly duties. In the Middle Ages, hunting or the act of "venerie" (166) often implied sexuality and sexual acts. Chaucer describes his Monk accordingly as a "manly man" (167) and a "prikasour" (189). In addition hunting "was al his *lust*" (192; emphasis mine). This descriptive language hints that although the Monk enjoyed hunting animals with his hounds, he may also have enjoyed hunting the wives of absent husbands. Delasanta explains how the Monk's horses may reinforce this theory:

That the horses in his stable are "deyntee," an adjective which in Middle English meant luxurious and rare as well as valuable, and that [the Monk's] particular horse is a palfrey, a small saddle-horse especially for lady riders, are significant details in reinforcing the reading of "venerie" as having sexual as well as the more obvious hunting connotations. (30)

For Chaucer's Monk, who disregards his vows, sexual promiscuity and "cuckolding" appear well within his character.

The Monk's decorative bells also suggest his secrete sexual activities. Rather preoccupied with his appearance, the Monk keeps himself and his "hors in greet estaat" (203). He may hold this image, in part, to impress and seduce women. According to Rowland, the bells decorating his bridle insinuate the Monk's flamboyant and sexual nature in two ways:

Firstly, they connote the idle pleasure and egocentric showiness of the profane world. Their sound competes with the sound of the chapel bell . . . . [Secondly] [b]ells were associated with sexual love in medieval amulets. Sometimes the amulets represented a phallus, on which bridle and bells were hung and on which a female was riding. Moreover, the Belle was the name of a famous brothel near Harry Bailly's Tabard Inn. (115)

The fact that the Monk's character sharply contrasts with the archetype of a true Monk supports the validity of Rowland's argument. Though Chaucer's Monk loves to hunt and wear fancy clothes, his profession strictly forbids it. Furthermore, the presence of the bells on his harness hints at conflicting metaphors. On one hand, the bells represent the bells of the church, while on the other they connate ostentation and sexuality. This suggests that since the Monk partakes in many "forbidden" pleasures, he more than likely indulges himself sexually as well.

Before asking the Monk for a tale, Harry Bailly emphasizes the manly "macho" image of the Monk through a series of comments suggesting his sexual prowess:

Thou woldest han been a tredefowel aright.  
Haddestow as greet a leeve as thou hast myght  
To parfourne al thy lust in engendrure,

Thou haddest bigeten ful many a creature. (1944-8)

Taking this statement as evidence, the Monk probably did not enter his order willingly. People in medieval times often entered the monastery out of financial necessity. Frequently, Monks were younger brothers within aristocratic families who failed to gain any inheritance as, traditionally, the eldest son inherited the family's estate. Chaucer's Monk probably was forced to take his vows because his elder brother refused to provide for him. However, once a member of the church and an outrider, the Monk found certain advantages to his profession:

Of fieble trees ther comen wrecched ympes.

This maketh that oure heires been so sklendre

And feble that they may nat wel engendre.

This maketh that oure wyves wole assaye

Religious folk . . . ." (1955-60)

Harry Bailly's words suggest, that since wives like to "try out" men in holy orders, the Monk graciously, dutifully complies with their wishes. Not only does the Monk allow himself a stable of fine horses, but also a harem of unfaithful wives to service. Hence, the Monk's description as a "prikasour" (vigorous horsemen) implies that he rides men's wives just as vigorously as he does his horses.

Like the Knight, the Wife of Bath is an avid traveler and requires a mount fit to carry a successful woman of affairs.<sup>6</sup> She rides an ambler—a modern day pacer. According to Bowden, "An ambling horse . . . is one which has been taught to lift two feet together on the same side of its body, making for comfortable riding on a long journey" (217). Since an experienced traveler like Alisoun would appreciate comfort, she appropriately chose an ambler as her mount.

However, the Wife of Bath's style of riding indicates even more about her character than the type

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<sup>6</sup> See fig. 15 on page 24.



of horse she rides. Chaucer notes of Alisoun that "Upon an amblere esily she sat" (469)—she wore "on hir feet a paire of spores sharpe" (473). The effective use of spurs indicates that Alisoun rode astride. Most dignified women in Chaucer's time rode sidesaddle. For instance, the Ellesmere drawings depict Chaucer's Prioress and Second Nun riding sidesaddle. The Prioress, "ful symple and coy," (119) follows the traditional horsemanship of a women of her status and would never dream to ride so suggestively as Alisoun does astride.

According to Rowland, "Medieval didactic writers make frequent use of the analogy of a woman [riding] a horse . . . . [This] figure is often used to denote the woman who tries to reverse the positions of the sexes" (131). Since Alisoun wears spurs—even carries a whip in the Ellesmere drawings—and rides astride, she apparently prefers to be in a position of control, thereby reversing traditional gender position. As evident in her description, prologue and tale, Alisoun promotes a woman's willpower and manipulation. She rides her ambler much as she rode her five husbands:

An housbonde I wol have—I wol nat lette—  
Which shal be bothe my dettour and my thral,  
And have his tribulacion withal  
Upon his flessch, whil that I am his wyf.  
I have the power durynge al my lyf  
Upon his propre body, and noght he. (154-9)

Just as she directs her horse's body, spurring him left, right, and onward, the Wife of Bath controls her husband's body. She even likens herself to a whip: "myself have been the whippe" (175) by which "men corrected be" (181). Through her language and riding style, the Wife of Bath shows how a women's sexual power allows her to dominate men.

Alisoun, an attractive woman, openly admits to using her sexuality to manipulate men. She uses sex to control her husbands so they will let her do and have what she desires. She abstains from sex to make her husbands feel guilty and apologize:

I wolde no lenger in the bed abyde,  
If that I felte his arm over my syde,  
Til he had maad his raunson unto me;  
Thanne wolde I suffre hym do his nycetee. (409-412)

Just as riders use oats to train their horses, the Wife of Bath uses sex to train her husbands. If her husbands serve her well, Alisoun remains a dutiful wife. She wears spurs, uses a whip, and rides an ambler because she desires a comfortable journey. Likewise, she uses sex to control her husbands because she wants a free and comfortable marriage.

Unlike the Wife of Bath, the Shipman is unaccustomed to traveling long distances on land as he journeys almost exclusively by sea.<sup>7</sup> Adding some subtle humor, Chaucer assigns the most difficult mount—a rouncy—to the least experienced rider. Since during Chaucer's time "[a]ll travel and almost all draught relied on the horse," citizens often times needed a dual purpose animal (Longrigg 138). Rouncys were heavy, powerful animals only slightly lighter than the modern day draft horse. Though an "ordinary riding horse . . . accustomed to heavy loads by use as pack animals, " rouncys were nevertheless heavy-footed, clumsy and inclined to trot, which made them difficult and uncomfortable to ride (Gladitz 157). However, Chaucer's Shipman "rood upon [his] rouncy, as he kouthe" (390). The Shipman, living most of his life at sea, would know little of choosing a mount, and since rouncys were common horses for hire and often impressive looking, he probably rented one based on looks and availability rather than for a comfortable gait.

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<sup>7</sup> See fig. 13 on page 24.

According to Bowden, "the sailor on horseback was evidently a matter for jest as early as the fourteenth century" (193). Therefore, it is more likely that the tavern owner or his stableman saw that the Shipman was "a fish out of water" and a very inexperienced horseman. His "gowne . . . [and] daggere hangynge on a laas" (391-2), a typical seamen's attire, hints at his inefficiency as a horseman. The Shipman's miserable horsemanship and inexperience place him on the wrong end of a cruel joke. In seeing this opportunity to entertain his guests on their pilgrimage, and since the Shipman would be none the wiser, Harry Bailly probably assigned the worst horse to the worst rider.

Another pilgrim, the Cook, also exhibits poor horsemanship.<sup>8</sup> Before the Manciple can begin his tale, the Cook drunkenly falls off his horse: "For lakke of speche, and down the hors hym caste, / Where as he lay, til that men hym up took. / This was a fair chyvachee of a cook!" (48-50). The Cook's inability to control his horse and his tendency to drink represents his inability to control his life. Unlike most of the pilgrims, the Cook does not embark upon Chaucer's pilgrimage on his own accord. He is hired to cook and does not seek any spiritual redemption through his journey. In his fragmentary tale, the Cook describes a food merchantman's apprentice that "lovede dys, and revel, and disport" (4420). The manner of his tale hints at the Cook's personal reflection. His inability to stay on his horse and habit of being a "dronken wight" (*ManT* 35) suggests that he is unhappy in his current state and may even long for a life where he can "hoppe and synge and maken swich disport" (4382).

The Cook rides a capul, a small sturdy animal bred to draw hay carts. The capul was often the mount of poor individuals and was used by "People in trade needing transport for their goods" (Rowland 116). This hints at the Cook's low social status. Also, the Manciple reveals that the Cook's capul is a mare—a double insult: "Yet hadde I levere payen for the mare / Which he

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<sup>8</sup> See fig. 12 on page 23.

rit on, than he sholde with me stryve" (78-9). During Chaucer's time, people with high social status rarely rode mares as they were not considered "quality" mounts. The Cook's inability to ride an unsatisfactory mare mirrors his lack of satisfaction in his station and life.

Though the Plowman, like the Cook, also rides a mare, he humbly accepts his position and therefore appears to ride properly. According to Karkeek, "No person *pretending* to belong to 'quality' would have mounted a mare, except under circumstances of direst necessity" (1886; emphasis mine). The Plowman—"A trewe swynkere and a good was he, / Lyvyng in pees and parfit charitee," (531-2)—has no purpose to pretend to be anyone else—bourgeois, nobility, or otherwise. Chaucer's Plowman fits the archetype of a good peasant: he loves God (whether it pleases or pains him), he loves his neighbor (often doing favors for free), pays his taxes, and works hard—"hadde ylad of dong ful many a fother" (530). Though poor and low-class, the Plowman embodies a high level of morality. He has no problem riding a mare, "the unmistakable badge of the very poor," because he is humble and happy with himself; he displays the badge of a poor Plowman because he knows and willingly accepts such a state (Delasanta 31).

The Nun's Priest's horse, like the Cook's, represents his oppression.<sup>9</sup> Conventionally, the position of a nun's priest was neither prestigious nor lucrative. During Chaucer's time a man serving a woman, especially within the same occupation, often suffered great humiliation and lack of respect. To illustrate his discontentment, the Nun's Priest rides a jade described by the Host as "foul and lene" (2813). The word "jade" originated from "The Old Norse *jalda* [meaning] a mare too old to foal" (Rowland 120). It is uncertain precisely what the term jade meant in Chaucer's time, but it may suggest that the Nun's Priest, like the Plowman and the Cook, also rides a mare, which places him in a much lower class than the noble Prioress. A mare too old to foal would probably be quite "lene" due to the hardships of old age and overuse. Also, during the

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<sup>9</sup> See fig. 5 on page 22.

Middle Ages, a jade was usually a cart horse rather than a riding horse, which suggests that the Nun's Priest's lowly position warranted no horse of higher quality. Even though the Nun's Priest appears miserable in his state, the Host proposes that he ought to assume the Plowman's view on life:

Be blithe, though thou ryde upon a jade.

What thogh thyn hors be bothe foul and lene?

If he wol serve thee, rekke nat a bene.

Looke that thyn herte be murie everemo. (2812-5)

By stating that the Nun's Priest should happily accept his life's station, Chaucer implies that it might be best for his pilgrims if they humbly adhered to their archetypes, even though most of them resolutely refuse to do so.

The Canon and his Yeoman are the last riders described in terms of their specific mounts and manner of horsemanship.<sup>10</sup> Chaucer remarks on the abuse shown to their horses in their attempt to catch the other pilgrims:

His hakeney, that was al pomely grys,

So swatte that it wonder was to see;

It semed as he had priked miles three.

The hors eek that his yeman rood upon

So swatte that unnethe myghte it gon.

Aboute the peytrel stood the foom ful hye;

he was of foom al flekked as a pye.

A male tweyfoold on his croper lay;

It semed that he caried lite array.

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<sup>10</sup> See fig. 23 on page 26.

Al light for somer rood this worthy man,  
And in myn herte wondren I bigan . . .  
For he hadde riden moore than trot or paas;  
He hadde ay priked lik as he were wood. (559-76)

To intercept the pilgrimage, the Canon and his Yeoman have spurred their horses to the point of dire exhaustion. The Canon's dabble-grey hackney appears to have been forced to run hard for three full miles and the Yeoman's horse speckled in sweaty foam can barely stand once the two reached the pilgrimage. This display of poor horsemanship implies the foolhardiness and presumption of the Canon rather than of his Yeoman, because the Yeoman, being a servant, would have no choice but to follow his master, whether it suited the well-being of his horse or not. When the Host asks the Canon for a tale, his talkative Yeoman interrupts, announcing that his master is a clever alchemist but is dressed so poorly because he misuses his craft. The Canon tries in vain to silence his Yeoman but then flees in shame. The Yeoman, at the end of his tale, admits to his master's sinfulness:

How that a man shal come unto this stoon,  
I rede, as for the beste, lete it goon.  
For whoso maketh God his adversarie,  
As for to werken any thyng in contrarie  
Of his wil, certes, never shal he thryve,  
Thogh that he multiplie terme of his lyve. (1474-9)

The Canon's poor horsemanship, like making God his adversary by abusing one of God's creatures, suggests his poor business practices and foolish ambitions.

The Canon rides a hackney. Hackney derives from the "French *haquenée*, which means 'nag' or gelding" (Edwards 154). Hackneys, though less valuable than palfreys, were the ordinary riding horse of the Middle Ages. Chaucer describes the Canon's hackney as "pomely gryns," which originally meant "spotted like an apple," or "dappled-grey" by modern standards. In the Middle Ages, horses came in a variety of colors. White was the most prized color, followed by dapple-grey. Though his horse's color was prized, the Canon "would despise it because in medieval France the *haquenée* was an ambling horse or mare, especially for ladies to ride on" (Rowland 121). Placing the Canon upon a dapple-grey hackney, again hints at his foolishness and failure as an alchemist. Just as he fails to double his profits by attempting to make "That of a pound [of gold] . . . tweye," (677) he fails to make a quality mount out of his hackney just by choosing a popular color.

## The Ellesmere Drawings



Fig. 1: The Knight



Fig. 2: The Squire



Fig. 3: The Prioress



Fig. 4: The Second Nun





Fig. 5: The Nun's Priest



Fig. 6: The Monk



Fig. 7: The Friar



Fig. 8: The Merchant



Fig. 9: The Clerk



Fig. 10: The Man of Law



Fig. 11: The Franklin



Fig. 12: The Cook



Fig. 13: The Shipman



Fig. 14: The Physician



Fig. 15: The Wife of Bath



Fig. 16: The Parson



Fig. 17: The Miller



Fig. 18: The Manciple



Fig. 19: The Reeve



Fig. 20: The Summoner



Fig. 21: The Pardoner



Fig. 22: Chaucer



Fig. 23: The Canon's Yeoman

## CHAPTER 2

### “Wehee” and “Weylaway”: Bayard and the Use of Horseplay in Chaucer’s

#### *Reeve’s Tale*

The most prevalent example of equine symbolization in *The Canterbury Tales* manifests in the *Reeve’s Tale*. Here as elsewhere, horses embody many of the same characteristics as their riders. Well-mannered horses belong to proud dignified, composed individuals, and disobedient, wild horses belong to people who are not able to control their passions. In the *Reeve’s Tale*, miller Symkyn uses the clerks’ free-spirited horse as the base for his trickery, thereby setting up his own downfall and humiliation as the horse's lustful actions soon become the actions taken by John and Aleyn.

When Symkyn releases the clerks’ horse, he not only frees Bayard to pursue the wild mares as he desires, but due to his thievery, he unintentionally frees the clerks’ sexual impulses for his daughter and wife as they seek their revenge. Thus the image of Symkyn freeing the horse parallels the clerks’ revenge. Janette Richardson describes the parallel between Symkyn’s trick and his undoing:

When Symkyn undoes Bayard’s bridle and gives the stallion freedom to pursue the wild mares as desire directs, he is unwittingly releasing animalistic instincts other than those of the horse, for had he not succeeded in the theft made possible by this one action, the two clerks would have had no call for the revenge which they later effect. Their anger at being duped both results essentially from this one action and parallels it, for the desire to avenge their deception unbridles all inhibitions upon precisely those impulses within them, which they share with their stallion. (90)

The detail of the first scene of the tale equates ironically to the second and final scene where the clerks enact their revenge and Symkyn is humiliated. In addition, several details from the chase scene mimic the bed scene at the end of the tale.

In the release of the clerks' horse, Chaucer clearly states that the miller unbridled Bayard. The miller's wife reinforces the importance of this act when she tells the clerks,

"Allas! youre hors goth to the fen  
With wilde mares, as faste as he may go.  
Unthank come on his hand that boond hym so,  
And he that better sholde han knyght the reyne!" (4080-83).

In the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, the bridle symbolized temperance—the sensible man's control over his passions. John Block Friedman cites Golding's preface to his translation of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*: "That man in whom the fyre of furious lust dooth reigne / Dooth run too mischief lik a horse that getteth loose the reyne" (qt. in Friedman 11). By unbridling Bayard, loosing the horse from control, Symkyn releases him to pursue the wild mares in the fens, and in turn, the clerks find themselves running helplessly after him.

Believing Symkyn ignorant and stupid, the clerks had become overconfident in their own cleverness, but once Symkyn releases their horse, they find that instead of controlling their situation with the miller, they are now themselves controlled by it. This lack of physical control affects the clerks' mental state as well. Upon hearing John cry out after the loose Bayard, Aleyn "al forgat, bothe mele and corn; / Al was out of his mynde his housbondrie" (4076-77). By losing their horse and thus their control over the situation with Symkyn, the clerks in effect give up their self-control. Friedman states that Chaucer's "use of Bayard to open the action of the tale sets the moral tone for what is to follow and suggests that the narrative is to deal with the ungoverned

passions of man" (11). Thus by unbridling Bayard and releasing him to satisfy his desires, Symkyn also releases the clerks, freeing them to pursue their own passions. They become, like Bayard, "unbridled," freed to pursue Symkyn's daughter and wife in order to regain their dominance and enact revenge upon the miller.

After the clerks return with Bayard, Symkyn kindly reties the horse so that "it sholde namoore go loos" (4138). This ironic image parallels the image of Symkyn making a bed for the clerks in his own home. He tries to tie the clerks to one bed, but they still get "loos" and run, like Bayard, to the wild mares, Symkyn's daughter and his wife.

In satisfying their lust for revenge, the clerks sleep with Symkyn's wife and daughter in his "owene chamber" (4139). This circumstance recalls Symkyn's unbridling of Bayard in the first scene and Bayard's chase after the wild mares in the fens. Paul F. Ruggiers explains the emergence of sexual desire at the start of the chase scene:

What emerges from the description of the stallion's "wehee!" in his instinctive search for the wild mares and the ensuing vigorous chase is an expression of natural exuberance, of lustiness and vitality in animals and humans alike without a shred of transcendental values. (76)

Once the clerks are let loose and given the opportunity to enact their revenge, they go forth with vigor and sexual prowess. In quoting Friedman, Feinstein explains that in medieval times, horses were associated with "passion and lust" (100). They were associated with a man's sexual vitality and desirability toward women, and medieval authors sometimes used the act of riding a horse to express sexual activity. Chaucer's brief riding images often express sexual activities. For instance, in the *Reeve's Tale*, John "priketh harde and depe as he were mad" (4231), and in the



*Nun's Priest's Tale* is Chauntecleer's regretful "al be it that I may nat on yow ride" (3168); though these images refer to horseback riding, they clearly represent sexual activity.

According to medieval tradition, if a man rode his horse well, then, more than likely, he rode his women well. Rowland states that "Medieval didactic writers make frequent use of the analogy of a woman to a horse" (131). This analogy creates several common token symbols such as the bridle, harness, collar, and girth which a man used to control his women as well as his horse. For instance, in marriage, the ring represents the halter used by the "groom to harness his bride" (Rowland 131). In the *Reeve's Tale*, Bayard is controlled by his bridle. When the bridle is removed, Bayard runs free to pursue his desires, and his freedom only ends when the clerks replace the bridle. Arguably, Symkyn's control over the clerks only lasts until he unbridles Bayard. Once he takes the bridle off and frees the clerks' horse, he likewise frees the clerks to carry out their revenge.

A long history of myth, proverbial lore and fable fashioned horses into symbols of lust and romance. This history and symbolism spans many cultures and many generations. In mythology, supernatural beings often, under an equine guise, seduce and copulate with beautiful maidens. In accordance with the ancient Greek and Chinese zodiacs, people born under the sign of the horse crave love and intimacy. Horses are even found in the anxiety dream where, "according to some psychologists, their presence indicates . . . [a] swift-moving, potent animal [which] serves as a vehicle for expressing infantile sexual conflicts often never adequately resolved, even in adulthood" (Rowland 129). To add to their manhood and romantic image, great kings, knights, and war heroes are often portrayed on horses. Artists often depict King Arthur and Lancelot astride great chargers.

The oldest and most renowned equine statue features the great Roman Emperor Marcus Aurelius. Nickel explains that “Among the works of art surviving from classical antiquity, one of the most influential is doubtless the equestrian statue of Emperor Marcus Aurelius” (17). For centuries, the statue stood in front of the Lateran Palace in Rome. Phillip Fehl documents that “Its last placement there was on a well-made pedestal, which was provided by [Pope] Sixtus IV in 1474” (362). During the Middle Ages, it was one of the few Roman statues to remain on public view. On the order of Pope Paul III, the statue of Marcus Aurelius was relocated in 1538 to the Piazza del Campidoglio (Capitoline Hill). Currently, the original is on display in a room designed especially for this purpose in the Palazzo dei Conservatori. The statue of Marcus Aurelius “served as a model for the majority of equestrian statues throughout the entire history of European art” and may even have inspired some of Chaucer’s works as the statue was well-known and often studied during Chaucer’s time (Nickel 17). Even today, horses symbolize strength, romance, and masculinity. Romance novels often depict horses along with picturesque "stallion-like" men on their covers. Cowboys, knights, and even distinguished Englishman are all sexual, romantic figures when they appear astride similarly beautiful animals. Due to ancient fable and history, horses have thus become an archetype for sex, passion, and romance, as Chaucer must have been well aware when he wrote his *Reeve's Tale*. "In the *Reeve's Tale*, the students' horse . . . gallops loose across the fens, an image of unbridled sexuality," as Boenig says, thus representing the clerks' youth, wild nature, sexual intent, and ability to fulfill their desires (48).

The horse archetype appears in the image of the clerks returning with Bayard as “wery and weet, as beest in the reyn” (4107). At first this detail, though pleasingly aesthetic, appears minor. Readers initially appreciate the detail but are innocently unaware that it is an ironic

parallel to the last scene. At dawn, after taking their revenge, Aleyn and John are in surprisingly the same condition as they were after their chase, but for obviously different reasons. For instance, when he returns to John, "Aleyn wax wery in the dawenyng, / For he had swonken al the longe nyght . . ." (4234-5). Since Aleyn and John spent "al the longe nyght" having sex with Symkyn's wife and daughter, they remain in the same tired, wet state as they were the night before.

John's own speech creates further ironic equivalents between the first and last scene. The first occurs when John quotes a proverb: "Man sal taa of twa thynges: / Slyk as he fyndes, or taa slyk as he brynges" (4129-30)—that a guest must be satisfied with either what he finds or what he brings, not both. According to Richardson, "the clerks are prevented from taking away a half-bushel of the grain they bought, [so] they do indeed 'take' what they find: namely, the wife and the daughter" (92). Since Symkyn takes great pride in his horse trick and believes that "The gretteste clerks been nocht wisest men," he fails to heed John's warning (4054).

The second parallel comes from another of John's foreshadowing proverbs: "With empty hand men may na haukes tulle" (4134). Through this falconry image, John explains that in order to keep a hawk in control, its master needs a lure. Therefore, what is held in the hand controls the beast. Only nineteen lines before John's proverb, he returns to the mill with Bayard's bridle in his hand, but it is Bayard's actions out of the hand which anticipate Symkyn's defeat and humiliation. Janette Richardson explains the importance of Bayard as a lure:

Bayard . . . is the lure in both major scenes. He attracts the clerks away from the mill, thus allowing Symkyn a temporary mastery; but ironically as specified by the combination of *sententia* [proverb] and literal detail, the stallion in turn

becomes the lure held in the hand which provides cause for the clerk's eventual mastery over Symkyn's predatoriness. (93)

In falconry, a lure, such as a piece of meat held in a falconer's hand, attracts the hawk and keeps it subdued by its master. Likewise, Symkyn uses Bayard as a lure, as bait, to draw the clerks away from the mill. Once the clerks chase after Bayard, Symkyn gains temporary mastery over the situation, thus subduing the clerks. However, once John returns to the mill leading Bayard in his hand, the role of master and falcon reverse as the second half of the tale materializes. Since John now holds Bayard, the lure, in his hand, he and Aleyn may regain mastery over Symkyn. Initially, Bayard, again acting as a lure, attracted Symkyn who used the horse to draw the clerks away from the mill. But since Bayard's capture initiates the sequence of events leading to Symkyn's cuckolding (the clerks arrive too late and must spend the night with Symkyn's family), the clerks' repossession of their horse reflects their eventual mastery over Symkyn. Thus Bayard creates ironic parallels between the two major sections of the *Reeve's Tale*, enhancing the humor and irony of the miller's downfall.

In another parallel that links Symkyn to Bayard, Chaucer compares the miller, sleeping drunk and snoring, to a horse: "This millere hath so wisely bibbed ale / That as an hors he fnoerteth in his sleep, / Ne of his tayl bihynde he took no keep" (4162-4). According to Richardson "This vivid though indelicate image is . . . highly effective for its immediate purpose of describing the nocturnal 'melodye' to which the clerks are forced to listen; but because a horse has played so important a part in the previous scene, the simile also relates Symkyn to Bayard" (91). To reiterate the importance of Symkyn's unbridling of Bayard, Chaucer gives the miller some of his qualities, carrying the importance of the horse imagery into the last section of the tale as Symkyn becomes the figurative horse.

In the first scene, Symkyn, like Bayard, enjoys a certain extent of freedom. While Bayard enjoyed his temporary romp with the wild mares, Symkyn delights in freedom from punishment for his theft. However, the freedom for both soon ends with a ditch. After a long weary chase, Aleyn and John finally catch Bayard in a ditch. Likewise, Symkyn's freedom ends in the cuckolding of his wife who, in her earlier description, is described as being "as digne as water in a dich" (3964). Symkyn's humiliation results from a figurative ditch, yet his situation mirrors that of Bayard in the first scene, for like Bayard, who loses his freedom to lust after the mares, Symkyn loses his sexual prowess with his wife. Psychologically, "ditch" has thus become a "coarse double-entendre in relation to the wife's anatomy" (Richardson 92). As the clerks thwarted Bayard's sexual activity in the first scene, they also spoil Symkyn's, the figurative horse's, sexual relationship with his wife. For John, the more potent, vigorous partner, sleeps with Symkyn's wife and by doing so, deepens Symkyn's humiliation. In the end, the clerks prove themselves more sexually potent than the miller and dominate him through the "swyving" of his mares—his wife and daughter.

Another hint emphasizing the importance of the horse imagery in the *Reeve's Tale* involves Bayard's name. If the horse did not play such a significant role in the tale, Chaucer would simply have stated that the clerks rode to the mill. He might have specified that they rode on a horse, or he could merely have just left it up for assumption. However, Chaucer calls this horse Bayard. And since Chaucer names few horses in *The Canterbury Tales*, the name becomes significant.

To examine the onomastic importance and appeal of the name Bayard, one must consult Chaucer's original source for the *Reeve's Tale*: "the French fabliau *Le Meunier de les Deux Clerks* [The Miller and the Two Clerks]" (Richardson 86). In the French version, the clerks arrive at the

mill, not with the lustful Bayard, but with a mare that belongs to one of their brothers. Instead of the miller unbridling and releasing the horse as he does in the *Reeve's Tale*, he steals the clerks' mare and the bag of grain. After this theft occurs, the mare disappears until the very end of the tale when the miller's wife tells the clerks that her husband stole the horse. However, Chaucer, seeing the potential symbolic and comic possibilities of the clerks' borrowed mount, chose to replace the much less interesting horse with the vigorous Bayard. In addition, Chaucer improves the original fabliaux by making the horse a character and an actor in the tale. By naming Bayard and having him speak "horse," Chaucer gives the animal a personality which later shows in the two clerks as well as Symkyn the miller.

At the onslaught of his freedom, Bayard goes "forth with [a] 'wehee.'" This horse-spoken exclamation gives Bayard's flight passion and a sense of deep motivation. This passion and motivation manifests later in Aleyn and John as they passionately sleep with the miller's wife and daughter, their motivation of course resulting from the theft of their grain and the humiliation from Symkyn's trickery with Bayard. In addition, by giving Bayard a motivated, lively flight and by making him exceptionally clever and spirited in evading his masters' capture, Chaucer creates a humorous yet familiar horse and rider figure.

Friedman explains the relevance and familiarity of the horse and rider in medieval society:

As it was depicted in medieval art and literature . . . [t]he horse and rider [stood] as figure for the proper—or more usually, the improper—relationship of reason and the passions in the soul of man. [This image] was a widely used motif in medieval iconography. It grew out of the Pauline concept of *homo duplex* or the twofold nature of man, the passional, sinful side of whose nature was likened to a

spirited horse and the rational side to the rider who ideally guides—rather than is guided by—his mount. [In addition] Plato had compared the human soul to a chariot pulled by two horses, one suggesting the will and the other the intellect. Philo of Alexandria . . . interpret[ed] a reference to the horse and rider in Exodus 15:1 to show that the horse was desire and passion (*epithumia kai thumos*), while the rider was mind (*nous*). And Horace [stated] in his Epistle to Lollius: "Rule your passion: which commands if it does not obey: do you restrain it with a bridle, do you with fetters." (10)

Since Chaucer's audience would have been familiar with this motif and (at least in regard to the students) with its associations, they could easily have related Bayard and the clerks' actions to the ungoverned, unbridled passions of man. By making Bayard central to the plot of the *Reeve's Tale*, Chaucer conflates the common horse and rider motif with the clerks' behavior when enacting their revenge upon the miller.

Although the simple act of naming the clerks' horse illustrates its importance in the tale, Chaucer's specifically chosen name, Bayard, is significant as well. Originally Bayard was the name of the horse belonging to the 12th century Old French fictional hero Rinaldo de Montauban. In his quest to pursue glory, Rinaldo, one of Charlemagne's nephews, captures the magical steed, Bayard. According to legend, Bayard had formally belonged to Amadis de Gual and "after the death of that hero [Bayard] had been held under enchantment by the power of a magician, who predicted that when the time came to break the spell, he should be subdued by a knight of the lineage of Amadis, and not less brave than he" (Bulfinch 661). To win Bayard, a knight needed to conquer him by force or skill. With the help of Malagig, enchanter and cousin

to Rinaldo, Rinaldo finds Bayard. Before attacking Bayard, Rinaldo stands at length admiring the horse's beauty and strength:

A bright bay in color (whence he was called Bayard), with a silver star in his forehead, and his hind feet white, his body slender, his head delicate, his ample chest filled out with swelling muscles, his shoulders broad and full, his legs straight and sinewy, his thick mane falling over his arching neck. (Bulfinch 662)

Bayard's description creates a very romantic image. With his thick flowing hair, muscular chest and his broad shoulders, Bayard could almost pass as a man or an image of a man's aspirations. Therefore, since Rinaldo wishes to obtain fame, he must ride a mount that suites and promotes his own manly image.

Once Rinaldo defeats Bayard by throwing him on his side, the horse becomes gentle and yields to Rinaldo as his master. With Bayard, "Rinaldo became one of the most illustrious knights of Charlemagne's court" (Bulfinch 663). Even Rinaldo's Bayard, like the clerks' Bayard in Chaucer's *Reeve's Tale*, gets loose sending his master on a wild chase. One instance occurred when Rinaldo tied Bayard to a tree while he rested. As Rinaldo slept, "Bayard meanwhile got loose, and strayed away where the grass tempted him" (Bulfinch 818). Soon some country people captured Bayard and sold him to King Charles. Unfortunately after Rinaldo reclaims Bayard, he and his brothers fall under the king's disfavor. Charlemagne pardons the four brothers on the condition that Rinaldo goes crusading in Palestine, and that Bayard is surrendered to Charlemagne's son Charlot. Charlot orders the horse chained to stones and drowned in the Meuse River. But each time Charlot tries to drown Bayard, the horse rises and returns to Rinaldo who stands at the edge of the bank. Before the third attempt, Charlot forces Rinaldo to hide from Bayard's view. Subsequently "When Bayard rose to the surface he stretched his neck out of the



water and looked round for his master, but saw him not. Then he sunk into the bottom" (Bulfinch 821). Till his demise, Bayard showed such love and loyalty to his master that after his death Rinaldo refused to ever ride another horse again.

After this first appearance, the name "Bayard" was used as a mock-heroic name for any horse. However, it soon acquired a more common usage as a proper name that simply denoted a bay (reddish-brown coat with a black mane and tail) colored horse. Chaucer even used Bayard as a place name for a cart horse in his *Troilus and Cressida*:

This Troilus is clomben on the staire,  
And litel weeneth that he moste descenden—  
But al day faileth thing that fooles wenden.  
As proude Bayard ginneth for to skippe  
Out of the way, so prikketh him his corn,  
Til he a lassh have of the longe whippe,  
Thanne thinketh he, "Though I prounce al biforn,  
First in the trais ful fat and newe shorn,  
Yit am I but an hors, and horses lawe  
I moot endure, and with my feres draw. (215-224)

In popular usage, the name lost the heroic qualities of Rinaldo's horse and became associated with a blind, stumbling, foolish old horse. Chaucer refers to this proverbial expression in his *Canon Yeoman's Tale*:

Though ye prolle ay, ye shul it nevere fynde.  
Ye been as boold as is Bayard the blynde,  
That blondreth forth and peril casteth noon.

He is as boold to renne agayn a stoon  
As for to goon bisides in the weye.  
So faren ye that multiplie, I seye.  
If that youre eyen kan nat seen aright,  
Looke that youre mynde lakke nocht his sight. (1412-19)

In this excerpt, the figure of Bayard symbolizes and explains the foolishness of people who seek to profit from alchemy.

By choosing Bayard as the name of the horse in the *Reeve's Tale*, Chaucer brings together the qualities of both the clerks and the miller. First, the name Bayard adds to the rustic detail, a common fabliau characteristic. By naming the horse and giving him speech and a personality, Chaucer adds charming detail to the *Reeve's Tale*, much in the same way he matches Symkyn's red hose with his wife's red gown. In addition, drawing upon Bayard's heroic associations as the original horse of Renaud, Chaucer give resonance to the horse's as well as the clerks' mock-heroic adventure. In heroic adventures, the hero journeys far away from home, undergoes some hardship, strife, or trial, then returns home again, usually but not always victorious. Bayard follows this tradition in his adventure as he runs far into the fens, struggles to avoid the clerks' capture, and then eventually returns home again. Similarly, the clerks journey from home to battle with the "evil" Symkyn. Once Symkyn pulls his trick and releases the horse, the clerks must undergo an arduous chase and then, when they return, painfully endure the miller's family symphony of snoring. However, in the end, the clerks' defeat Symkyn and return home victorious.

A name with a number of connotations, like Bayard, allows for connection with a number of characters. While Bayard's heroic association recalls the clerks' mock-heroic defeat of

Symkyn, its proverbial meaning embodies the foolishness of the men in the tale. For even though the clerks ultimately win over Symkyn, they foolishly assume the miller's ignorance of their plan to catch him stealing their grain:

This millere smyled of hir nycetee,  
And thoghte, "Al this nys doon but for a wyle.  
They wene that no man may hem bigyle,  
But by my thrift, yet shal I blere hir ye,  
For al the sleighte in hir philosophye.  
The moore queynte crekes that they make,  
The moore wol I stele whan I take.  
In stide of flour yet wol I yeve hem bren.  
The gretteste clerkes been nocht wisest men." (4046-54)

The miller was not as foolish as the clerks hoped. Even the clerks admit to their own foolishness as, once they discover their horse missing, John calls to Aleyn: "Ilhayl! By God, Aleyn, thou is a fonne!" (4089). Then in the second half of the tale, Johns feels slighted when Aleyn leaves him to sleep with the miller's daughter and thus calls himself a fool: "'Allas!' quod he, 'this is a wikked jape; / Now may I seyn that I is but an ape'" (4200-4202). By calling Aleyn a fool and himself an ape, John admits to their own ignorance when dealing with the miller.

Bayard's popular association with blind foolishness relates also to the miller. Although Symkyn initially fooled the clerks with his trick, he was foolish himself in believing that he could steal grain and escape without punishment. "Hym thar nat wene wel that yvele dooth.' / A gylour shal hymself bigyled be" (4320-21). Ultimately Symkyn, who calls others fools, is fooled and tricked as the clerks sleep with his wife and daughter and steal back their grain. His

cuckolding then results as punishment for his theft, trickery, and false pride. The overtures of Bayard's name remain significant, foreshadowing and symbolizing the actions, as well as the personality traits, of the characters in the *Reeve's Tale*.

Most critics assume that the lustful Bayard is a stallion. Sandy Feinstein poses a convincing argument, however, that due to the common conventions of the time, "Bayard is more than likely a gelding" (100). Feinstein asserts that since a stallion's nature makes it difficult to handle, and since the stallion's main purpose, then and now, involves breeding mares, using one to haul grain—as the clerks do in the *Reeve's Tale*—would be highly impractical and inconvenient. To support her position, Feinstein explains the improbability of clerks procuring and handling a stallion:

A knight might ride a proud steed, a stallion, because of the achievement in handling such an animal; but he would have the time to train such an animal that university clerks and wardens would not, or should not. . . . The sort of management required [in training stallions] would not lend itself to turning stallions into packhorses; nor would clerks or millers be the likely managers of such animals. (101)

Even in the Middle Ages, stallions served as valuable, albeit dangerous, animals requiring the utmost care and management. Most stallions belonged to the nobility who could afford to train and keep them properly; clerks and wardens would have little use for them.

Although Sandy Feinstein presents a valid, well-supported argument, it fails to adhere to the conventions of the genre of the *Reeve's Tale*, the fabliau. If Bayard appeared as a clerk's horse in a different tale, such as the *Knight's Tale* or the *Wife of Bath's Tale*, he would most certainly be a gelding. But, since fabliaux conventionally center around sexual rather than

rational logic, Bayard may very well be a stallion. Norris J. Lacy explains inconsistent logic of the fabliaux:

The fabliaux posit a cosmos in which our customary rules of logic and perception can be either suspended at the whim of the narrator or, conversely, observed rigorously, should the narrator's purposes require it. Pragmatic conventions (concerning the usual rules of logic, the usual way the world works, the normal understanding of what is possible and what is expected) give way to conventions of the genre itself. (136)

Logically, Bayard should be a gelding, but this works against the tale's implicit sexual thematic. Since Chaucer obviously intended the horse incidents in the *Reeve's Tale* to foreshadow the clerks sleeping with Symkyn's wife and daughter, portraying Bayard as a gelding would diminish the narrator's purpose. Also, the likeliness of a gelding exclaiming "wehee" and running "thurgh thikke and thurgh thenne" remains slim (4066). Geldings, like most horses, prefer the companionship of other equines, but they rarely lust after mares with Bayard's liveliness. A gelding, once freed, would probably find a nearby field in which to graze or would return home (in this case to the warden's barn or stable).

The suspended logic of Bayard's gender is related to another characteristic of fabliaux—disregard for common rules of reason. Mistaken identities dominate fabliaux humor; characters often fail to recognize a familiar face and/or voice, thus succumbing to some sort of trick or cuckolding. Most often a wife, assuming that she is with her husband, may have sex with a stranger just as Symkyn's wife mistakes John for her husband when she is tricked into the wrong bed. Due to the age of their daughter, Symkyn and his wife have been married at least twenty years. Logically Symkyn's wife should be able to tell him apart from a young clerk even in the

absence of light, but she fails to recognize the switch and is even surprised by her husband's sexual vigor. A fight results from the wife's mistake and the clerks' sexual activities, and eventually Symkyn is beaten and defeated. The very absurdity of mistaken identities and miscued logic adds to the humor of such fabliaux scenes.

Norris Lacy examines the influence of mistaken identities on the humor of the fabliaux:

[T]he emphasis [on mistaken identities] is not on *whether* one would be likely to recognize a friend or spouse, but on the humorous possibilities offered if one does not. Mistaken identities are a frequent source of humor, and, as in the joke, the fabliaux finds it sufficient simply to stipulate them. They must happen because the joke depends on it. (135)

Misplaced and deferred logic are essential to the fabliaux. Without lapses in common reason, the fabliaux's humor fizzles. In the same manner that Symkyn's wife failed to recognize her husband of twenty years, Bayard remains a stallion even though clerks, logically, would never use stallions to haul grain. Bayard's stallion sexuality sets up the clerks' arduous chase and the miller's eventual humorous downfall. In order to insure the humor of the *Reeve's Tale* as a fabliaux, Bayard must remain a stallion.

Just as Bayard reflects the clerks' nature, the Reeve's chosen mount, the stot, hints at its master's character.<sup>11</sup> In the *General Prologue*, the "Reve sat upon a ful good stot / That was al pomely grey and highte Scot" (615-16). In the Middle Ages, a stot mainly indicated a sturdy farm horse used by landowners to inspect their property; however, it also referred to a stallion. The stot most closely resembled the modern day cob type. According to Janette Richardson, since the Reeve's horse "is also called Scot [,] it can be assumed that he has a good Norfolk cob"

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<sup>11</sup> See fig. 19 on page 25.

(120). The cob type horse is thickset with powerful hindquarters and short, strong legs. As a riding animal, the cob, at the time, was considered the "gentleman's gentleman" (Edwards 242).

By placing the Reeve astride a dapple gray stallion, Chaucer hints at the Reeve's sexual desire. Though old, the Reeve still retains his youthful desires:

Oure wyl desireth folie evere in oon.

For whan we may nat doon, than wol we speke;

Yet in oure asshen olde is fyr yreke. . . .

But wyl ne shal nat faillen, that is sooth.

And yet ik have alwey a colte's tooth. (3880-88)

Since the Reeve will always have a "colt's tooth" and young passions, he rides a stallion reminiscent of his mind's youthful desires. But, since the Reeve's body is now feeble, he presumably cannot walk long distances, and so, the strong stallion he rides replaces his old man's body with a youthful virile one. The horse's "pomely grey" coat represents the Reeve's "white top" thus signifying his age, while the horse's quality and gender represent his sexually youthful heart.

Although reeves in the Middle Ages managed estates, they usually were not wealthy. However, since Chaucer's Reeve steals and manipulates his young lord, he amasses a great deal of wealth. He is "better at bargains than his lord" (624) and "feared like the plague" (621); thus he surpasses his lord in business skill as he willfully uses any means necessary to insure that he benefits from and maintains control over the manor. Chaucer also describes "The Reve [as] a splendre colerik man" (587). The term choleric refers to the Reeve's violent temper, which again reflects his mount as stallions characteristically have hot, unpredictable, dangerous temperaments.

The Reeve's characteristic sexual nature and the type of horse he rides foreshadow the action, characters, and plot of his tale. Since the *Reeve's Tale* illustrates the sexual desire of the two young clerks and their horse, the Reeve rides a stallion in order to remain as youthful and sexually vigorous as John, Aleyn, and Bayard. In the same manner that Bayard represents the clerks' lust and prowess, the Reeve's stot signifies his eternal sexually spirited nature.

According to Sandy Feinstein, during Chaucer's time, "Horses were omnipresent; they served all three estates in a wide range of capacities: as transportation and draft animal, as war horse and courtier's mount, as pack horse and plough horse, as hunter and tournament steed" (100). Since horses were ubiquitous in everyday medieval society, Chaucer's audience would know the practical as well as the symbolic meanings of these important animals. In addition, the Reeve's audience of Canterbury pilgrims would have known the nature of their mounts. Therefore, the Reeve, well aware of his eternal sexual desire, rides a stallion and uses Bayard's stallion imagery in his tale to represent the nature of his characters. Just as the horse embodies an eminent figure of the Middle Ages, it plays an important role in *The Canterbury Tales*. In the *Reeve's Tale* especially, Chaucer relies on popular concepts of the horse during his time to represent his characters and the nature of their tale.



## CHAPTER 3

### From Blood, Bronze, and Brass: Classical Equine Allusions and Creative Models in

#### Chaucer's Squire's Tale

Perhaps the most fascinating horse represented in *The Canterbury Tales* is the Squire's "steede of bras" (81). In the *Squire's Tale*, Chaucer relies less on common everyday conventions of horse breeds and equestrianism and more on the horse's literary and historical background to emphasize the importance of the brass steed. Though fragmental, the tale begins as a medieval romance, relying on certain form characteristics of the genre: a beloved king, a beautiful princess, and magical tokens. Most of the magical tokens, gifts given to King Cambuscan, are common symbols that appear in many medieval romances. However, the center of these marvels, the brass steed, remains unique to the *Squire's Tale* and may reflect something of the young man's nature.

In medieval romance, authors use magical tokens because they "are believed to have supernatural power to cause a supernatural being (as a wizard or a witch) to produce a particular result (as rain, death, or healing) considered not obtainable by natural means" (Rollo *xix*). The mirror, the sword, and the ring emerge most often in medieval tales. For example, Yvain, in *The Knight with the Lion*, by Chrétien de Troyes uses a magical ring to hide from his attackers at the castle of the fountain knight. Rings populated Celtic lore and often symbolized hidden desires or weaknesses of a character. Swords, such as King Arthur's Excalibur, and mirrors, or any reflective surface, are common tools used by medieval authors to give their heroes heightened power or to hint at certain character flaws within such heroes. Since the Squire, in an attempt to mimic his father, the Knight, wishes to tell a true romance, he includes these generic conventions

in his tale. Even his brass horse, though truly individual, has its roots in myth and classical literature.

Naturally, the Squire desires to prove himself a worthy storyteller in the presence of his father. According to Craig Berry, the Squire's predicament reveals a "self-conscious intersection of literary imitation and inherited authority" (287). In trying to imitate the Knight, as well as assert his own skill, the Squire includes several classical allusions in his tale. Being young and inexperienced, he lacks the finesse of his father, yet his tale reflects his lively character and suits him accordingly. Representing the newest generation of knighthood, it conveys the Squire's youthful exuberance, vivid imagination, and naivety. As Coghill says,

[t]he young Squire is charmingly self-conscious about his style (which is like his father's unmatured), . . . but his head is full of wonders, horses of brass, magic mirrors, rings, and swords. There is no knowing how long he would have wandered among such age-old, ever-fresh imaginings, had he not been interrupted by the Franklin. He was still in the tapestry world of Chaucer's own youthful vision. Chaucer had passed beyond it into the common light of day, but it was a world he had never forgotten and could still recapture as if he had never gotten old. (167)

Chaucer embodies the Squire's, and perhaps his own "ever-fresh imaginings" in the creation of the magical steed of brass. The horse, though owing its creative origin to such classical models as Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and Virgil's *Aeneid*, shows the Squire's individual creativity as it blurs the lines between animal, man, magic, and machine.

In the beginning of the *Squire's Tale*, a foreign knight arrives at King Cambuscan's birthday feast to bestow magical gifts from the "kyng of Arabe and of Inde" (110). The gifts

include a mirror, a ring, a sword, and a magical brass steed which the knight dramatically rides into Cambyuskan's hall while the king and his guests dine. The knight gives the mirror and the ring to King Cambyuskan's daughter. The mirror "hath swich a myght that men may in it see . . . who is [their] freend or foo" (133-6). The ring allows its wearer to understand and speak the language of any creature. These gifts later allow Princess Canacee to converse with the love-lorn falcon. The sword "swich vertu hath that what man so ye smyte / Thurghout his armure it wole kerve and byte" (157-58) and the brass horse has the power to carry his rider anywhere in the world within a day; both are given to King Cambyuskan. Though the gifts hold many wonders (and would more than likely have appeared vital to the remainder of the tale had it been completed), the people of Cambyuskan's court marvel mostly at the brass steed.

After his birthday feast, King Cambyuskan, followed by a group of his subjects, goes to inquire about the knight's strange steed:

At after-soper gooth this noble kyng  
To seen this hors of bras, with al a route  
Of lordes and of ladyes hym aboute.  
Swich wondryng was ther on this hors of bras  
That syn the grete sege of Troie was,  
Theras men wondreden on an hors also,  
Ne was ther swich a wondryng as was tho.  
But fynally the kyng axeth this knight  
The vertu of this courser and the myght,  
And preyde hym to telle his governaunce. (302-11)

Although all four gifts are extraordinary, more comments are made about the brass horse. To illustrate the significance of the horse, the Squire gives the knight's explanation "far greater discourse upon the strange steed than the other three gifts" (Kordecki 283). In his description, the Squire asserts that "Nature ne art ne koude hym nat amende," (197) implying that since the essence of this horse involved both nature and machine, it crossed the human-made world with that made solely by God. In insisting, "It was a fairye," (201) Cambyuskan's people "murmureden as dooth a swarn of bees" (204) and began to rehearse "olde poetries" (206) about two specific mythical mounts: Pegasus and the Trojan horse. According to Kordecki, "The brass steed, then, becomes a cause for more speech, and object of discourse as well as magic, and an excuse for mythological allusions" (283). To illustrate his knowledge and display vernacular skill, the Squire uses his brass steed as an excuse to allude to classical literary models.

The first allusion, well before Cambyuskan's people begin to speculate, occurs the moment the foreign knight rides into the palace. Using the classic romance motif of the armed knight riding into the banquet hall, the Squire directly mirrors the Green Knight riding into King Arthur's court in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. The Green Knight enters Arthur's court during a Christmas feast:

As the sound of the music ceased, and the first course had been fitly served, there came in at the hall door [a horseman] terrible to behold, . . . . Even the steed on which he rode was of the same hue, a green horse, great and strong, and hard to hold, with broidered bridle, meet for the rider. (3)

Critics interpret the poem different ways, but most agree that *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* "deals with an apparently disorderly intruder into an ordered world, who brings one member of that world to see that the full truth about whatever is true is more complicated and less stable

than he had thought" (Allen and Moritz 147). The disruption of order may indeed have been the Squire's purpose for his intruding knight as well.

In his tale, then the Squire's king, much like King Arthur, holds a great feast when "[i]n at the halle dore al sodeynly / Ther cam a knyght upon a steede of bras" (80-81). Before the knight appears, the kingdom seems perfect. They have a fitting king—"So excellent a lord in alle thyng: / Hym lakked nocht that longeth to a kyng" (15-16)—and a princess whose beauty "lyth nat in [the Squire's] tonge, n' yn [his] konnyng" to tell (35). The beginning of the tale creates such a perfect kingdom, that the account seems almost eventless. But the knight acts as a catalyst, setting the story into motion by creating conflict and disorder. For King Cambyuskan, "the usual disorders which beset society are to be solved by magic tools—the horse, the ring, the mirror, and the sword," all given to him by the foreign knight (Allen and Moritz 145). And just as the Green Knight draws Sir Gawain away from Arthur's court, the Squire's knight tempts Cambyuskan away from his kingdom by giving him the brass steed—a horse which can take him anywhere he desires within the span of one day—perhaps foreshadowing certain weaknesses in Cambyuskan or unseen truths within his kingdom that his flight could have revealed had the tale been completed.

In examining the brass horse, Cambyuskan's people first compare it to Pegasus, the flying horse of Greek mythology. They "seyden it was lyk the Pegasee, / The hors that hadde wynges for to flee" (207-8). Invoking the legend of Pegasus, the Squire draws upon one of the most familiar and influential poetic sources in the late Middle Ages: Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. According to Greek mythology, Pegasus and his giant brother Chrysaor sprang from Medusa's neck as Perseus beheaded her. The fourth book of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* describes Pegasus's birth: "Swift Pegasus the winged horse and eke his brother grow / Out of their mother's new-shed

blood. Moreover he did show / A long discourse of all his haps and not so long as true" [IV. 960]. Though Cambyuskan's subjects identify the brass steed with Pegasus simply because of its ability to fly, the Squire uses their astonishment to create "the marvelization of the aesthetic" (Berry 295). Berry explains that the Squire permeates his tale with visual and imaginary wonders in order to make the narrative itself a marvel demanding awe and respect. The visualizing and telling of the marvelous "was a common motif in myths of upward mobility among the lower echelons of the third estate, so by dismissing the explanatory efforts of Cambyuskan's courtiers, the Squire identifies himself as . . . rhetorically in control of the marvelous and thus fully qualified to ascend to knighthood" (295). Unlike his father's tale which emphasizes courtly romance and chivalry, the Squire's narrative concerns itself mainly with creating visual marvels.

During the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the belief in marvelous phenomena occupied both the common and learned classes of the late Middle Ages. Due to the growing interest in the conceptions of the marvelous, its themes and motifs often appeared in the literature of the time period. According to Le Goff, Chaucer's time "saw a major intellectual and cultural shift, the 'aestheticization of the marvelous', in which the marvelous ceased to hold a significant place in the medieval paradigm and became increasingly employed merely as a literary and artistic ornament" (40). This "new-age" movement would have greatly appealed to the young and imaginative Squire who preoccupies his mind with wonder and the splendor of chivalry. He shrouds his own tale in mystery and spectacle to enrich and enhance his tale. Indeed, Chaucer may have used the *Squire's Tale* to demonstrate the presence of the marvelous and the "aestheticization of the marvelous" in the minds of the pilgrims, who themselves are traveling to a shrine abounding in marvelous allure. Hence, Chaucer suggests that the Canterbury pilgrims are very much influenced by the cultural state of their society and time period. Their minds still

adhere to folkloric traditions and indulge in popular myths. By including a Pegasus-like horse, a cross between animal and machine, the Squire attempts to replicate popular myth and rhetorically create a visual marvel not very different from Ovid's original. In Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, one of the muses explains to Athena that Pegasus produced the spring on top of Mount Helicon. Upon hearing this account, Athena traveled to Mount Helicon to see for herself the "sacred spring. / [and] mus[ed] greatly with herself at the strangeness of the thing" (V. 334-5). Ovid's flying horse created a spring marvelous enough to fascinate the goddess Athena, and the Squire uses this same motif to bemuse his audience. By demonstrating his familiarity with Ovid, the Squire demonstrates his own mastery of the marvelous.

In addition to creating his own Pegasus-like model, the Squire also adapts from Ovid the power dream of metamorphosis. For instance, all the gifts given to Cambyuskan—the mirror, the ring, the sword, and the brass horse—resemble "applied science in attempting to control the natural world and extend human capabilities" (Crane 32). They can give a man superhuman abilities, for whoever holds these objects can see through any deception, kill or heal any person, fly to any desired destination, and possess the language of any creature. Thus they transform, morph, and extend mankind's self-definition. The brass horse, more than any of the other gifts, embodies this theme of metamorphosis. Kordecki explains the horse's morphing capabilities:

[T]he horse blends the natural with the artificial in that this device becomes alive, unlike the other remaining gifts, the sword, mirror, and ring, whose power is more passive. Their essence does not change, but instead changes those around them. The horse becomes something else, an example of the great metamorphosing theme of myth which this tale exploits here . . . . The brass horse can not only

carry its rider anywhere in a day; it can do so by soaring in the air like an eagle.  
(284)

The Squire's brass steed morphs the abilities of animal and machine. Once the knight dismounts the horse, it becomes motionless: "His steede, which that shoon as sonne brighte, / Stant in the court, stille as any stoon" (170-1). Like the modern day machines, the horse does not move until its master turns a peg behind its ear:

This hors anoon bigan to trippe and daunce,  
Whan that this knyght leyde hand upon his reyne,  
And seyde, "Sire, ther is namoore to seyne,  
But, whan yow list to ryden anywhere,  
Ye mooten trille a pyn, stant in his ere." (312-6).

The Squire melds human-controlled animals with human-controlled machines to create a creature with mythic abilities, much as he mixes human desire and wonder with magical gifts to possibly give Cambyuskan god-like powers. In a larger sense, the Squire, too, is morphing his father's romantic tale and Ovid's poetic source with his own powerful imagination to fashion a true romantic fantasy full of magical marvels.

Rapt in contemplation, Cambyuskan's subjects compare the brass steed to "the Grekes hors Synon, / That broghte Troie to destruccion" (209-210), thereby accessing another ancient story that has been woven into Homer's *Odyssey* and Virgil's *Aeneid*. The Trojan horse recalls the myth of the Trojan War. Though the events of this myth take place before the *Odyssey*, both sources mention the incident of the Trojan horse. In the eighth book of the *Odyssey*, Odysseus says to Demodocus,

Now shift your theme, and sing that wooden horse



Epeius built, inspired by Athena—  
the ambushcade Odysseus filled with fighters  
and sent to take the inner town of Troy. (140)

The Greek army, in a final attempt to defeat Troy, built the Trojan horse, a giant hollow wooden structure filled with Greek soldiers and given to the Trojans as a gift while the rest of the Greek army pretended to leave the siege. Meanwhile Sinon, a Greek spy, convinced the Trojans to accept the gift and allow the wooden horse into their city despite the warning of Laocoön and Cassandra. Once inside the wall, the Greek soldiers emerged from the wooden horse's stomach and opened the gates for the rest of the Greek army. Soon thereafter, on account of the Trojan horse, the Grecian army defeated the great city of Troy.

One of Cambyuskan's subjects expresses his worry over the possible repeat of such an incident due to the King's acceptance of the brass horse: "'Myn herte,' quod oon, 'is everemoore in drede; / I trowe som men of armes been therinne, / That shapen hem this citee for to wynne'" (212-4). Had the *Squire's Tale* been completed, perhaps this subject's premonition would have proven true. Yet the mysterious appearance of the knight and the presentation of the magical gifts in a perfect kingdom with a perfect king seems odd and out of place. Like the wooden horse within Troy's wall, the brass horse may foreshadow unwanted hardships about to befall Cambyuskan. In his allusion, the Squire mentions "Synoun" the Grecian spy who persuaded the Trojans to bring the trap—the wooden horse filled with Greek soldiers—inside their gates. In the second book of the *Aeneid*, a source the Squire could have studied, Virgil describes Sinon's deception:

Already slipped away, the Danaan captions  
By the divine handicraft of Pallas built

A horse of timber, tall as a hill, . . .

The horse's belly—with men fully armed . . .

Thymoetes shouts

It should be hauled inside the walls and moored

High on the Citadel—whether by treason

Or just because Troy's fate went that way now.

Contrary notions pulled the crowd apart. . . .

Next thing we knew, in front of everyone,

Laocoön with a great company

Came furiously running from the Height,

And still far off cried out: "O my poor people,

Men of Troy, what madness has come over you?

Can you believe the enemy truly gone? . . .

Have no faith in the horse!

Whatever it is, even when Greeks bring gifts

I fear them, gifts and all!" (II: 20-70)

Despite Laocoön's warnings, the Trojans listen to Sinon's deception and let their doom in by the front door. Berry discusses the importance of Sinon to the *Squire's Tale*: "By referring to the horse as belonging to Sinon, the mistrusting onlooker grants primary authority to the artful tale-teller who wins the sympathy of the Trojan audience" (296). In addition, Virgil refers to the Trojan horse as a "siege engine"—very similar to the Squire's machine-like brass steed that operates through a pull pin. Implicitly, then, the Squire places his rhetorical skill on par with that

of Sinon, who was able to bring the Trojans to their downfall as a result of his powerful argument.

The allusion to Sinon's horse introduces important concerns that develop as the *Squire's Tale* progresses. Later in the tale, Canacee speaks to a falcon that tells her of a true love's betrayal through the art of beautiful speech and deception. The falcon's narrative invokes sympathy in the audience and creates an interest in how truth is concealed and then later revealed. Berry describes the danger of Sinon who convincingly concealed the truth to the Trojans:

Sinon the Greek whose rhetorical skill persuades the Trojans--or tricks the Trojans into persuading themselves--that the massive horse outside their walls must be brought inside the city, does not, after all, come up with the plan, build the horse, or join the warriors inside it, but the success of the Greek enterprise does hinge on his tale of woe and its reception. (297)

Since the second half of the *Squire's Tale* deals with "woe and its reception," the incidents and allusions surrounding the brass horse hint at other deceptions that might have appeared later if the tale had been completed.

Although the Squire's brass steed undoubtedly owes some of its creation to the Trojan horse, the original horse was made of wood while Chaucer's was brazen. The transformation of wood to brass also owes its origins to myth. According to Henry Barrett Hinckley, the fifth century B.C Spartan general Pausanias "tells us that a brazen . . . image of the horse stood in the Acropolis at Athens with Menestheus and Teucer [two Grecian soldiers who hide in the Trojan horse] looking out of it . . . [also] Argives sent to Delfi a bronze image of the wooden horse after the battle of Threa" (158). Thus the likeness of the Trojan horse had been recreated in brass and

might have been remembered as such by the people of Chaucer's time. By creating a magic horse of brass, in any case, the Squire invokes the most famous deception in history, emphasizing Cambyuskan's courtiers wonder and mistrust of the steed as they remember the unfortunate events that befell Troy:

Swich wondryng was ther on this hors of bras  
That syn the grete sege of Troie was,  
Theras men wondreden on an hors also,  
Ne was ther swich a wondryng as was tho. (305-8)

In Virgil's account, the people of Troy also offer overlapping and contradictory explanations when they first encounter the mysterious wooden steed. The people's wondering, in both the *Squire's Tale* and the *Aeneid*, underscores "the difficulties and subtleties of interpretation" (Berry 298). Thus the Squire places the blame of any misinterpretations of his tale on the audience instead of the storyteller.

The Squire's brass horse may also, in part, owe its creation to Virgilian legend. During the Middle Ages, several magical tales and legends circulated about Virgil, one of which included a bronze horse. According to legend, Virgil constructed the horse "with the aid of magical incantations in such a way that, so long as it was intact, no horse would suffer from swayback" (Spargo 84). This magic horse also had the power to heal sick horses. According to Spargo, the Virgil's bronze horse appeared in a number of Virgilian legends:

The *Image du Monde* refers more briefly to the horse; it healed ailing horses of every ill as soon as they looked at it. In *Cléonadés* it is necessary to tie the sick horses to the pillar on which stood the image, which by its healing powers interfered much with the business of horse-doctors. *Renart le Contrefait* repeats

the *Image du Monde* almost word for word. The *Cronica dí Partenope* expands to include [that] [i]nfirm horses had but to look at the bronze horse to be healed . . . and that the bronze from the image was [eventually] melted down to make the bells for the largest church in Naples. (84-5)

Since the Virgilian legends were widespread, the Squire's audience might well have recognized the connection between the two metallic steeds—the Squire's brass and Virgil's bronze. By creating a metal horse similar to the one portrayed in Virgil's myth, the Squire emphasizes the human fascination with marvels, both mythical and literary. He may have used his brass steed to draw his audiences' attention and spark their curiosity. In speculating about the many contradictory origins of the brass steed, the Squire's audience, much like Cambyuskan's subjects, would have been intrigued by the marvel which "Nature ne art ne koude hym nat amende" (197).

Though the Squire's brass horse relies on classical allusions for credibility and mythical applications, no literary source can fully account for its creation. The brass horse is a unique, ingenious construction entirely on its own. It morphs Pegasus of Grecian myth and the Trojans' wooden horse, but their combination still does not constitute the brass horse's mythical, mechanical qualities. To credit his own wit, the Squire warns readers that any difficulties in comprehending his marvel are their fault, not his. Since the foreign knight promises to reveal the secret of the brass horse's operation only to Cambyuskan, his subjects, despite their expertise in classical literature, struggle to explain the marvel. Through their confusion, the Squire implies that only wellborn individuals with proper upbringing (like the Squire himself) can truly understand, appreciate, and wield "such a powerful and fantastic instrument (either the horse or the poem that it figures)" (Berry 294). To showcase his highborn status, the Squire scoffs at the explanatory attempts of Cambyuskan's subjects: "As lewed people demeth comunly / Of thynges

that been maad moore subtilly / Than they kan in hir lewednesse comprehende" (221-3). Since Cambyuskan's courtiers are lower in status to the Squire, they cannot comprehend the marvelous steed.

John Hill attempts to explain the Squire's stance on status and the understanding of marvels:

Beginning with the horse of brass, on which neither nature nor art can improve, the Squire indicates his dislike of speculation. People invoke poetical analogies in a vain attempt to comprehend the horse, yet no one can move it, make it fly, or have it disappear. He characterizes the speculators as wondering, deeming, with diverse folk deeming diversely. . . . These murmurings greatly annoy the Squire as he likens them to the humming of bees and characterizes them as the crude and reductive deemings of people unable to understand something more subtle than their "lewednesse." The horse . . . [is] subtly made—beyond the comprehension of speculating, wondering fools. (81)

The Squire pushes his audience to accept his marvels for their own beauty and power. They are better appreciated for their own qualities and thus demeaned by any dissection or relation to other sources—a speculation typical of lowly men "whose wondering is really a form of jangling even if they do hit upon the causes or mainspring of a thing" (Lawton 260). But since his audience includes a range of class statures, he has Cambyuskan's subjects allude to common myth figures to help the lower class individuals appreciate his marvel. The allusions also validate the Squire's rhetorical skill and poetic knowledge—characteristics of his high status.

Even Cambyuskan's subjects, though lacking proper understanding, consider the brass horse an instrument of the nobility. They explain the steed as,

So wel proporcioned for to been strong,  
Right as it were a steede of Lumbardye;  
Therwith so horsly, and so quyk of ye,  
As it a gentil Poilleys courser were. (192-5)

The Lombardy horse, prized for its strength and ability to wheel around in battle at a full gallop, was highly coveted and a "great favorite with English kings" (Rowland 123). By comparing the brass horse to "a steede of Lumbardye," Cambyuskan's courtiers recognize it as a creature associated with nobility. In addition, the people describe the horse as "horsly." *Horsly*, according to the MED, means horse-like. This simple term mocks the people's inferior (at least to the Squire's) skill with language. Words such as *manly*, *kingly*, and *queenly* pertain to and indicate noble or admirable qualities, but since Cambyuskan's subjects lack the proper diction to describe the brass horse, they must rely on common, uncomplicated words to classify their admiration and amazement. This coined term reinforces the Squire's view that only individuals with high social status possess the words to adequately describe the true marvel of the brass steed.

Society during Chaucer's time paid careful attention to distinctions in social class, and although the Squire is "Curteis, lowely, and servysable," (99) he is well aware of his station and what is expected of him as a future knight. Thus his reiteration that only nobility can master the brass steed stems from his hopeful attempt to create his own rhetorical marvel rather than from excessive arrogance. While the beginning of his tale does resemble an eloquent romantic fantasy, it soon becomes a tangled mess of complicated descriptions and subplots. The Squire, unable to maintain his organization, struggles to tell a story that is too complex for his experience and skill. His strained effort contrasts his father's ease and elegance and proves that although the Squire has the makings of a great knight and storyteller, he will not equal his father's skill until he gains

experience. According to editor Donald Baker, the Squire's lack of skill may be the reason for his fragmented tale:

Chaucer deliberately left [the *Squire's Tale*] incomplete (or interrupted by the Franklin) as part of a demonstration of the Squire's character—a young man who is full of lofty ideas . . . whose learning is confused, his eloquence one of enthusiasm rather than skill; he becomes entrapped in a web of story materials that he cannot manage, as he looks over his shoulder at his father, continuing to interrupt his own story to say that he is doing the best that he can. (42)

The Squire, endearingly self-conscious, discloses his inferior skill on several accounts. He tries to use the eloquent language expected of a learned young squire, but his rhetorical skill falls short due to his lack of experience.

In order to not disappoint his audience (and perhaps his father), the Squire admits his shortcomings. At the Host's request for a tale, the Squire replies,

"Nay, sire, . . . but I wol seye as I kan

With hertly wyl, for I wol nat 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." (4-8)

Though he means well, the Squire, unsure of his abilities, apologizes in case his tale offends or disappoints any audience member. Once he has begun his tale, he again admits his inability to describe Canacee's beauty: "It lyth nat in my tonge, n' yn my konnyng; / I dar nat undertake so heigh a thyng. / Myn Englissh eek is insufficient" (35-7). Afraid of doing injustice to Canacee's beauty, the Squire simply skips the description using his inferior English as an excuse. And



finally, after the Franklin's interruption and right before his fragment ends, the Squire hopes that his undeveloped skill will not prevent the favorable reception of his tale: "As fer as that my wittes wol suffyse. / I prey to God that it may plesen yow" (706-7). Though the *Squire's Tale* lacks the refinement of the *Knight's Tale*, his self-awareness is so charming that it warrants forgiveness. Chaucer may have planned this awkward tale to suite his Squire accordingly. As seen in the *General Prologue*, Chaucer is fond of the Squire, admiring his youth and innocence. He states, "He was as fressh as is the month of May," (92) suggesting that though he lacks the maturity of summer, his youthful exuberance and inexperience, like that of a young colt, is refreshing and endearing. Finally, the Squire's lack of control over his marvels becomes an attractive feature rather than a vice.

As he did for most of his tales, Chaucer wrote the *Squire's Tale* specifically for the Squire:

The *Squire's Tale* . . . he must have written especially for this character—  
unfortunately without finishing it. . . . The subject is in thorough keeping with the  
personality of the speaker, and the lively and learned recital is truly characteristic  
of the Squire, with his reminiscences of Arthurian romances, his knowledge of  
rhetoric, and his wide reading, which is seen throughout, notwithstanding all his  
asseverations of modesty. The eloquence and wisdom of the Squire rouse the  
enthusiasm of the sturdy Franklin, who bewails the vulgar tendencies of his own  
son in comparison with the fine manners of the Squire. (ten Brink 167-8)

Through the underlying themes of adventure, fantasy, chivalry, truth, justice and romance, Chaucer illustrates the spirit of the young Squire. The tale "itself seems to be the stuff of dreams" (Jordan 133). The Squire, like most young men, is a dreamer. He may even imagine himself

within his own tale—a noble knight riding a brass steed who eventually falls in love with Canacee, whose beauty is beyond words.

Chaucer's description of the Squire is also consistent with his tale. He contains all of the qualities expected of a noble youth. He is handsome: "Of his stature he was of evene lengthe, / And wonderly delyvere, and of greet strengthe;" (83-4) mannerly: "And born hym weel, as of so litel space, / In hope to stonden in his lady grace;" (87-8) and well-learned in the fine chivalric arts: "Wel koude he sitte on hors and faire ryde. / He koude songes make and wel endite, / Juste and eek daunce, and weel purtreye and write" (94-6). By adhering to a squire's predetermined social conventions, Chaucer's Squire fits into his archetype and thus tells his tale according to these standards. The *Squire's Tale* involves (and creates the possibility for further) nobility, chivalry, romance and adventure—all qualities a squire and future knight would hold of interest. However, since horses were involved in almost every aspect of knighthood, the most important skill for a squire to obtain would be the art of horsemanship. Squires needed to ride well in order to learn to battle and joust. According to Bowden, "To joust was commanded as a necessary exercise for every young man who would become a knight by the thirteenth-century" (77). Since Chaucer's Squire loves chivalry, jousting, and "Wel koude . . . sitte on hors and faire ryde" (94) marvelous steeds would be very appealing to him, for a knight was oftentimes only as good as his horse.

Much as modern day young men marvel over fine automobiles, medieval squires coveted fast, fancy steeds. In his tale, Chaucer's Squire describes the brass horse much like a contemporary youth does a sports car:

Greet was the prees that swarmeth to and fro

To gauren on this hors that stondest so,

For it so heigh was, and so brood and long,  
 So wel proporcioned for to been strong,  
 Right as it were a steede of Lumbardye;  
 Therwith so horsly, and so quyk of ye,  
 As it a gentil Poilleys courser were.  
 For certes, fro his tayl unto his ere  
 Nature ne art ne koude hym nat amende . . .  
 It was a fairye, as the peple semed. . . .  
 This hors anon bigan to trippe and daunce,  
 Whan that this knyght leyde hand upon his reyne,  
 And seyde, "Sire, ther is namoore to seyne,  
 But, whan yow list to ryden anywhere,  
 Ye mooten trille a pyn, stant in his ere, . . .  
 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 therein lith th' effect of al the gyn,  
 And he wol doun descende and doon youre wille,  
 And in that place he wol abyde stille. . . .  
 Ride whan yow list; ther is namoore to doone." (189-334)

The Squire marvels at length, and fawns over the brass steed as if it were a modern day Corvette.  
 Like most young men, the Squire loves fast and powerful modes of travel. A horse that could

carry its rider anywhere in the world within the span of a day would be powerful, majestic, and most of all, unbeatable. What the Squire includes in his tale about horses would probably have interested many noble young men during the Middle Ages.

In addition to his description in the *General Prologue*, the Squire's Ellesmere illustration hints at the young man's disposition and social status.<sup>12</sup> Though the Ellesmere drawings offer only one artist's rendition of *The Canterbury Tales*, they support several interpretations of the reading—especially in regard to a pilgrim's social status. According to Rosenblum and Finley, "The social status of the Knight and his son prompts an expectation that they would endorse the hierarchical status quo, and their [Ellesmere] miniatures support such a reading" (141). In their tales, both the Knight and the Squire endorse chivalry and nobility and their portraits are drawn accordingly. For instance, the Squire's portrait is consistent with his high economic and social status. He wears a fur-trimmed gown adorned with decorative embroidery and rides a fancy well-equipped steed. Both the Squire and his father appear to be riding warhorses, "unsuitable for pilgrimage," but useful "to [emphasize] that they belong to the *stede*-owning class" (Dent 9). *Stedes*, like dextrers, were warhorses capable of carrying "about thirty stone of armoured knight" (Dent 5). The Squire, in his depiction, seems to be riding a Lombardy steed—the type to which he likens his brass steed. Rowland supports this interpretation by saying that "The Squire to the Ellesmere illustration appears to be riding just such a horse, and is demonstrating its skill by executing a high school air, the *corvetti*" (123). To perform the *corvetti*, the horse continually pranced and reared up and down while in place. This was a highly sophisticated maneuver requiring a very skilled rider. Since the Squire could "faire ryde" (94), a *corvetti* lies well within his skill to perform.

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<sup>12</sup> See fig. 2 on page 21.

Through the incomplete construction of his fantasy romance and marvelous brass steed, the Squire tells a tale befitting his character. To show himself a learned storyteller in his father's company and to prove his worthiness as a future knight, the Squire alludes to several classical poetic sources. Yet even though his tale relies heavily on these references, he maintains his own voice and creativity. The *Squire's Tale*, as is the case for the rest of the pilgrims, remains truly his own. It reflects his status, his passions, and his ideals. Though incomplete, the *Squire's Tale*, remains an important aspect of *The Canterbury Tales*, and the brass steed is integral to it. As Kordecki explains,

[I]n the Squire's description of the brass horse, the text is allowing myth to permeate and substantiate magic. The medieval Christian romance world, in typical Chaucerian fashion, subsumes the seemingly antithetical pagan world of mythology . . . [and thus] demonstrates how blissfully these modes can coexist in Chaucer. (287-8)

The presence of the brass steed illustrates Chaucer's ability to incorporate different belief systems within his tales to create complexity in his characters and the social world he creates for them.

Chaucer lived in an age when horses were as common as the modern day automobile. In the Middle Ages, people used horses for almost every aspect of life: travel, commerce, war, agriculture, and leisure. According to Vernon, "if man went to war, horses went to war, too. If man was moved to explore the surrounding country, the horse was his companion. When primitive trade was founded, the horse was an indispensable accessory. And when the joy of the hunt . . . was kindled in man's eager spirit, it was the horse that fired the spark" (vii). Horses (again like the modern day automobile) substantially represented a person's social status. Just as

a rich executive would drive a fast, fancy car, a king or noble would ride a well-bred, powerful mount. Just as a poor college student would drive a second hand "beater," a lowly clerk would ride a skinny nag. Horses embodied the lived experience of Chaucer's time, and since Chaucer knew their many implications for society and social status, he did not neglect to use them in his tales.

In particular, Chaucer used horses to help indicate the social hierarchy represented in *The Canterbury Tales*, but he also knew their symbolic and literary applications as well. He employs both in describing his pilgrims and in constructing the narration of their tales. The beauty of *The Canterbury Tales* relies, in part, on its subtle details, which create the illusion that the pilgrims' true selves are revealed. Chaucer's references to the pilgrims' horses are typically brief, yet they greatly hint at each pilgrim's character. The Knight seems a perfect, humble Christian more concerned with his soul rather than with the appearance of his clothes or his horses. The Wife of Bath rides in spurs, which means that she rides astride: perhaps she likes her men to be like her horse, subservient. And the Monk outrider, by devoting his time to hunting and his stable full of fine horses, proves that he lacks piety. Since Chaucer's horses quietly reveal much about their riders, they add important yet charming detail to *The Canterbury Tales*. In order to create the true ambiance of a pilgrimage, Chaucer's menagerie must be mounted. The pilgrim's specific mounts add to the realism and subtle beauty of the tales, and thus Chaucer did indeed have a purpose for them.



Ellesmere Chaucer

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