慶應義塾大学学術情報リポジトリ
Keio Associated Repository of Academic resouces

| Title | Lie and fable in Chaucer's Manciple's tale |
| --- | --- |
| Sub Title | |
| Author | 松田, 隆美(Matsuda, Takami) |
| Publisher | 慶應義塾大学藝文学会 |
| Publication year | 2017 |
| Jtitle | 藝文研究 (The geibun-kenkyu : journal of arts and letters). Vol.113, No.2 (2017. 12) ,p.29- 39 |
| JaLC DOI | |
| Abstract | |
| Notes | The decay of lying? : essays in honour of professor Keiko Kawachi |
| Genre | Journal Article |
| URL | https://koara.lib.keio.ac.jp/xoonips/modules/xoonips/detail.php?koara_id=AN00072643-01130002-0029 |

慶應義塾大学学術情報リポジトリ(KOARA)に掲載されているコンテンツの著作権は、それぞれの著作者、学会または出版社/発行者に帰属し、その権利は著作権法によって保護されています。引用にあたっては、著作権法を遵守してご利用ください。

The copyrights of content available on the KeiO Associated Repository of Academic resources (KOARA) belong to the respective authors, academic societies, or publishers/issuers, and these rights are protected by the Japanese Copyright Act. When quoting the content, please follow the Japanese copyright act.

# Lie and Fable in Chaucer's *Manciple's Tale*

**Takami MATSUDA**

When the Host turns to the Parson as the final teller in the *Canterbury Tales* and asks him to 'telle us a fable' (X 29), the Parson flatly rejects the request, saying 'Thou getest fable noon ytoold for me / For Paul, that writeth unto Thymothee, / Repreveth hem that weyven soothfastnesse / And tellen fables and swich wrecchednesse.' (X 31-34).[1] He does so on the authority of the Epistle to Timothy, which rejects 'foolish and old wives' fables' that 'will indeed turn away their hearing from the truth'.[2] Here, the Parson may be voicing the current 'consciousness of the dangers of promulgating fabula among a potentially various and unpredictable lay audience',[3] which the Canterbury pilgrims certainly are, judging not only from their social diversity but from their unseemly behaviour on the road to Canterbury, prompted often by telling of a 'fable'. In his outright denial, he may be consciously antifraternal, or even sympathetic to Lollards (the Host refers to him as a 'lollere' once before; II 1173, 1177), who were the strongest opponents of 'fablis and lesyngis' employed in sermons.[4]

At the same time, his denial of a fable may be specifically directed toward the *Manciple's Tale* just told. Whether the *Manciple's Tale* was originally intended to be the penultimate tale of the *Canterbury Tales* has been a subject of discussion, but in view of the fact that most extant MSS and early printed editions refer to the Manciple at the beginning of the *Parson's Prologue*, this was certainly one of the most popular ways the *Canterbury Tales* reached its closure.[5] Assuming that the two tales are somehow related, scholars have come up with a number of interpretations, variously contextualized, not only of these two tales but also of how the *Canterbury Tales* as a whole ends. Some argue that the *Parson's Tale* offers a possibility of resolving, within the Christian moral context, a conflict or an issue the *Man-*

*ciple's Tale* foregrounds in a narrative form. For example, the tragic ending of the *Manciple's Tale* makes it possible to see the tale as alluding to contemporary issues of law and violence, especially to the discord in the metropolitan food supply guild in which Manciple, Cook and Host all share an interest.[6] More often perhaps, the two tales were seen to be both concerned with the use and abuse of language.[7] In this respect, the 'janglying' of both Manciple (in the *Prologue*) and the crow can be seen to be concerned specifically with the abuse or disuse of the sacrament of penance, as against the proper confession advocated in the *Parson's Tale*.[8]

Whatever the relevance of such interrelated readings might be, it can at least be said that the Parson consciously draws attention to a generic difference between the two tales, when he refuses to tell a fable and offers instead a 'meditacioun' (X 55) which he intentionally calls 'a myrie tale in prose' (X 46). The expression, also used with reference to the similarly didactic and compilatory Tale of *Melibee* ('this murye tale', VII 964), deliberately contradicts the Host's use of the same expression in soliciting an entertaining tale with no heavy moralizing.[9] The merry tale of the Parson turns out to be the treatise on seven deadly sins that belongs to a different genre with a different function; it is in fact a reference book, a sort of penitential manual which is used to prepare the confessor to hear confession and instruct the penitent in what to confess.[10]

In this respect, the Parson's denial of fable can be regarded as directed toward a structural shortcoming of the *Manciple's Tale*. The Manciple calls his tale an 'ensample' (IX 309) but if we take into account the fact that *exemplum* and *fabula* were often clearly distinguished, the Parson may be referring to the *Manciple's Tale* as a mere fable, *narratio ficta*, as opposed to an *exemplum* that needs to be based on historical authenticity.[11] He may in fact be pointing out that it is nothing but a disorderly fable, whose *sententia* lacks an authority. In this paper, we will see that the *Manciple's Tale* fails to function as a proper *exemplum* ('short fictitious narrative meant to convey a moral', according to *MED* 1(b)) structurally and that it also deals in the tale itself with how a fable is indeed concocted, making it almost impossible to tell a lie from a truth.

The *Manciple's Tale* is one version of the tragedy of Phoebus who murdered his wife Coronis, having been informed of her adultery by the crow that witnessed it. In Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (II, 533-631) which was the source for medieval versions, the bird of Phoebus (a raven in this case) eagerly hastens to its master to disclose the secret it has discovered. This

‘inexorable informer’ (‘non exorabilis index’; II, 546) gives deaf ear to the advice of another ‘talkative crow’ (‘garrula ... cornix’, II, 547-48) that on learning the raven’s intention, warns that a bringer of ill news will not be welcomed. The raven is eventually punished for its officiousness by the despairing Phoebus.[12]

The tale is retold in several medieval versions where it is usually presented as an exemplary tale against ‘janglying’ or talkativeness. In John Gower’s *Confessio Amantis* (III, 768-817), the tale is preceded by the Confessor’s remark that this is an ‘ensample’ on the importance of holding one’s tongue, while the marginalia in Latin also state that this is ‘an example against those who in the cause of love presume to reveal the counsel of another’.[13] Although the entire passage is relatively short and we learn nothing about the crow’s motive, it is called ‘a fals bridd’ (792) and ‘that shrewe’ (798), as if to censure its unsolicited meddling. The early fourteenth-century *Ovide moralisé*, which provides a longer and more faithful rendering of Ovid, is also structured rigidly as an *exemplum*. After the narrative, the exposition of it is introduced by ‘Ces fables espondrai biement / Par histoire, et puis autre-ment’ (2455-56).[14] The tale is first recapitulated as a historical (i.e. not figurative) story where the crow is substituted by a human servant. A moral reading then follows with a warning against chattering and gossiping: ‘Par sa jengle, et cis nous enseigne / Que nulz jenglerres ne deviengne’ (2499-2500). After a section that denounces liars and flatterers, the tale ends with the concluding moral precept: ‘Mieux doit mentir, / Ou taire soi, pour pais avoir, / Que mal souffrir pour dire voir’ (2546-48).[15]

The *Manciple’s Tale* also observes the structural division of a narrative tale and the moral that follows, introducing after the tale itself a series of morals with ‘Lordynges, by this ensample, I you preye, / Beth war, and taketh kep what that ye seye’ (IX 309-10). ‘Janglying’—gossip and slander—is often mentioned in treatises on vices and virtues as a serious misdeed to be censured because it can disrupt the social integrity of a Christian community. Divided into several smaller branches, it occupies a whole chapter in *Somme le Roi* as the ‘pechié de langue’[16] and it is treated succinctly but systematically as a branch of wrath in the *Parson’s Tale* along with other evils of the tongue:

> Now cometh ydel wordes, that is withouten profit of hym that speketh tho wordes, and eek of hym that herkneth tho wordes. Or elles ydel wordes been tho

> that been nedeless or withouten entente of natureel profit. / And al be it that ydel wordes been somtyme venial synne, yet sholde men douten hem, for we shul yeve rekenynge of hem bifore God. /
>
> Now comth janglynge, that may nat been withoute synne. And, as seith Salomon, "it is a sygne of apert folye." / And therefore a philosophre seyde, whan men axed hym how that men sholde plese the peple, and he answerde, "Do many goode werkes, and spek fewe jangles." / (X 646-50)

The passage is from William Peraldus's *Summa de vitiis*. The authority cited is mostly biblical, except for one philosopher which is also unnamed in Peraldus.[17] In the *Manciple's Tale*, in contrast, although such *auctores* as Solomon, David (as the author of the Psalms), and Seneca are mentioned, many of the morals warning against 'janglyng' and promoting the merit of silence find analogues in *Disticha Catonis* and similar collections of precepts and proverbs[18] so that they are presented in the context of pragmatic wisdom and worldly prudence, as a rather mundane advice of quietism. Although a line between worldly wisdom and authoritative teaching is a fine one, worldly prudence as advocated in proverbial literature is considered inferior to Christian prudence, as Reginald Pecock makes clear.[19] Worldly prudence, if overdone, can become a guile. *Piers Plowman* criticizes that 'For *Spiritus prudencie* among þe peple is gyle / And al tho fayre vertues as visces thei semeth'.[20] The authority of morals is compromised when they are known to come from such popular sources.

In presenting a series of morals, the *Manciple's Tale* persistently uses the form of address, 'my son'. This address is also from a collection of proverbs where the dialogue form is frequently used.[21] *Disticha Catonis* is addressed from Cato the Elder to his son at the beginning,[22] and we may also note that in *Confessio Amantis*, Confessor regularly and repeatedly addresses Amans as 'my son'. The difference is that whereas these address forms are from a figure of authority to a learner, in the *Manciple's Tale* it is from the mother to her son:

> Daun Salomon, as wise clerkes seyn,
> Techeth a man to kepen his tonge weel.
> But, as I seyde, I am noght textueel.

> But nathelees, thus taughte me my dame:
> "My sone, thenk on the crowe, a Goddes name!
> My sone, keep wel thy tonge, and keep thy freend. (IX 314-19)

The narrator refers to a biblical authority but excusing himself that he is not 'textueel' (which incidentally is the exactly same excuse the Parson gives in his *Prologue*; X 57), cites as the immediate source his mother, who is a female figure of no authority. Even though the morals themselves contain truth, the way they are presented here, coming from a collection of moral precepts through the mouth of a mother, throws doubt on their reliability and in doing so, calls into question the relevance of the *Manciple's Tale* as an *exemplum*. We are left with uncertainty about the truth behind pragmatic wisdom, wondering whether what is presented as universal wisdom may merely be an opportunistic pretext.

The narrative of the tale itself is also characterized by this uncertainty. After introducing Phoebus as a mythic hero, it turns somewhat vulgar when it mentions Phoebus's jealousy and fear of being cuckolded (IX 144-46). Readers may anticipate a comical development, such as one found with several fabliaux tales of adultery that preceded it, in view of the altercation of the narrator with the drunken Cook (whose unfinished tale was perhaps one of the bawdiest in the *Canterbury Tales*) and the digression by the narrator on how nature always wins and some creatures cannot resist sexual impulse. His frivolous apology for the use of the 'knavyssh' word, 'lemman' (IX 205), may also make the readers expect a plot with some bawdiness. In this way, the tale seems to lead the readers on a wrong generic path, until such expectation is betrayed by the tale's sudden tragic ending.

The *Manciple's Tale* differs from its analogues at one significant point. While the crow brings misfortune on itself by revealing the adultery it has witnessed, the tale actually proceeds in such a way that the crow's disclosure may be regarded as neither deliberate nor premeditated. This lack of apparent intention stands out if we compare the tale with its analogues. As we saw, in *Metamorphoses,* the bird of Phoebus is described as an 'inexorable informer' and there is another 'talkative crow' that warns against its action. These details leave no doubt about the deliberate intention of the bird, and they are also reproduced fairly faithfully in the medieval analogues, *Ovide moralisé* and Guillaume de Machaut's *Le Livre dou Voir Dit*.[23]

In contrast, there is no second bird ('garrula ... cornix' in Ovid) in the *Manciple's Tale* and Chaucer's crow displays no self-righteous indignation nor an opinion of any sort about what it witnessed, but simply cries 'cukkow' in its cage. It is Phoebus who, catching on the double meaning of the word (or rather the noise), demands the explanation. The character of the crow seems too undeveloped to support an interpretation that it has an intention, as McGavin has argued, and the tragedy that falls on the crow is caused not by the crow's inquisitiveness but by Phoebus's need for self-deception.[24] The crow seems to be reporting what it saw in a straightforward manner, 'By sadde tokenes and by wordes bolde' (IX 258). McGavin points out that in such a circumstance 'we would speak in more halting, circumlocutionary terms, perhaps leaving the injured third party to fill in the more unpleasant details' and quotes a passage from *Othello* for illustration:[25]

> OTHELLO Hath he said anything?
> IAGO He hath, my lord; but be you well assured
> No more than he'll unswear.
> OTHELLO What hath he said?
> IAGO Faith, that he did – I know not what he did.
> OTHELLO What, what?
> IAGO Lie—
> OTHELLO With her?
> IAGO With her, on her, what you will.
> OTHELLO Lie with her? lie on her? We say lie on her when they belie her. Lie with her? Zounds, that's fulsome! Handkerchief—confessions—handkerchief! (4.1.29-37)[26]

The comparison with *Othello* also throws light on a significant difference. In *Othello*, in addition to deliberately halting speech, Iago uses the homonym 'lie' in a suggestive but ultimately ambiguous way. Iago gives a significant nudge to Othello's imagination when he adds 'With her, on her what you will', where 'lie on her' could mean both 'lie about her' and 'lie on top of her physically'. While the ambiguity protects Iago from any kind of accusation of perjury, Othello not only fills in unpleasant details but invent the unpleasant (and false)

narrative himself.

Chaucer's crow has no such rhetorical subtlety but reports unpleasant (but true) details in a plain and unambiguous manner. Just as Othello loses himself with rage, Phoebus literally becomes beside himself and loses discretion. An important detail in Ovid about Coronis's pregnancy is not included, so that the *Manciple's Tale* has very little to say about the adulterous party, focusing almost exclusively on the reaction of the cheated third party. The tale is really about the inner struggle of Phoebus from the beginning to the end because it all begins with Phoebus trying to attribute a significance to 'cukkow' which may just be a cawing noise. This can be regarded as an action out of curiosity, which brings about nothing but unhappiness, according to Bernard of Clairvaux:

> I ask you, then, what good do all these frivolous images do the body, what use are they to the soul? Then again, you'll find that a curious man is an empty man. All curiosity brings is frivolous, vain, fleeting consolation. .... You cannot imagine how much unhappiness this brings forth; it is not so much blissful vanity as vain bliss. From it comes hardness of heart, as we find it written, 'O my people, they who call you blessed mislead you'. From it comes the stubborn fury of enmity, the anxious laborings of suspicion, the cruel torment of spite, the torture — more able than pitiful — of burning jealousy.[27]

Also, curiosity as a vice is opposed to prudence, as it clutters memory with unprofitable things and produces a disorderly state of mind that can lead to a hasty and unconsidered decision, Phoebus's murder of his wife in this case.[28] When he recovers his sense, he accuses himself as well as the crow:

> "Traitour," quod he, "with tonge of scorpioun,
> Thou hast me broght to my confusioun;
> Allas, that I was wroght! Why nere I deed?
> O deere wyf! O gemme of lustiheed!
> That were to me so sad and eek so trewe,
> Now listow deed, with face pale of hewe,

Ful giltelees, that dorste I swere, ywys!
O rakel hand, to doon so foule amys!
O trouble wit, O ire recchelees,
That unavysed smyteth gilteles!
O wantrust, ful of fals suspecion,
Where was thy wit and thy discrecion?
O every man, be war of rakelnesse! (IX 271-83)

Here, however, while Phoebus regrets his rashness and lack of discretion, he continues to act in the state of confusion. Unlike Othello who discovers truth behind Iago's lies, Phoebus refuses to believe what the crow reported without any lie or innuendo, and accuses the crow of its 'false tale' (IX 293). For Phoebus, truth is whatever he wishes to believe, and because Chaucer's crow is amoral, at least in comparison with Ovid, the narrative lacks a moral dimension and focuses exclusively on the confused agony of Phoebus and how he revised his memory in consequence of what did happen. He is trapped within himself as he apparently shows no intention of finding out the truth of what the crow said. His wife, as far as he is concerned, is 'ful giltles', and it is on this assumption that he brands the crow a liar. The tale is no longer about the delayed discovery of truth as in *Othello*, but about how truth and lie are relativized once it becomes a question of arbitrary belief by a confused mind.

What Phoebus did to himself is to change or overwrite his memory, blaming someone else for what happened. His memory is disordered, like a sewer into which 'disgusting and dirty thoughts drizzle and run off' according to Bernard of Clairvaux.[29] Because he refuses to face the truth, he is trapped in unending curiosity, tormented by vain and unprofitable images. To deliver him or anyone out of this condition, the proper management of memory, which includes deletion of what is vain and harmful, is necessary. In the medieval art of memory, oblivion in this sense is nothing but the relocation of useless memories to a less frequented place by changing the network of association.[30] Bernard of Clairvaux emphasizes the need to do this carefully, with the metaphor of the correction of a parchment with a penknife, preserving what is useful and erasing only the trace of what is harmful.[31] As Carruthers says, forgetting is ethically necessary 'to resist *curiositas* and to find one's stance or ground against the wandering and wantonness of mental fornication".[32] In the context of

the *Canterbury Tales*, one needs to turn to the *Parson's Tale* for this proper management of memory, where both memory and oblivion play a crucial part in achieving contrition and confession.[33] In leaving Phoebus in his confused state of mind, and by leaving the reader equally confused about the amount of truth this failed *exemplum* carries, the *Manciple's Tale* deals, through both its structure and narrative content, with the relative nature of truth and lie and at the same time functions as a kind of prologue to the final penitential manual presented by the Parson.

**NOTES**

1 *The Riverside Chaucer*, 3rd edn, gen. ed. Larry D. Benson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008). All quotations from and references to Chaucer are from this edition and will be cited in parentheses within the text.

2 1Tim 4.7 and 2Tim 4.4, as identified in Siegfried Wenzel's explanatory note to X 32-34 in the *Riverside Chaucer* (p. 955).

3 Elizabeth Allen, *False Fables and Exemplary Truth in Later Middle English Literature* (New York: Palgrave, 2005), p.12.

4 Allen, *False Fables*, p. 13; Katherine C. Little, *Confession and Resistance: Defining the Self in Late Medieval England* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006), pp.91–94.

5 For a recent argument on reading the two tales in sequence see Stephen D. Powell, 'Game Over: Defragmenting the End of the *Canterbury Tales*', *The Chaucer Review* 37(2002), 40-58. As Powell notes (p.44), only 4 MSS substitute other pilgrims for 'Manciple' in the *Prologue to the Parson's Tale*, according to *The Text of the Canterbury Tales*, ed. by John M. Manly and Edith Rickert, 8 vols (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1940), IV, 361.

6 See for example, Craig E. Bertolet, 'The Anxiety of Exclusion: Speech, Power, and Chaucer's Manciple', *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 33(2011), 183-218; Eve Salisbury, 'Murdering Fiction: The Case of *The Manciple's Tale*', *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 25(2003), 309-16; Marion Turner, *Chaucerian Conflict: Languages of Antagonism in Late Fourteenth-Century London* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp.140-46.

7 Cf. Chauncey Wood, 'Speech, the Principle of Contraries, and Chaucer's Tales of the Manciple and the Parson', *Mediaevalia*, 6(1980), 209-229; David K. Coley, *The Wheel of Language: Representing Speech in Middle English Poetry, 1377-1422* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2012), pp.31-68; Louise Fradenburg, 'The Manciple's Servant

Tongue: Politics and Poetry in *The Canterbury Tales*', *ELH* 52(1985), 85-118; Derrick G. Pitard, 'Sowing Difficulty: *The Parson's Tale*, Vernacular Commentary, and the Nature of Chaucerian Dissent', *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 26(2004), 299-330.

8 Cf. Mark Allen, 'Penitential Sermons, the Manciple, and the End of *The Canterbury Tales*', *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 9(1987), 77-96.

9 Cf. Lois Ebin, 'Chaucer, Lydgate, and the "Myrie Tale"', *The Chaucer Review* 13 (1979), 316–36.

10 Richard Newhauser, 'The Parson's Tale and Its Generic Affiliations', in *Closure in The Canterbury Tales: The Role of The Parson's Tale*, ed. by David Raybin and Linda Tarte Holley (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, Western Michigan University, 2000), pp.45-76 (p.49).

11 Claude Bremond, Jacques le Goff, and Jean-Claude Schmitt, *L'«Exemplum»*, Typologie des sources du Moyen Age occidental, Fasc 40, A-VI, C.9 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1982), p.32.

12 *Sources and Analogues of the Canterbury Tales*, ed. by Robert M. Correale and Mary Hamel, 2 vols (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2002, 2005), II, 732-54, 769-10.

13 'exemplum contra illos qui in amoris causa alterius consilium reuelare presumunt': John Gower, *Confessio Amantis*, ed.by Russell A. Peck, 3 vols, TEAMS Middle English Texts Series (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 2003-2006), II, 362 (note to 784ff.).

14 *The Sources and Analogues of the Canterbury Tales*, ed. by W. F. Bryan and G. Dempster (London: Routledge, 1941), p.707.

15 'It is better to lie or remain silent in order to have peace, than incur displeasure by telling the truth.'

16 *La Somme le Roi par Frère Laurent*, ed. by E. Brayer and A.-F. Leurquin-Labie, SATF (Paris: Société des anciens textes français, 2008), pp.158-72.

17 Kate O. Petersen, *The Sources of the Parson's Tale* (1901; repr. New York: AMS, 1973), p.61.

18 Cf. V. J. Scattergood's explanatory note in the *Riverside Chaucer* (p.954); Bryan and Dempster, pp.721-22.

19 Reginald Pecock, *The Folewer to the Donet*, ed. by E. V. Hitchcock, EETS OS 164 (London: Oxford University Press, 1924), pp.58-59.

20 *Piers Plowman*, ed. by Derek Pearsall (London: Arnold, 1978), C. XXI. 455-56.

21 J. S. P. Tatlock, 'The Date of the Troilus: And Minor Chauceriana', *Modern Language Notes*, 50(1935), 277-296 (p.296).

22 Wayland J. Chase, *The Distichs of Cato: A Famous Medieval Textbook* (Madison: University of Wisconsin, 1922).

23 Correale and Hamel, II, 750-69.

24 John J. McGavin, 'How Nasty Is Phoebus's Crow?' *The Chaucer Review* 21(1987), 444-58.

25 McGavin, pp.449-50.

26 William Shakespeare, *Othello*, ed. by Norman Sanders (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

27 *Ad clericos de conversione*, VIII. 14 (*PL*, 182: 842); *Sermons on Conversion*, trans. by Marie-Bernard Saïd, Cistercian Fathers Series, 25 (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1981), pp.48-49.

28 Cf. *Das Moralium Dogma Philosophorum des Guillaume de Conches: Lateinisch, Altfranzösisch und Mittelniederfränkisch*, ed. by John Holmberg (Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksells, 1929), p.104.

29 Bernard of Clairvaux, *Ad clericos de conversione*, III. 4 (*PL*, 182: 836): Saïd, *Sermons on Conversion*, p. 35.

30 Mary Carruthers, *The Craft of Thought: Meditation, Rhetoric, and the Making of Images, 400-1200* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 94–95.

31 Bernard of Clairvaux, *Ad clericos de conversione*, XV. 28 (*PL*, 182:849); Saïd, *Sermons on Conversion*, p. 64.

32 Carruthers, *The Craft of Thought*, p.94.

33 Cf. Takami Matsuda, 'Performance, Memory, and Oblivion in the *Parson's Tale*', *The Chaucer Review*, 51(2016), 436-52.