

## Rhetorical Strategies in *Animal Farm* and the *Nun's Priest's Tale*

Geoffrey Chaucer's *Nun's Priest's Tale* teaches one to beware of deceit. George Orwell's *Animal Farm* teaches one to beware of power. In the *Nun's Priest's Tale*, a fox deceives Chanticleer, to the benefit of the fox and detriment of Chanticleer. In *Animal Farm*, the pigs gain power and oppress the farm animals, to the benefit of the pigs and detriment of the farm animals. Through the use of fable and rhetorical devices, Geoffrey Chaucer and George Orwell prove that deceit and power are dangerous.

*Animal Farm* began with a speech given by Old Major, a "highly regarded... majestic-looking pig, with a wise and benevolent appearance" (Orwell, 4). Orwell's description of Old Major is ironic because "pig" connotes negative characteristics such as dirty, greedy, filthy. However, Old Major is the opposite of these characteristics. In this case, the fable style is beneficial to the plot because it creates surprise when Old Major juxtaposes the connotations of his animal body. Surprise entertains and captivates the reader.

"Comrades, here is a point that must be settled...let us put it to the vote" (Orwell, 10). In his speech, with his diction, by addressing his audience as "comrades", Old Major became a trusted friend. His friendly, but firm and reasonable tone revealed that the animals, including the pigs, began *Animal Farm* with a fair democracy and good intentions. However, the road to hell is paved with good intentions. Old Major's speech is forgotten. As the pigs became increasingly powerful, they became increasingly oppressive. However, Old Major's speech had made it clear the pigs began with good intentions. Therefore, it is obvious that the power is what made the pigs oppressive, not the pigs' initial intentions. Power corrupted the pigs. Power oppressed the animals. Power is dangerous.

"O false murderer, lurking in your den! /O new Iscariot, new Ganelon! /O false dissembler, like the Greek Sinon" (Chaucer, 3226). In this quote, from the *Nun's Priest's Tale*, Chaucer used three allusions, balanced syntax, and parallel syntax. This quote describes the fox, who was friendly towards Chanticleer, and then betrayed him. The three allusions Chaucer used to describe the fox allude to three men who betrayed people who trusted them. Iscariot alludes to Judas Iscariot, Jesus's disciple who betrayed him to the Roman guards. Ganelon alludes to the knight who betrayed Charlemagne's army, to the Muslims, in the *Matter of France*. Sinon alludes to a Greek warrior who betrayed the Trojans, in the Trojan War (he pretended to betray the Greeks, but was actually giving the Trojans false information in order to help the Greeks). Since all three of the allusions refer to betrayals, Chaucer was clearly foreshadowing the fox's betrayal of Chanticleer. The balanced and parallel syntax make the quote stand out from the rest of the text to emphasize the sentence's foreshadowing. Syntax helped Chaucer enhance the plot of the *Nun's Priest's Tale*.

Chaucer used the stereotypes of his characters' animal bodies to foreshadow. In the *Nun's Priest's Tale*, it is a fox who Chanticleer regrettably puts his trust in. However, as soon as the fox appeared, the reader could predict Chanticleer would be tricked by the fox. "Fox" connotes a character who enjoys

subterfuge, cunning, and deception. As a rooster, Chanticleer seeks to be noticed and is consequently susceptible to flattery. Chanticleer's rooster stereotype explains why he was so eager to believe the fox's deceptive flattery. Chaucer used the combination of the fox and rooster stereotypes to magnify Chanticleer's unawareness and clearly show that Chanticleer was foolish to believe the fox's flattery. In result, Chanticleer was almost eaten. Chanticleer's foolishness strengthens Chaucer's argument to be aware of deceit.

Chaucer is not the only person to take advantage of the fox's stereotype. Last year, in 2016, the movie *Zootopia* was released. One of *Zootopia*'s protagonists, a fox, commented, "'if the world's only going to see a fox as shifty and untrustworthy, there's no point in being anything else'". The fox made this comment because of his experiences that everyone he had encountered believed he was devious and dishonest, as one would assume of a fox. His comment not only applies to his own life story, but to any story with a fox. Placing a character in a fox's body immediately indirectly characterizes the character as a schemer and a deceiver. Animal stereotypes have a strong impact on the plots of stories.

In *Animal Farm*, a stereotypical greedy pig, Napoleon, destroyed an important symbol. The animals' anthem, *Beasts of England*, was a symbol for the animals' hope. Orwell emphasized *Beasts of England*'s importance with a description of the animals' reaction to it: "The cows lowed it, the dogs whined it, the sheep bleated it, the horses whinnied it, the ducks quacked it" (Orwell, 13). Orwell's description contains balanced, parallel clauses in quick succession. The syntax (balanced and parallel) highlight the description and give it a smooth flow. The quick succession of clauses all repeat the same message: the animals loved *Beasts of England*. By repeating this message five times in one sentence, Orwell established *Beasts of England* as the symbol for the animals' hope. In Chapter VII, Napoleon used his power to forbid the singing of *Beasts of England*, in effect outlawing hope. Napoleon's use of power hurt the morale of the animals.

Another important display of Napoleon's power is the execution of several animals who have supposedly committed crimes. The execution scene's intense, negative imagery creates a picture that is gruesome and horrendous and terrifying. "The tale of confessions and executions went on, until there was a pile of corpses lying before Napoleon's feet and the air was heavy with the smell of blood" (Orwell, 84). Orwell's imagery is pathos. It invokes a sense pity toward the farm animals and a sense of fear and hatred toward Napoleon. Orwell's disturbing, piteous imagery persuades the reader to believe power is dangerous and harmful.

In *Animal Farm* and the *Nun's Priest's Tale*, George Orwell and Geoffrey Chaucer made use of fable style and rhetorical strategies to communicate their morals. Years later, in 2017, their rhetoric and use of fable are still effective at communicating the important, timeless morals: beware of deception, and beware of power.