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Reciprocal Generosity and Dorigen's Tragic Perception of Reality in The Franklin's Tale

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FOREWORD

At the centre of the plot in *The Franklin's Tale* there is a promise of love made by a married woman to her would-be lover, whose fulfilment depends upon the accomplishment of an apparently impossible request on the part of her potential suitor, which eventually turns out to be feasible against all expectations: Dorigen, Arveragus's wife, swears to Aurelius that she will reciprocate his love if he removes the rocks which stand in the sea along the Breton coast – a task which she considers unquestionably impossible to achieve, but which Aurelius eventually manages to accomplish by hiring a magician. The promise develops into a test for the characters' moral integrity, in which reciprocal renunciation contributes to the happy ending of the story: Dorigen, entrapped in the choice between a life of dishonour – either as an unfaithful wife to her husband or as a disloyal lady to her would-be lover – and an honourable self-inflicted death, puts the decision in the hands of her husband; Arveragus, instead of exerting his marital control over his wife and disregarding her promise, sends Dorigen to her potential suitor; Aurelius, moved by compassion for Dorigen and admiration for Arveragus, sends his beloved back to her husband releasing her from her promise; by the same token, the magician crowns the positive resolution with an act of generosity by releasing Aurelius from his payment. However, this is only part of the story because Chaucer indulges in the detailed characterization of the female protagonist by paying particular attention to the thoughts and emotions that inform her character in the controversial moments of the story.

In my dissertation I have undertaken an analysis of *The Franklin's Tale* starting from the assumption that the characterization of Dorigen may have been a matter of primary importance to Chaucer when he set about writing the story. Dorigen, in fact, seems to have given her

narrator the possibility to explore the inward dimension of a character who is drawn from literary conventions, but who defies sheer predictability. The narrator's most personal touch in the story should be found in the degree of attention that his heroine is granted in crucial moments of the tale. While the plot seems to be carefully designed to show the gentleness of its male characters, Chaucer enriched the story by focusing his narration on the complexity which the character of Dorigen acquires, as well as the mixture of sympathetic involvement and ironic detachment with which the female protagonist is presented. By the end of the story, it seems that Dorigen, more than any other character, has deserved the happiness restored by the positive development of events.

My dissertation is divided into two chapters, each of which can be associated with the two moments in which Dorigen takes centre stage, being granted the possibility of putting her emotional involvement into words by means of soliloquies. The two complaints have been a starting point in the development of my dissertation because they most evidently signal Chaucer's use of ideas that are external to the concerns of the plot – ideas which contribute to the characterization of his female character, and which may have been drawn or influenced by other texts, Boethius's *De Consolatione Philosophiae* and Boccaccio's *De Mulieribus Claris*.

The first chapter starts with a general presentation of Boethius and the medieval reception of *De Consolatione Philosophiae* in order to explain to what extent Chaucer's translation of Boethius may have been influential in his late writings. The second section of the chapter is an analysis of Dorigen's first complaint, the part of the *Tale* that is most evidently indebted to the *Consolatio*; particular attention has been paid to the textual affinities between the two works. A further section is dedicated to the problem of marriage and love which is paramount to an understanding of Dorigen, as the story seems to associate her individuality with a dependence on her husband that is so strongly felt by Dorigen that it takes the form of a desperate obsession; the language used to describe the process of the attempted consolation of Dorigen's grief on the part of her friends bears a Boethian colouring. The last section of the chapter tackles the problem of

Chaucer's adaptation of the dialogic form of *De Consolatione Philosophiae* to his narrative and especially to Dorigen's voice.

The first section of the second chapter is centred on the scene in which Dorigen makes her promise to Aurelius; in particular, the alternation of seriousness and playfulness in her reply to Aurelius's advances has been read as symptomatic of Chaucer's peculiar use of courtly conventions in imagining the relationship between Dorigen and the young squire. In the following section, Dorigen's second complaint is analysed comparing her catalogue of virtuous women with analogous texts, notably Boccaccio's collection of biographies of famous women. The third section of the chapter is an analysis of Arveragus's reply to Dorigen; his invocation of the importance of *trouthe* has been read as the presentation of an opposing viewpoint to the principle of death for the sake of chastity, which Dorigen champions in her second soliloquy. In the last section, the attempt at conciliating the tragic tone that characterises Dorigen with the comic ending of the *Tale* has been read as symptomatic of the importance that the role of Dorigen is granted within the story – an importance which seems to overshadow the question about the characters' generosity asked by the Franklin as a conclusion to his speech.

CHAPTER ONE

Boethian echoes in The Franklin's Tale

1.1 The medieval tradition of *De Consolatione Philosophiae* and Chaucer's *Boece*

Anicius Manlius Severinus Boethius (born about 480 A.D. in Rome) was one of the most important intellectuals and politicians at the Ostrogothic court of Theodoric when, being accused of treason, he was imprisoned, tortured and put to death in 524. He came originally from the family of the Anicii and was adopted, after his parents' death, by Q. Aurelius Memmius Symmachus, a historian and senator who belonged to the few families of Roman aristocracy which controlled public life in Rome. The power of Roman political institutions depended on the court of the Ostrogothic kings in Ravenna and the Senate's activity was limited to the local administration. Boethius's political success as a senator was crowned by his consulship – an office to which also his two sons would be appointed – and reached its climax when he became Master of the Offices (*magister officiorum*) at Ravenna, thus being promoted to minister of the highest rank. It was at this point that he was accused and sentenced to death. The reasons for Boethius's charge of treason are not easy to define. A series of historical circumstances are thought to have led the court to think that Boethius's political position could be a problem. In 522 the political situation was perceived as insecure: worries came from the lack of a designated successor to Theodoric and from the policy of ecclesiastical and political unification of the Byzantine emperor Justin. Boethius might have already been looked at with suspicion at the Arian court because of his support to Pope John I's policy of unification of the Churches of the

East and the West. Controversies on doctrinal matters had been opposing the Greek East to Rome since the fourth century and had even led to Felix III's excommunication of the Patriarch of Constantinople Acacius, causing a schism between the churches that lasted from 484 to 519. Boethius's accusation followed his defence of Albinus, a former consul who supported ecclesiastical unification. Suspicions over him might have been fostered by some of the theological ideas he expressed in his tractates in the past because of his philosophical interest in the Trinitarian problem, but that had important consequences in the process of reconciliation between the Churches of the East and the West. His sentence to death was the second of a series of three: Albinus had already been sentenced and, along with Boethius, his father-in-law Symmachus would be put to death.¹

Boethius's *De Consolatione Philosophiae* is believed to have been written during his imprisonment. At the beginning of the work,² Boethius presents himself as an old man in distress, whose sole comfort is to go back with his mind to the happiness he witnessed in the past. Surprisingly enough, old age – not his imprisonment – is the object of his complaint in the incipit of the work, and the sudden realisation of approaching death makes Boethius all the sadder because it goes together with the awareness that his former happiness was nothing but an illusion. In book 1, prose 4, Boethius reveals to Lady Philosophy that the reason for his complaint is that he has been sentenced to imprisonment because of a false charge of treason.³ He recounts how he put his own authority as a senator at stake to expose courtly officers'

¹ The information about Boethius's life contained in the paragraph is drawn from: William Bark, "Theodoric vs. Boethius: Vindication and Apology", *The American Historical Review*, 49 (1944), pp.410-26; Joachim Gruber, *Kommentar zu Boethius, De Consolatione Philosophiae*, Berlin, New York: Walter De Gruyter, 1978, pp.1-13; John Matthews, "Anicius Manlius Severinus Boethius", in Margaret Gibson, ed., *Boethius. His Life, Thought and Influence*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1981, pp. 15-43.

² "Gloria felicitis olim uiridisque iuuentae / Solantur maesti nunc mea fata senis." ("The art that was my young life's joy and glory / Becomes my solace now I'm old and sorry") [l. m1. pp.128-29] All references to Boethius's *De Consolatione* and its translation into Modern English are to the Loeb edition: H. F. Stewart, E. K. Rand, eds., *Boethius: The Theological Tractates and The Consolation of Philosophy*, Cambridge, Mass., and London: Harvard University Press, 1962.

³ Anna Crabbe notes that the opening metre is not to be taken as "symptomatic of the *Consolatio* as a whole". Her point is that the motives of premature old age and the wish for death occurring in the first metre are Boethius's display of literary knowledge. See Anna Crabbe, "Literary Design in the *De Consolatione Philosophiae*", in Margaret Gibson, ed., *Boethius. His Life, Thought and Influence*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1981, pp.246-47.

iniquities to the king or to defend others from false accusations. The image that he gives of himself is not that of a senator who worked in the pursuit of advantages for his career but that of a politician who set justice as his priority. He thinks therefore that he has a right to be upset because the circumstances of his accusation by the hands of wicked people and, what is worse, his punishment seem not to make justice to the commitment he had shown throughout his political career.

The autobiographical material in *De Consolatione Philosophiae* overtly refers to the last part of Boethius's life. However, reducing the work to the final attempt of a man sentenced to death to prove his innocence would mean imposing a partial reading on it. The *Consolatio* is in fact the culmination of Boethius's lifelong studies in ancient philosophy and his masterpiece from the point of view of literary style.⁴ As an aesthetic and philosophical achievement, the book was so influential that it was to become an inspiring source for art and thought in the Middle Ages.⁵ In fact, it started to be widely read and to circulate among scholars in the late eighth century, and from the ninth century onwards grammarians would use the *Consolatio* as a fundamental text in the monastery schools of northern Europe and, later on, also in grammar schools and universities.⁶ Beaumont has supported the idea that the exegetic tradition related to Boethius's *De Consolatione* in northern Europe is due to Alcuin, who probably brought a copy to Anglo-Saxon England from one of his trips to Italy.⁷ As Minnis explains, glosses, commentaries and translations were produced in the Middle Ages to make the content of a specific text easier to understand.⁸ In the case of *De Consolatione Philosophiae*, a number of

⁴ Crabbe argues that "the sum of Boethius' other writings does not prepare us for this final work", hinting at the fact that the *Consolatio* is unexpected if compared to the rest of Boethius's writings. See Crabbe, p.237.

⁵ Jaqueline Beaumont, "The Latin Tradition of the *De Consolatione Philosophiae*", in Margaret Gibson, ed., *Boethius. His Life, Thought and Influence*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1981, p.278.

⁶ Nigel F. Palmer, "Latin and Vernacular in the Northern European Tradition of the *De Consolatione Philosophiae*", in Margaret Gibson, ed., *Boethius. His Life, Thought and Influence*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1981, pp.362-63.

⁷ Beaumont also finds evidence of Alcuin's use of Boethius's ideas and phraseology in his own texts, suggesting that by making use of them in the Christian framework of his works Alcuin contributed to what she calls "this marriage of Christian and profane", i.e., to a Christian interpretation of Boethius's work. See Beaumont, pp.279-80.

⁸ A. J. Minnis, "'Glosynge is a Glorious Thyng': Chaucer at Work on the *Boece*", in A. J. Minnis, ed., *The Medieval Boethius. Studies in the Vernacular Translations of De Consolatione Philosophiae*, Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1987, p.106.

writers commented on the work in the form of glosses or wrote separate commentaries, and these interpretative attempts that built up over time are witness to the extraordinary popularity of the work among medieval scholars. The earliest relevant commentary on Boethius's *De Consolatione Philosophiae* was written by Remigius of Auxerre (841-908), who was master of the monastic school of St Germain at Auxerre and teacher at Rheims and Paris. So popular was his commentary among scholars that a Remigian tradition of glosses was established from his commentary and from the subsequent revisions of it made by other scholars. The authority of this interpretative tradition was questioned in the twelfth century by William of Conches (c.1080-c.1154), whose commentary on Boethius's *De Consolatione Philosophiae* gave a particularly Neoplatonic set of glosses to the original text. Probably in the second half of the thirteenth century, William of Aragon wrote – in overt opposition to William of Conches's Platonic glosses – what is believed to be the first commentary on the *De Consolatione* that provides an Aristotelian interpretation of Boethius. Probably not long before 1307, Nicholas Trevet⁹ completed his own commentary, which draws on William of Conches's but deals more extensively with historical references, instead of indulging in the exposition of mythological material.¹⁰

The process of translation of the *De Consolatione* is not to be understood as something significantly different from the process of adding glosses to Boethius's text or of writing specific commentaries on it. As Minnis has argued, translations of the *De Consolatione* were not supposed to replace the Latin original but to make its meaning accessible through another

⁹ The English Dominican Nicholas Trevet was born in c.1258 and died in 1328, according to John Bale – a sixteenth-century English bibliographer, who continued John Leland's research and published his results providing a first edition of the indexes of Trevet's works. After the University of Paris, he graduated in theology from Oxford and spent his life teaching theology at the University of Oxford and the school of his order in London. Being held in great esteem as a writer, his work was financed by important ecclesiasts, notably Pope John XXII. He wrote exegetic and patristic writings, commentaries on classical authors, historical writings and theological tractates. (I drew the information about Trevet from Franz Ehrle, "Nikolaus Trivet, sein Leben, seine Quolibet und Quaestiones ordinariae", in Clemens Baeumker, ed., *Abhandlungen zur Geschichte der Philosophie des Mittelalters*, Münster i. W.: Verlag der Aschendorffschen Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1923, pp.1-19.)

¹⁰ The information about the commentaries on Boethius's *De Consolatione* contained in the paragraph is drawn from A. J. Minnis, "Aspects of the Medieval French and English Traditions of the *De Consolatione Philosophiae*", in Margaret Gibson, ed., *Boethius. His Life, Thought and Influence*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1981, pp.313-15.

language.¹¹ Geoffrey Chaucer was not the first to translate the *Consolatio* into vernacular. Alfred (848/9-899), king of the West-Saxons and the Anglo Saxons, who embarked on a cultural project to revive literary culture and to found an educational system at his court which promoted the spread of knowledge in the vernacular, wrote himself a prose translation of the *Consolatio* into Anglo-Saxon, in which he felt himself free not only to expand the original text, making use of commentaries, but also to change part of Boethius's conclusions in the text, adapting it to his own vision of the world.¹² Though Anglo-Saxon is conventionally believed to have been no longer used as a literary language after about c.1200, and it might have been difficult for later medieval scholars to read Alfred's translation, B. S. Donaghey has produced evidence of Trevet's use of Alfred's Boethius as a source for his commentary on the *Consolatio*.¹³ Partial translations into Old French were produced since around 1100, and from the mid-thirteenth century to the early fourteenth century five distinct prose translations were written, among which Jean de Meun's *Li Livres de Confort* is to be counted.¹⁴

Therefore, when Chaucer set out to write a translation of Boethius's *De Consolatione* a large apparatus of secondary material had been written and the knowledge of Boethius's text must have been influenced by it. The problem of which texts Chaucer used as sources to write his *Boece* has been the object of much critical debate over the years. It was at the beginning of the twentieth century that Kate O. Petersen provided substantial evidence to support Chaucer's indebtedness to Trevet's commentary.¹⁵ The other major source for *Boece* is Jean de Meun's Old

¹¹ Minnis, "'Glosynge is a Glorious Thyng': Chaucer at Work on the *Boece*", pp.106-107.

¹² The information about Alfred and his translation is drawn from Malcolm Godden, "King Alfred's Boethius", in Margaret Gibson, ed., *Boethius. His Life, Thought and Influence*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1981, pp.419-24; and Patrick Wormald, 'Alfred (848/9-899)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, Oct 2006 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/183>, accessed 7 Nov 2012].

¹³ B. S. Donaghey, "Nicholas Trevet's Use of King Alfred's Translation of Boethius, and the Dating of his Commentary", in A. J. Minnis, ed., *The Medieval Boethius. Studies in the Vernacular Translations of De Consolatione Philosophiae*, Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1987, pp.11-16.

¹⁴ Palmer, pp.364-66.

¹⁵ "There are more than three hundred and seventy cases in which a word, a phrase, or an entire gloss in Trivet's commentary finds a literal English equivalent in Chaucer's *Boethius*". See Kate O. Petersen, "Chaucer and Trivet", *PMLA*, 18 (1903), p.175.

French prose translation.¹⁶ Critics have observed how Chaucer's translation presents a number of similarities to Jean de Meun's version which no other Old French extant translation can outnumber;¹⁷ moreover, Bernard L. Jefferson, starting from the assumption that Chaucer may have wanted to consult translations of Boethius that had been previously made, has pointed to the fact that, since no Middle English version was available, he may have resorted to Old French versions, among which his preference must have gone to Jean de Meun's *Boece* given his good knowledge of the French author, whose *Roman de la Rose* he had already translated.¹⁸

Apart from Jean de Meun and Nicholas Trevet – who have been indicated as the sources of most of the *Boece*'s extrapolations – the rest of Chaucer's additions in his translation, as Minnis has observed, have mostly parallels in the Remigian tradition of glosses.¹⁹ Moreover, Kottler has argued that some of Chaucer's (and Jean de Meun's) additions are due to the

¹⁶ Two different Old French translations have been object of debate as far as their attribution to Jean de Meun is concerned – a more literal prose translation and a freer translation which respects Boethius's alternation between prose and verse. As James M. Cline explains, the former is written in a dialect which resembles the one in which Jean de Meun wrote his work; however, this translation, closer to the Latin text and obscure in some points because of its literalness, seems to contradict the dedicatory epistle which prefaces the translation, in which Jean de Meun writes to Philip IV, who had requested the translation, explaining that it was his purpose to render the full meaning of the Latin text without being too closely literal. Cline argues that Jean de Meun's notion of openness in translation should be related to the standards of the time, when Latin texts were rendered into the vernacular by forcing the grammar of the target language so heavily that word-for-word translations could hardly be understood by those who had no familiarity with Latin: “[w]e have no expression today for what was meant by translation after the word, which was little more than a complete and inflected glossary. Open translation, on the other hand, is what we should call literal translation: a translation as close to the original as can be accomplished without doing violence to English idiom. But it is in no sense synonymous with our idea of free translation.” He concludes that the principle of openness invoked in the dedicatory does suit the prose translation despite its obscurity – a principle that is reflected also in Chaucer's translation. See James M. Cline, “Chaucer and Jean De Meun: *De Consolatione Philosophiae*”, *ELH*, 3 (1936), pp.170-181, quotation on page 178.

¹⁷ Some of the similarities between Jean de Meun's and Chaucer's translations have been pointed out by V. L. Dedeck-Héry, who observed that additions to Boethius's original are identical or very similar in both translations (a single word in the Latin text can be doubled in both French and English versions, a literal translation of a passage from Latin into English is followed by a translation into English of the same passage in the French version). However, Dedeck-Héry argued that these similarities could be motivated by the fact that both authors could have relied on one source, notably the same commentary. In reply to this objection, he lists a number of passages in which Chaucer preferred to translate the word or expression of Jean de Meun's version instead of using another word or expression in English; moreover, he adds a list of stylistic resemblances between the two translations, false readings common to both translators, and Chaucer's defective renderings of the Latin original, which, he suggested, are probably due either to false readings, or to a misreading of the French translation, or to a too literal translation of it. See V. L. Dedeck-Héry, “Jean de Meun et Chaucer, traducteurs de la Consolation de Boèce”, *PMLA*, 18 (1903), pp.967-91. Kottler, in his study on the vulgate tradition of the *Consolatio*, partially limits the validity of Dedeck-Héry's results attributing some of Jean de Meun's and Chaucer's additions to the original to the variant readings that had established in the Latin text by the fourteenth century. See Barnet Kottler, “The Vulgate Tradition of the *Consolatio Philosophiae* in the Fourteenth Century”, *Mediaeval Studies*, 17 (1955), pp.213-14.

¹⁸ Bernard L. Jefferson, *Chaucer and the Consolation of Philosophy of Boethius*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1917, pp.3-5.

¹⁹ Minnis, “‘Glosynge is a glorious thyng’: Chaucer at Work on the *Boece*”, pp.108-09.

readings of the vulgate text of the *Consolatio* – the fourteenth-century version that presents a number of readings that differ from those in the text that was copied in earlier manuscripts.²⁰ From the evidence that has been provided so far and from his analysis of the extant manuscripts of Jean de Meun’s translation, of the commentaries on the *De Consolatione Philosophiae* and of the Latin original text which was in circulation in the Middle Ages (the ‘Vulgate’ text), Minnis has concluded that:

Chaucer [...] had just three texts to hand, which may be identified as follows:

1. A ‘plain’ text (i.e. not glossed) of Jean de Meun’s *Li Livres de Confort* [...].
2. A Vulgate text of the *Consolatio* with Remigian glosses written between the lines and in the margins.
3. A copy of Trevet’s commentary, either written around a Vulgate text of *De Consolatione Philosophiae* or written out as a continuous treatise.²¹

The fascination that *De Consolatione Philosophiae* must have had on Chaucer did not result simply in his *Boece* but is to be seen in his achievements as a writer. Through the translation of Boethius’s masterpiece, Chaucer became better acquainted with the philosophical content of *De Consolatione Philosophiae* – both in its original form and in its exegetic tradition – and acquired a range of motifs, images and vocabulary, which he would use in his later narratives, namely *The Canterbury Tales*. As Minnis has observed, most of the philosophical thought that informs *Troilus and Criseyde*, *The Knight’s Tale* and *The Franklin’s Tale*, “Chaucer’s three major pagan poems” (as he calls them), is drawn from his reading of *De Consolatione Philosophiae* through the mediation of Trevet’s commentary.²² Therefore, Chaucer’s translation of *De Consolatione Philosophiae* must have been a fundamental step in his

²⁰ From an analysis of 43 manuscripts of the fourteenth century, Kottler has observed that a different text of the *Consolatio* had been established by that time, i.e., “a vulgate text” as he calls it. According to Kottler, new readings gradually replaced older ones through a gradual process which, for most of these readings, had already started in the ninth century but was not substantially effective until the eleventh century. After a period in which manuscripts were copied with older and new readings, by the fourteenth century new readings had replaced older ones in almost all the extant manuscripts that Kottler analysed. For Kottler, the existence of a vulgate tradition for the *Consolatio* is due to the intensive and widespread interpretative work on the text: glosses, translations and commentaries set about the appearance of variant readings. However, Kottler explains, there must have been also a moment in which scholars set a standard for these readings, which contributed to the formation of a common version of the text. See Kottler, pp.210-12.

²¹ Minnis, A. J., “‘Glosynge is a glorious thyng’: Chaucer at Work on the *Boece*”, pp.120-22.

²² Minnis, A. J., *Chaucer and Pagan Antiquity*, Cambridge: Brewer, 1982, pp.1-12.

literary production, and interpretations that try to read Chaucer's work on the basis of his indebtedness to Boethius's text in terms of verbal references or motives common to both authors are legitimate.

1.II Dorigen's complaint about the rocks

In his dissertation *Chaucer and the Consolation of Philosophy of Boethius*, Bernard L. Jefferson argues that Chaucer was so enthusiastically receptive to Boethius's ideas because the *Consolatio* dealt with the themes he had at heart:

[n]o ideas in Chaucer's poetry are more characteristic of him than those concerned with Fortune, with 'destinee', with 'cas and aventure', with 'gentillesse', with 'felicitee', with 'divine purveyaunce', the 'bond of love', 'trouthe', and similar things.²³

In his attempt to evaluate the Boethian influence in Chaucer's literary production, Jefferson quotes Dorigen's complaint about the rocks in *The Franklin's Tale* as the passage in which – along with Palamon's complaint in *The Knight's Tale* (865-93)²⁴ – Chaucer deals most with the problem of evil in the world, and points out Chaucer's indebtedness to Boethius's *De Consolatione*, in particular to Book I Metre 5. Jefferson also, comparing Dorigen's complaint with Palamon's, finds out a common pattern in which the problem is presented:

(1) The almighty power of God is granted. No doubt is ever expressed as to the existence of that. (2) The question is asked: why does this all powerful God permit evils to afflict man and the guiltless to suffer? (3) The speaker, not being able to reconcile to each other the facts of God's existence of evil, leaves the matter for clerks to decide.²⁵

W. Bryant, Jr. Bachman starts his analysis of *The Franklin's Tale* and "Chaucer's relation to Boethian theodicy" from Dorigen's complaint about the rocks and, following Jefferson's footsteps, argues that

these parallels in language and theme between the *Consolation* and Dorigen's lament suggest that not only are the black rocks symbolic of the presence of evil in creation, but

²³ Jefferson, p.48.

²⁴ Jefferson also identifies lines from other four works by Chaucer – *The Complaint of Mars*, *Troilus and Criseyde*, *The Legend of Good Women* and *The Man of Law's Tale* – as passages which contain references to the problem of evil in the world. However, he distinguishes these shorter passages from the longer ones in the *Franklin's Tale* and the *Knight's Tale*, which he quotes and analyses.

²⁵ Jefferson, p.69.

also that the subject of teleological discontinuities, the problem and resolution, is viewed by Chaucer in very Boethian terms.²⁶

More recently W. A. Davenport, who in his investigation into the use of complaint in *The Franklin's Tale* has pointed out the resemblance of Dorigen's complaint on the rocks with Palamon's apostrophe to the cruel Gods, maintains that both speeches are indebted to Boethius.²⁷ In the light of the considerations made by these critics, I will examine the Boethian parallels that occur in Dorigen's soliloquy, both in terms of themes and vocabulary. To develop my analysis, I will divide the passage into three moments, which correspond to the three points that have been suggested by Jefferson.

Dorigen's complaint starts with the following lines:

Eterne God, that thurgh thy purveiaunce
Ledest the world by certein governaunce,
In ydel, as men seyn, ye no thyng make. (865-67)²⁸

In her addressing God as the eternal maker and ruler of the universe, Dorigen starts from the assumption that the world is the result of a providential order in which everything exists for a purpose. In the first line, she makes use of two words, *eterne* and *purveiaunce*, that are of particular importance for the philosophical matter discussed in the last two books of the *Consolatio*. As I explained before, not only did Chaucer read *De Consolatione Philosophiae* as any learned man in the late Middle Ages would, but he also translated it into the vernacular. His translation, known as *Boece*, gives important indications of the way in which Chaucer may have understood Boethius's text and the pertinent secondary literature which was circulating at the time. In my attempt to interpret *The Franklin's Tale* in the light of the Boethian influence contained, I will draw inferences primarily from Chaucer's translation of the *Consolatio*. In case of discrepancy between Chaucer's translation and the Latin original, I will turn also to the latter and comment upon both texts.

²⁶ W. Bryant, Jr. Bachman, "'To Maken Illusioun': The Philosophy of Magic and the Magic of Philosophy in the *Franklin's Tale*", *Chaucer Review*, 12 (1977), pp.55-67.

²⁷ W. A. Davenport, *Chaucer: Complaint and Narrative*, Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1988, p.189.

²⁸ All references to Chaucer's works are to Benson, Larry D., ed., *The Riverside Chaucer*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987.

Eternity, God's sole prerogative, is defined in *Boece* as the "parfit possessioun and al togidre of lif interminable", while everything in the world is subject to "temporel condicioun" (V. p6, 27-28): earthly things are transitory because their present condition, a limited moment in time, proceeds from the past to the future having no share either in what has already happened or in what has yet to come; on the other hand, God "have al present the infinit of the moevable tyme" (V. p6, 49-50), that is, God embraces the entire temporal space all at once as if time were for him an everlasting present condition.²⁹ As for Boethius's discussion of God's governance of the world in the fourth book of the *Consolatio*, Philosophy presents the relationship between Providence and Fate in the following terms:

The engenderynge of alle thinges [...] and alle the progressiouns of muable nature, and al that moeveth in any manere, taketh hise causes, his ordre, and his formes, of the stablenesse of the devyne thought. And thilke devyne thought [...] stablissith many maner gises to thinges that ben done; the whiche manere whan that men looken it in thilke pure clenness of the devyne intelligence, it is ycleped purveaunce; but whanne thilke manere is referred by men to thinges that it moeveth and disponyth, than of olde men it was clepyd destyne. (IV. p6, 42-56)

Providence is described as immovable and simple, whereas Fate's characteristics are changeability and manifoldness. However different they are, both are the instruments through which God governs the universe, and they do depend upon one another: Providence requires Fate to operate in the world, and Fate could do nothing without Providence's order. Ultimately, Providence and Fate are, as Philosophy argues, the two forms in which the same divine thought operates in the universe: it takes the semblance of Providence when man looks at it as the divine intelligence that rules the universe, but was called Fate by the ancients as they referred it to the things that are ruled by the divine intelligence. Boethius exemplifies the relationship of Providence to Fate with the relationship of the centre to its circle. In a series of concentric circles, the closer the circle is to its centre, the more similar to its centre. As Howard R. Patch has noted, Boethius combined the idea of Fate turning things in an orbit with the notion of God as the stable centre of a circle. He explains the resulting idea as follows: "The more the soul is

²⁹ *Boece*, book V. prose 6, lines 14-15. All subsequent references to Chaucer's *Boece* are written as follows: number of the book in roman numerals. p (prose) / m (metre) number of prose/metre, number of lines. For example, V. p6, 14-15.

freed from things corporeal, and thus [...] from Fate, the more it may attain to that centre of stability and simplicity which [...] is Providence, or God.”³⁰ As Scheible has observed, Boethius had to combine these two elements in order to affirm both God’s taking personal care of the world and his absolute transcendence.³¹ On the one hand, Providence, the absolute goodness that informs the relationship of God to the world he created, accounts for the transcendent nature of God’s plan, that is one, immutable, immovable, and beyond space and time; on the other hand, Fate explains how what God has planned comes into being in the things that are perceived by the senses to form what we commonly call reality. Scheible describes the relationship between Fate and Providence as the relationship between a copy and its original, with *fatum* being a “translation of the transcendent *providentia* into time and movement”.³² Therefore, as Scheible also points out, Boethius believed that the world could not be possibly better than it already was and, by using the notion of *fatum* as the force which strives to recreate the best possible copy of the original unity of *providentia* out of the manifold of discordant elements of the world, he managed to align himself with the Christian belief of God as the maker as well as the maintainer of the cosmos.

Dorigen’s incipit contains in a concise form all this Boethian background of knowledge. Boethian is also her use of the term *governance*. As Jefferson and Bachman note, her complaint bears resemblances to a passage in *Boece* in which God is addressed by Boethius as follows: “O thou governour, governynge alle thynges by certein ende” (I. m5, 31-32). *Governance*, God’s control over the universe, occurs in the form of the noun “governour” as an epithet of God and

³⁰ Howard R. Patch, “Fate in Boethius and the Neoplatonists”, *Speculum*, 4 (1929), pp.62-72.

³¹ For an explanation of the relationship between Providence and Fate in Boethius’s *De Consolatione*, see Helga Scheible, *Die Gedichte in der Consolatio Philosophiae des Boethius*, Heidelberg: Carl Winter Universitätsverlag, 1972, pp.184-87.

³² “Wie also aus der Ewigkeit Gottes die Zeit hervorgeht und in der Unbewegtheit Gottes die Ursache aller Bewegung liegt, so geht aus seiner Güte, die, auf das Geschöpf gerichtet, *providentia* heißt, das *fatum* hervor, gewissermaßen als eine Übersetzung der transzendenten *providentia* in Zeit und Bewegung.” (“Therefore, in the same way that time is derived from God’s eternity and the cause of all movement is God’s immobility, *fatum* comes from God’s goodness – that takes the name of *providentia* when it is addressed to the created being – as it were a translation of the transcendent *providentia* into time and movement.” [my translation]). The quotation is drawn from Scheible, p.186.

the verb “governe”.³³ In Book III Metre 9, Boethius addresses God as *governor* (“O thow Fadir, soowere and creatour of hevene and of erthes, that governest this world by perdurable resoun”), and the apostrophe is spoken in the form of a prayer, as Philosophy required Boethius to do at the end of the previous prose. The fact that God does not make anything in vain, as Dorigen says, is the same as saying that he governs things to a certain end, for a specific purpose, or by eternal reason. Therefore, both Dorigen and Boethius start by the assumption that God exists. Moreover, the similar use of apostrophe makes the incipit of Dorigen’s speech sound like a prayer.

In the following lines, Dorigen asks herself about the meaning of the rocks in creation:

But, Lord, this grisly feendly rokkes blake,
That semen rather a foul confusion
Of werk than any fair creacion
Of swich a parfit wys God and a stable,
Why han ye wrought this werk unresonable?
For by this werk, south north, ne west ne eest,
Ther nys yfostred man, ne bryd, ne beest;
It dooth no good, to my wit, but anoyeth.
See ye nat, Lord, how mankynde it destroyeth?
An hundred thousand bodyes of mankynde
Han rokkes slayn, al be they nat in mynde,
Which mankynde is so fair part of thy werk
That thou it madest lyk to thyn owene merk.
Thanne semed it ye hadde a greet chiertee
Toward mankynde; but how thanne may it bee
That ye swiche meenes make it to destroyen,
Whiche meenes do no good, but evere anoyen? (868-84)

This part, starting with an adversative *but*, signals a change in focus. The syntactic construction puts emphasis on the rocks, which are the focus of the entire complaint, and which Dorigen first mentions in a sentence that lacks its main verb: Dorigen might have omitted the “see ye nat” that she uses in line 876 when she addresses God as Lord for the second time. The change is felt also in the tone of the speech. Morton W. Bloomfield describes Dorigen’s complaint as “a

³³ In the Latin original, God is addressed with the terms “gubernans” and “rector”: “Omnia certo fine gubernans” (“Thou to that certain end / Governest all things”), “Rapidus rector comprime fluctus” (“Thou careful ruler, these fierce tempests slake”). In his translation Chaucer does not alternate the terms. In effect, *Oxford Latin Dictionary* (henceforth referred to as *OLD*) explains that the verb *guberno* means “[t]o guide the course of, steer (a ship)”, and can be used figuratively to mean “[t]o direct, control, govern, administer”; by the same token, *rector* means “[t]he helmsman of a ship”, but also “[t]he ruler, governor, controller”, in which case it can be “applied to the supreme deity”. Therefore, the two terms can be read as synonyms.

combination of prayer and complaint”.³⁴ In effect, it seems that the contrast introduced by the adversative and the particular emphasis given to the rocks in the elliptical sentence signal a shift from the tone of prayer in the previous lines to that of urgent lamentation in these lines. Incidentally, complaint is a rhetorical device that involves “affective piety in long, flowing lines with vivid, dramatic phrasing, freedom in the placing of syntactical pauses and rich imagery”, as has been defined by Davenport.³⁵

Dorigen’s argument against the rocks, which allegedly should be a fitting part to a perfect work, is divided by the insertion of three questions, which summarise the three main steps in Dorigen’s reasoning: God’s creation is a non-sense because of the rocks, the rocks are dangerous to mankind, God seems not to love mankind. Doubts about God’s fair treatment of mankind are raised also in *Boece*, as Jefferson and Bachman have observed:

O thou governour, governynge alle thynges by certain ende, whi refusestow oonly to governe the werkes of men by duwe manere? Why suffrestow that slydyng Fortune turneth so grete enterchaungynge of thynges? So that anoyous peyne, that scholde duweliche punysche felons, punysscheth innocentz [...] O thou, what so evere thou be that knytttest alle boondes of thynges, loke on this wrecchide erthes. We men, that ben noght a foul partie, but a fair partie of so greet a werk, we ben turmented in this see of fortune. Thou governour, withdraughe and restreyn the ravyschyng flodes, and fastne and ferme this erthes stable with thilke boond by whiche thou governest the hevене that is so large. (l. m5, 31-58, my italics)³⁶

The passage is taken from the first book of *Boece*. In this book Boethius is in despair because of his imprisonment, when Lady Philosophy appears to him and comforts him, convincing him that he has no right to complain. The fifth metre, from which the extract is taken, comes immediately after a long prose in which Boethius has summarized to Philosophy the events that led him to

³⁴ Morton W. Bloomfield, “*The Franklin’s Tale: A Story of Unanswered Questions*”, in Mary J. Carruthers and Elizabeth D. Kirk, eds., *Acts of Interpretation: The Text in its Contexts 700-1600. Essays on Medieval and Renaissance Literature in Honor of E. Talbot Donaldson*, Norman, Oklahoma: Pilgrim Books, 1982, p.189.

³⁵ Davenport, p.3.

³⁶ *The Riverside Chaucer* compares the passages in italics with the following lines in *The Franklin’s Tale*: 865-66 (Dorigen’s address to “Eterne God” and his governance of the world), 871 (the stability and perfection of Dorigen’s God), and 879-80 (mankind as the “fair part” of creation). See Benson, p.1007. As far as the translation of the passage in italics starting with “We men” is concerned, Minnis argues that Chaucer’s addition of “but a fair partie of so greet a werk” may have been indebted to Trevet’s commentary (“HOMINES NON PARS UILIS immo ualde nobilis pars OPERIS TANTI id est mundi”), while “this see of Fortune” is not only indebted to Trevet’s explanation (“QUATIMUR FORTUNE SALO id est mari”), but also bears resemblance to Jean de Meun’s “sombres tourmenté par la mer de fortune”. See A. J. Minnis, “Chaucer’s Commentator: Nicholas Trevet and the *Boece*”, in A. J. Minnis, ed., *Chaucer’s Boece and the Medieval Tradition of Boethius*, Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1993, p.103. I transcribe here the Latin original for clarity’s sake: “Operis tanti pars non uilis / Homines quatimur fortunae salo.” (“We men, not the least work thou didst create, / With fortune’s blasts do shake” [l. m5, 44-45]).

prison, and has expressed his distress at seeing that wicked people are allowed to put into practice their evil plans while innocents are unjustly punished. According to his association of good chance with reward and bad chance with punishment, Boethius wonders whence evil comes if God exists. In the fifth metre he addresses God as the ruler who governs different aspects of the natural world – the movements of the skies, the waning and waxing of the moon, the succession of winter to summer, the duration of night and day, the blowing of winds – but who apparently does not extend the same control over mankind.

Dorigen's soliloquy derives from an analogous moment of dismay. As we have been told before,³⁷ Dorigen is near the sea, sitting on the edge of a cliff, absorbed in her thoughts, waiting for her husband to come back on a ship, as she "caste hir eyen dounward fro the brynke", sets her eyes on "the grisly rokkes blake" that are scattered in the sea, and gets so scared that she cannot stand and has to sit on the grass. The rocks frighten her because she thinks that they can be dangerous to the ship that is to bring her husband back home from England, and, as Charles A. Owen explains, they represent "the menace of natural forces to her husband's life."³⁸ The fear she feels determines the nature of her soliloquy to God. Through Dorigen's fear for the rocks Chaucer raises within the *Tale* the Boethian problem of the existence of evil and pain in a world that is supposed to be ruled by a benevolent God. As Bachman argues in the quotation I reported above, the rocks are a symbol of the presence of evil in the world. While Boethius is concerned with injustice among men, evil for Dorigen is exemplified by the rocks and the horror which they cause to her, as the adjective *grisly* underlines.³⁹

³⁷ "Another tyme ther wolde she sitte and thynke, / And caste hir eyen dounward fro the brynke. / But whan she saugh the grisly rokkes blake, / For verray feere so wolde hir herte quake / That on hire feet she myghte hire nocht sustene. / Thanne wolde she sitte adoun upon the grene, / And pitously into the see biholde, / And seyn right thus, with sorweful sikes colde" (857-64).

³⁸ Charles A. Owen, Jr., "The Crucial Passages in Five of the *Canterbury Tales*: a Study in Irony and Symbol", *JEGP*, 52 (1953), p.295.

³⁹ OED, s.v. *grisly*. The phrase "the grisly rokkes blake" is quoted under the first meaning: "Causing horror, terror, or extreme fear; horrible or terrible to behold or to hear; causing such feelings as are associated with thoughts of death and 'the other world', spectral appearances, and the like."

The rocks are a complete mistake in Dorigen's idea of creation, in which man is "so fair partie" of God's project. The adjective *fair* used with reference to the privileged position of mankind within the universe occurs also in the passage from *Boece* quoted above ("We men, that ben nought a foul partie, but a fair partie of so greet a werk"), in which we find also the use of the adjective *foul* as its contrary. "Fair creacion" is opposed to the idea of "foul confusion" in Dorigen's speech. The word *confusioun* as referred to the things God created in the world occurs in the following passage of *Boece*:

For whiche it es that alle thingis semen to ben confus and trouble to us men, for we ne mowen nat considere thilke ordenaunce. Natheles the propre maner of every thing, dressynge hem to gode, disponith hem alle, for ther nys no thing doon for cause of yvel [...] But thou mayst seyn, 'What unreste may ben a worse confusioun than that gode men han somyme adversite and somtyme prosperite, and schrewes also han now thingis that they desiren and now thinges that thei haten?' [...] But for to constreyne (*as who seith, but for to comprehende and to telle*) a fewe thingis of the devyne depesse the whiche that mannys resoun may undirstonde, thilke man that thow wenest to ben ryght just and ryght keynge of equite, the contrarie of that semeth to the devyne purveaunce, that al woot. [...] Thanne whatsoever thou mayst seen that is doon in this world unhopid or unwened, certes it es the ryghte ordre of thinges, but as to thi wikkid opynioun it is a confusioun. (IV p6, 166-237)

The words are drawn from Philosophy's reply to Boethius and inserted after the explanation of God's maintenance of order in the world through Providence and Fate. In this passage Philosophy explains to Boethius how everything in the world is directed toward good; the idea that there might be something wrong with creation is the result of human inability to understand the divine order that is behind it. Dorigen's idea of the rocks as "a foul confusion / Of werk", therefore, would be considered by Philosophy as "wikkid opynioun" caused by human weakness.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ Chaucer used the adjective *wikkid* to translate the Latin *peruersus*, whose first meaning is, as OLD explains, "facing the wrong way round or the opposite direction from the usual one, reversed", but which can also be used with the meaning of "wrong-headed, perverse, misguided", especially when it is referred to "persons, their actions, ideas". In the Latin original *peruersa* is referred to *confusio* instead of *opinionis*, as Chaucer did in his translation: "Hic igitur quidquid citra spem uideas geri, rebus quidem rectus ordo est, opinionis uero tuae peruersa confusio." ("Wherefore whatsoever thou seest done here against thy expectation is right order in the things themselves, but a perverse confusion in thy opinion." [IV. p6, 131-33]) *The Riverside Chaucer* supposes that Chaucer's manuscript of Boethius's Latin text had a different reading. Significantly, in Dorigen's speech the word *confusion* is premodified by the adjective *foul*, which OED defines as "[m]orally or spiritually polluted; abominable, detestable, wicked" (s. v. *foul*, adj., meaning 7.a.), therefore as a synonym for *wikkid*, whose use was frequent in Middle English with the meaning of "[b]ad, in various senses", among which there is also "[a]ctually or potentially harmful, destructive, disastrous, or pernicious; baleful; when applied to air, odour, taste, etc., passing into: offensive, foul" (s. v. *wicked*, adj., meaning 2.b.).

Kathryn Hume has argued that *reason* and *stability* are “important technical terms” in Boethius, and the fact that they occur in Dorigen’s speech is symptomatic of the indebtedness of the passage to Boethius.⁴¹ In the following passage, both terms occur in association with God and creation:

O thow Fadir, soowere and creatour of hevene and of erthes, that governest this world by perdurable resoun, that comaundest the tymes to gon from syn that age hadde bygynnyng; thow that duellest thiselve ay stedefast and stable, and yevest alle othere thynges to ben meved, ne foreyne causes necesseden the nevere to compoune werk of floterynge matere, but oonly the forme of sovereyn good iset within the without envye, that moevede the frely. (III. m9, 1-11)

The metre is a prayer of Boethius to God, which Philosophy asked him to perform at the end of the previous prose in order to be allowed to understand the nature of the sovereign good. At the beginning of the metre, Boethius affirms his belief in a rational principle behind creation. Moreover, this “perdurable resoun” is the attribute of a God who is “stedefast and stable”. The idea of stability occurs more than once in Boethius, as Hume also observes: in I. m2, “stable hevene”; in I. m5, “erthes stable”; in II. m8, “stable feyth”; and IV. p6. In this last occurrence in particular, God’s immobility explicitly accounts for all earthly things’ movement:

The engendrynge of alle thynges [...] and alle the progressiouns of muable nature, and al that moeveth in any manere, taketh hise causes, his ordre, and his formes, of the stableness of the devyne thought (IV. p6, 42-47).

Chaucer therefore makes his heroine address a God whose attributes are Boethian: in particular, Dorigen’s God is supposed to be the embodiment of the immutable principle of rational order that is behind creation. At the same time, however, Dorigen seems to question the truth of such a rational order because of the existence of the rocks.

In the second part of her complaint, Dorigen expresses the view that the rocks are a problem in creation because they represent a menace to mankind:

For by this werk, south north, ne west ne eest,
Ther nys yfostred man, ne bryd, ne beest;
It dooth no good, to my wit, but anyeth.
See ye nat, Lord, how mankynde it destroyeth? (873-76)

⁴¹ Kathryn Hume, “The Pagan Setting of the *Franklin’s Tale* and the Sources of Dorigen’s Cosmology”, *Studia Neophilologica*, 44 (1972), p.291.

Not only are the rocks useless to mankind, but they have also fatally injured people. For this reason, Dorigen doubts that their creation makes any sense at all. Dorigen emphatically affirms the totally gratuitous kind of evil that the rocks objectify, observing how the rocks do nothing – at any latitude and longitude of the world (“south north, ne west ne eest”), to any living beings (“Ther nys yfostred man, ne bryd, ne beest”) – but harm. Her question “See ye nat, Lord, how mankynde it destroyeth?” polemically attacks the conception of creation as it is described in the *Consolatio*. In her song to God (III. m9), Philosophy says that God did not need to involve any external causes in creation “but oonly the forme of sovereyn good iset within the”. The notion of Sovereign Good is therefore mentioned as the sole principle from which the world is derived. Moreover, opposing elements in the universe are held together in harmony through a bond of love that pervades the universe:

That the contrarious qualities of elementz holden among hemself allyaunce perdurable
[...] al this accordaunce [and] ordenaunce of thynges is bounde with love. (II. m8, 2-15)

Dorigen’s question “See ye not, Lord” is motivated by the fact that she attempts to generalise from her limited perception of the world, as Carolyn Collette has noticed.⁴²

After her second question to God, Dorigen mentions the fact that a huge number of people have died because of the rocks, or, as Dorigen says, rocks have slain many human bodies: “An hundred thousand bodyes of mankynde / Han rokkes slayn, al be they nat in mynde” (877-78). In her words emphasis is put on the huge number of people who have died in the sea and on the active responsibility of the rocks in their death.⁴³ Human suffering because of nature is the

⁴² “In her thought/prayer, she exhorts God, saying, ‘Se ye nat, Lord, how,’ using sight as a metaphor for comprehension, attempting, in effect, to project her world view, literally her sublunar perception of the nature of things, into the realm of eternal stability.” See Carolyn Collette, “Seeing and Believing in the *Franklin’s Tale*”, *Chaucer Review*, 26 (1992), p.398.

⁴³ Linda Charnes reads in Dorigen’s obsession with the rocks “an hysterical wish to make Arveragus suffer in kind”. Her point is that by making reference to a huge number of people slain by the rocks, Dorigen is “questioning an entire literary tradition that keeps sending knights and heroes off on quests through dangerous seas, leaving languishing wives and potential widows behind.” See Linda Charnes, “‘This Werk Unreasonable’: Narrative Frustration and Generic Redistribution in Chaucer’s *Franklin’s Tale*”, *Chaucer Review*, 23 (1989), pp.299-307. Though I do not deny that Dorigen may have in mind “the vast body of traditional heroic literature” that deals with knights sent overseas to fight for honour, I do not think that Dorigen wants to “strike back”, as Charnes says. The fact that at the end of her complaint she prays that God may protect her husband (“But thilke God that made wynd to blowe / As kepe my lord!” [888-89]) seems to deny any vindictive intention on her part. I relate the suffering evoked to her more general questioning of God’s benevolence toward mankind.

centre of her thoughts. The paradox in creation is due to the fact that, on the one hand, mankind seems to occupy a special place within the universe; on the other, it is exposed to what seems to be sheer cruelty.

The idea that, as Dorigen says, “mankynde is so fair part” of God’s work occurs also in the passage quoted above from *Boece* (book I, metre 5), in which man is said not to be “a foul partie” of the Creation.⁴⁴ Moreover, in book V, metre 5, man is elevated above the other living beings on earth because of his sole ability to stand in a straight upright position.⁴⁵ The idea that the world was created in resemblance of God’s image – as is supposed by Dorigen in the lines “Which mankynde is so fair part of thy werk / That thou it madest lyk to thyn owene merk.” – bears a resemblance to a passage of *Boece* that says that God made the universe similar to the perfect image of it he had in his mind:

Thow, that art althir-fayrest, berynge the faire world in thy thought, formedest this world to the lyknesse semblable of that faire world in thy thought. (III. m9, 11-14)⁴⁶

As Scheible explains, according to Boethius’s cosmogony God finds the image of the world within himself, because he and the image of the world are identical.⁴⁷ This accounts for the fact that everything in creation is good in itself, because it derives from God, who is the Supreme Good. Dorigen insists on the fact that she would expect a different attitude towards mankind from God, saying that God is supposed to have “a greet chiertee / Toward mankind”. The idea

⁴⁴ Hume, too, has noted the analogy between Dorigen and Boethius in their inability to “comprehend God’s apparent indifference to the welfare of ‘mankynde ... so fair part of thy werk’”. See Hume, “The Pagan Setting of the *Franklin’s Tale* and the Sources of Dorigen’s Cosmology”, p.292.

⁴⁵ “Only the lynage of man heveth hevest his heie heved, and stondith light with his upryght body, and byholdeth the erthes undir hym. And, but yif thou, erthly man, waxest yvel out of thi wit, this figure amonesteth the, that axest the hevene with thi ryghte visage and hast areised thi forheved, to beren up an hye thi corage, so that thi thought ne be nat ihevied ne put lowe undir fote, syn that thi body is so heyghe areysed.” (V. m5, 16-25). As Scheible explains, this is a reflection of the superiority of mankind over any other creature of the universe, and signifies man’s soul’s double condition of being fastened down to matter and the false goods, and of striving upward after God and the absolute good. See Scheible, pp.198-202.

⁴⁶ Hume interprets the relative clause “that thou it madest lyk to thyn owene merk” as referring to *mankynde* instead of *werk*, the idea expressed being that man was made in God’s image. Even in this case, there is no need, as she argues, to suppose a non-pagan source like Genesis as the source for this idea, because it is also to be found in Boethius (she mentions I. p4) and Ovid. See Hume, “The Pagan Setting of the *Franklin’s Tale* and the Sources of Dorigen’s Cosmology”, p.292.

⁴⁷ Scheible, p.104.

that God is benevolent toward mankind is also present in the *Consolatio*. In III. m9, the relationship between mankind and God is described as follows:

And whan thei [i.e. human beings] ben convertyd to the [i.e. God] by thi benygne lawe,
thow makest hem retourne ayen to the by ayen-ledynghe fyer. (III. m9, 36-38)

Man's special position within creation is also a reflection of the "benygne lawe" that exists between God and mankind. This law is expounded by Trevet as follows:

animas CONUERSAS REDUCI IGNE id est caritate reducente a uiciis ad uirtutes
FACIS REUERTI AD TE scilicet tamquam ad finem et summum bonum LEGE
BENIGNA id est lege per tuam benignitatem sanctita.
(the souls, TURNED TOWARDS YOU WITH RETURNING FIRE, that is with love
leading them away from the vices to the virtues; YOU CAUSE TO RETURN TO YOU,
that is, so to speak, to their end and Supreme Good; BY YOUR BENEVOLENT LAW,
that is by a law sanctioned by Your benevolence.)⁴⁸

God and mankind are in a mutual relationship: on the one hand, man can reach the Supreme Good through love (*caritas*), i.e. by eschewing vices and following virtues; on the other hand, God's benevolence (*benignitas*) makes human beings return to him, as they pursue their end. It seems that Dorigen is referring to this kind of benevolence as she talks of God's *chiertee*, his attitude of "dearness, tenderness, fondness, affection".⁴⁹

In the last part of her complaint, Dorigen leaves the problem of the rocks for clerks to solve, and wishes that God could make the rocks disappear:

I wool wel clerkes wol seyn as hem leste,
By argumentz, that al is for the beste,
Though I ne kan the causes nat yknowe.
But thilke God that made wynd to blowe
As kepe my lord! This my conclusion.
To clerkes lete I al disputison.
But wolde God that alle thise rokkes blake
Were sonken into helle for his sake!
Thise rokkes sleen myn herte for the feere. (885-93)

The polemical tone with which she addresses a series of questions directly to God is abandoned. Dorigen has to face the fact that she can do nothing against the rocks. There is a sense of defeat in not being able to understand how clerks could support the idea that the world has been made in the best possible way, and that therefore it is impossible to think of anything in the Creation as

⁴⁸ All references of Trevet's commentary and its translation into English are to "Extracts from Trevet's Commentary on Boethius: Texts and Translations", ed. by E. T. Silk, translations by A. B. Scott, in A. J. Minnis, *Chaucer's Boece and the Medieval Tradition of Boethius*, Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1993, pp.35-81.

⁴⁹ OED, s. v. *cherte*, n., first entry.

wrongly done. “Al is for the beste” contains, in a concentrated form, the consolatory message of the *Consolatio* that, even when appearances may lead us to think that something in the world is out of place, we are comforted by the belief that there must be a rational benevolent mind behind it, and that the confusion or folly we detect in the world is simply due to our limited ability to understand. As Philosophy says to Boethius,

Ne it nis no merveile, [...] thowh that men wenen that ther be somewhat foolissh and confus, whan the resoun of the ordre is *unknowe*. But although that thou *ne knowe nat the cause of so gret a disposicioun*, natheles for as moche as God, the gode governour, atempreth and governeth the world, ne doute the nat that alle thinges ne ben don aryght. (IV. p5, 40-48, my italics)

The reasons for the events of the world may be unknown to human understanding; however, man must not doubt that everything has been made with the best intentions.

Dorigen resolves to pray that God may guard her “lord”. It is the first time she mentions her husband in this complaint, and she does it using the same term she has used twice for God. This part of the complaint brings Dorigen’s focus back to her real worry, her husband, and marks a separation between reason and feelings. Her complaint started as a series of apostrophes to God, but in this last part God is referred to in the third person. This change in the way in which God is addressed accounts for Dorigen’s change in attitude towards the end. She mentions God’s control of the winds, an attribute of God which, as Hume observes, is also to be found in Boethius.⁵⁰ If the rocks cannot be removed, Dorigen seems to think, she can only hope that her husband may not encounter a tempest that could make the ship crash into the rocks. But this is still not enough to assuage her anguish.

In her *conclusion*, she expresses her indifference to a rational approach to God’s intentions with creation. Her reasoning has failed to cancel her fear, and there is nothing left for her to do but wish that the rocks “were sonken into helle for *his* sake” (my italics). Her

⁵⁰ Hume has argued that “[t]his sort of descriptive phrasal for God is common enough in Middle English, but there are passages concerning God’s creating and controlling the winds in both Boethius and Ovid”. For Boethius, she mentions I. m5, in which Boethius, in his direct address to God, says: “Thy myghte atempreth the variauntz sesouns of the yer, so that Zephirus, the debonere wynd, bryngeth ayen in the first somer sesoun the leeves that the wynd that hyghte Boreas hath reft away in autumpne” (20-25). See Hume, “The Pagan Setting of the *Franklin’s Tale* and the Sources of Dorigen’s Cosmology”, pp.292-93.

conclusion is therefore a request to God. A request to God, though different in kind, is also pronounced by Boethius in I. m5:

Thow governour, withdraughe and resreyne the ravysschyng flodes, and fastne and ferme these erthes stable with thilke boond by whiche thou governest the hevne that is so large. (I. m5, 54-58)

Boethius, who complains in the metre about the fact that Fortune allegedly punishes the innocents and rewards the wicked, begs God to stop “slydyng Fortune” (34) from her changeable governance, which is compared to fast-flowing water,⁵¹ and to apply the stable ruling with which he governs the celestial bodies to earthly things. Dorigen’s request does not concern Fortune: her concern is about the disappearance of the black rocks for her husband’s sake. However, both Boethius and Dorigen ask God to change the order of creation; both requests derive from personal concerns (Boethius’s unjust imprisonment and Dorigen’s fear for her husband); both prayers are felt as wrong from the Boethian point of view.

After showing the influence of Boethius on Dorigen’s speech in terms of vocabulary and motifs, I will consider if and to what extent the philosophical contents of her complaint may be adequate to the pagan nature of her character. The nature of the God she addresses has not been interpreted by the critics unanimously. Robert Burlin has argued that, in her address “Eterne God, that thurgh thy purveiaunce” (865), Dorigen “invokes an unmistakably Christian God rather than the pagan pantheon of the rest of the poem”; however, he does not explain why this God should be so undoubtedly Christian.⁵² Bloomfield has noticed how, in Dorigen’s apostrophe to God, “her language is full of Christian overtones and resonances”; not denying the pagan setting of the tale, he allows Chaucer this “violation” arguing that he cannot be expected “to have a sense of historical exactitude when dealing with pagan Celts”.⁵³ On the other hand, Hume has observed that, even if Dorigen’s lament about the rocks does “contain Christian commonplaces”,

⁵¹ The occurrence is quoted in OED, s. v. *ravishing*, adj. and adv., 2: “Esp. of fast-flowing water: that carries something along or away”.

⁵² Robert B. Burlin, *Chaucerian Fiction*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977, p.204.

⁵³ Bloomfield, “*The Franklin’s Tale: A Story of Unanswered Questions*”, p.190.

there is no need to read Dorigen's God as Christian.⁵⁴ Her point is that Chaucer used Boethius as a "favorite repository of pagan thought" not only in the *Franklin's Tale*, but also in other works set in pagan antiquity, such as *Troilus and Criseyde* and the *Knight's Tale*.⁵⁵ Derek Pearsall's view of the problem represents a compromise between the two opposing ideas. He says that Dorigen's apostrophe "Eterne God" is "entirely ambiguous", saying that "the characters behave in a high-minded, quasi-Christian way".⁵⁶ But what was Chaucer's idea of pagan antiquity and pagan God? What was his perception of cultural difference between the heathen and the Christians, the past and the present?

Bloomfield argues that, in the twelfth century, the perception of history changed, so that man gained "(1) a more accurate sense of chronology and (2) a sense of cultural diversity."⁵⁷ Chaucer's later literary production reflects this change and, in the case of *The Franklin's Tale*, whose setting he dates back to Roman times, Bloomfield argues that

Chaucer shows here in his accumulation of details an intense awareness of the pastness of the past and the difference between those days and his own.⁵⁸

In his study about Chaucer's approach to the past, Minnis has observed that at Chaucer's time theology and philosophy were two differentiated disciplines – the first one relying on "the authority of revelation" and the latter on "the use of reasoning" – and argues that the fact that pagan characters in his works are often supporting Boethian ideas is due to the fact that

the doctrine of *De Consolatione Philosophiae* pertained to philosophy in the strictest possible sense of the term, a specialist discipline which was grounded on natural reason and in which most of the experts were pagans.⁵⁹

The *Consolatio* provided Chaucer with a set of philosophical ideas that he considered not to be necessarily Christian, not because he held its author to be a pagan – which has been proved not

⁵⁴ Hume lists the "Christian commonplaces" as follows: "eternal God, purveyance, a fair creation in which man (made in God's image) is the fairest part, and the notion that all is for the best." See Hume, "The Pagan Setting of the *Franklin's Tale* and the Sources of Dorigen's Cosmology", p.290.

⁵⁵ Hume, "The Pagan Setting of the *Franklin's Tale* and the Sources of Dorigen's Cosmology", p.290.

⁵⁶ Derek Pearsall, *The Canterbury Tales*, London, New York: Routledge, 1985, p.147.

⁵⁷ Morton W. Bloomfield, "Chaucer's Sense of History", *JEGP*, 51 (1952), pp.301-05.

⁵⁸ Bloomfield, "Chaucer's Sense of History", pp.305-07.

⁵⁹ Minnis, *Chaucer and Pagan Antiquity*, pp.10-11.

to be the case –⁶⁰ but because the content of the book dealt with “natural reason”, something that Christians shared with the heathen. In the process of shaping pagan characters in *Troilus and Criseyde* and *The Knight’s Tale*, Minnis argues that Chaucer kept in mind the distinction between the “Christian world under grace” and the “pagan world under natural law”, and operated in the following way: Chaucer had a precise and informed idea of pagan antiquity, which he derived from the textual sources about the ancients that were available, and which he completed through adaptation of his own ideas and beliefs to a pagan world-view.⁶¹

Minnis has argued that “one may speak of the currency, in the age of Chaucer, of a more liberal attitude to the pagan past than had existed hitherto”.⁶² In the Middle Ages, paganism was all kinds of belief that were not reposed in Christ, and was generally associated with idol-worship. Two were the ways in which the idea of the existence of a plurality of deities was firstly conceived, according to medieval man. Some argued that gods were originally mortal men who, after their death, continued to be held in great esteem and praised till they eventually became worshipped as deities. Others associated the birth of gods with the praise of natural phenomena. In both cases, polytheism was believed to have spread among people also thanks to the intervention of Satan and devils, the forces of evil. From a philosophical point of view, pagans were generally thought to be fatalists, i.e., to think of themselves as relentlessly subject to what the gods decreed. However, late-medieval scholars dismissed the idea that all pagans were fatalists, and tended to find points of continuity with the ideas of ancient philosophers. Working on the premise that God revealed truth many times to certain figures in the Old Testament before the advent of Christ, these scholars held certain pagans in good esteem because they had been able to abandon polytheism and to believe in one God. Platonists, for example, who supported a monotheistic idea of God and affirmed his immutable nature, were admired as much as the

⁶⁰On this point, Hume says that Chaucer, as any medieval person, would reckon Boethius not only to be a Christian but also a saint, and observes that “in his Retraction, Chaucer registers his agreement by classing his translation of *De Consolatione* with his ‘legendes of seintes and omelies.’” See Hume, “The Pagan Setting of the *Franklin’s Tale* and the Sources of Dorigen’s Cosmology”, p.290.

⁶¹ Minnis, *Chaucer and Pagan Antiquity*, pp.21-22.

⁶² Minnis, *Chaucer and Pagan Antiquity*, p.59.

prophets and patriarchs of the Old Law. These ‘enlightened’ pagans were thought to have achieved their wisdom through their own rational ability but also with the help of occasional divine revelation. The most controversial discussion about pagans in the Middle Ages was related to their afterlife, notably whether good pagans were allowed to go to heaven even if they did not witness Christ’s advent. Some thought that they could be relieved of the physical pain of hell but they were eternally denied the vision of God, which was anyway a form of damnation. In the early fourteenth century, however, some theologians did not dismiss the hope that certain pagans could have been saved by God as unrealistic, arguing that human beings were able to gain the knowledge necessary to salvation merely in virtue of their own natural capacities. Whether Chaucer believed or not in the salvation of the pagans, is difficult to say but it is almost certain that he was well-read in such a debate, and he must have been aware that there have been many respectable figures among the pagans who had reached exceptionally good philosophical knowledge and had supported a monotheistic creed.⁶³

Winthrop Wetherbee, in his interpretation of the ending of *Troilus and Criseyde*, provides an interesting evaluation of Chaucer’s idea of pagan antiquity as a Christian writer through his use and reference to the first-century Latin author of the *Thebaid*, Statius.⁶⁴ In his reading of the *Thebaid*, Wetherbee observes how the narrator’s judgement on the events of the story oscillates between, on the one hand, “a frustrating awareness of the burden of fate and the moral indifference of the gods” and, on the other, passages in which he seems to put emphasis on the value of the life of men, who, though they eventually cannot but succumb, are somewhat rewarded in the afterlife for their virtue. One of the examples he provides is the character of Menoecus, whose ascension to the seat of Jove after his death is seen as the result of a suicide purposely committed to save Thebes – an act invested with great moral significance in the poem since it is presented as reflecting the design of the Goddess *Virtus*. Wetherbee observes that

⁶³ The information contained in the paragraph is drawn from Minnis, *Chaucer and Pagan Antiquity*, pp.31-60.

⁶⁴ Winthrop Wetherbee, *Chaucer and the Poets. An Essay on Troilus and Criseyde*, London: Cornell University Press, 1984, pp.111-44.

though human efforts prove useless in changing fate, the narratorial treatment of moments such as Menoeceus's suicide and his afterlife hints at a conflict with the traditional idea of religion, that he describes as being

largely the religion of cult and practice, devoted to the propitiation of the traditional gods and to the search for guidance through augury, necromancy, and the imputation of a symbolic value to good and bad fortune.⁶⁵

Therefore, Wetherbee argues, in the moments in which the narrator indulges in the account of afterlife rewards

Stadius suspends the power and authority of the traditional order, and by increasing emphasis on the divinity of *Pietas* and *Virtus* themselves, implicitly rejects it.⁶⁶

C. S. Lewis, too, takes into consideration the peculiar treatment of the pagan deities in Statius's *Thebaid*.⁶⁷ He inserts his analysis in his chapter on "Allegory", arguing that Statius's *Thebaid* provides a significant example of a change in the perception of the pagan gods in classical Roman society – a change in which gods seem to be gradually replaced by personifications. Lewis mentions the example of the process by which Menoeceus is persuaded into suicide by a supernatural being which has taken the form of a mortal but which, rather than a god of the classical pantheon, is the personification of *Virtus*. According to Lewis, this accounts for the fact that *Virtus*

is to him [i.e., Statius] a deity more serious and, in a sense, more real than all the Graeco-Roman pantheon. Indeed, if we do not understand this gravity in his personifications, if we do not see that his Olympians come nearest to *mere* machinery and his personifications nearest to real imaginative expression, we shall have missed the whole significance of his work.⁶⁸

Wetherbee sees in *Thebaid*'s particular attitude toward paganism the reason for Dante's presentation of the figure of Statius in *Purgatorio* as a converted pagan. According to Wetherbee, Dante must have read the story of Menoeceus in a Christian perspective, that is, as the process of purification that the soul has to get through in Purgatory to reach Heaven, and then

⁶⁵ Wetherbee, p.138.

⁶⁶ Wetherbee, p.138.

⁶⁷ C. S. Lewis, *The Allegory of Love. A Study in Medieval Tradition*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1936, pp.48-56.

⁶⁸ Lewis, *The Allegory of Love*, p.53.

transformed Statius into the figure that explains this process to Dante in *Purgatorio XXI*.⁶⁹ As Wetherbee explains, Dante transforms the pagan poet Statius into a Christian that is going through a process of purification in the Purgatory for his sin of prodigality. Wetherbee observes that Statius's repentance and his conversion from paganism to Christianity were fostered by his reading of Vergil's poetry:

[t]he catalyst of his experience of conversion was the language of Vergil, which, by a process compounded of partial misreading and half-conscious translation, came gradually to seem to him "consonant" with the doctrines being proclaimed by Christian preachers (*Purg.* 22. 37-42, 67-81).⁷⁰

Statius compares the ability of Vergil's poetry to illuminate him to the image of the torch-bearer: in his words, Vergil was to him like somebody who, in the night, carries a lantern behind him so that he lightens the path for those who are following him, while he himself must lead the way in the darkness. By inventing Statius's process of conversion through Vergil, Wetherbee observes, Dante wanted to illustrate the role that intuition plays in the experience of literature. Wetherbee, in fact, argues that

[a]ny Christian interpretation of Statius must be a matter of intuition, for no single detail of his poetry will yield a clear and unmistakable Christian meaning. The kind of reading needed to bring the *Thebaid* into line with Dante's spiritual biography of its poet is close to the kind of reading that Dante credits Statius with having applied to the poetry of Vergil (*Purg.* 22. 64-73). It depends on our giving a privileged significance to elements in the poetic text that may well have had an altogether different value for the poet himself.⁷¹

Wetherbee gives a poetic meaning to the relationship of Christianity with pagan antiquity as is presented in Dante's Statius. Works by pagan authors do not solely mean what they were intended to mean at the moment of their composition; they are also subject to the interpretation of readers living in a different age and having a different frame of mind. Statius's process of conversion, Wetherbee argues, presupposes the fact that Vergil's words mean more than he intended them to signify. The same process is to be found in Dante, who interprets Statius's ambiguous attitude toward paganism as the form of a latent Christianity, as Wetherbee points

⁶⁹ Wetherbee, p.228.

⁷⁰ Wetherbee, p.228.

⁷¹ Wetherbee, p.229.

out.⁷² In the concluding stanzas of *Troilus* the narrator shows tentativeness in his providing an adequate ending to the poem. Wetherbee explains this difficulty with the fact that Chaucer had in mind Dante's Statius, and wanted to convey an analogous sense of poetic experience in which by means of intuition a story set in pagan antiquity could be read as consonant with a Christian message. This interpretation accounts for the fact that the narrator, in the last stanzas of the poem, overtly betrays his distance from the religious background of his pagan story through an explicit reference to Christ and his death on the cross for the souls of human beings.⁷³ According to Wetherbee, by this point the narrator has acquired a new perspective on his poem, of which he was unaware when he previously sent it off with the formula "Go, litel bok" at line 1786.

Wetherbee explains this process through the idea that

[t]he "truth" of poetry consists in its fidelity to its own tradition and its capacity to reveal new meaning in the light of evolving historical and spiritual perspectives on that tradition.⁷⁴

Wetherbee's point sheds light on Chaucer's sense of continuity between the Christian present and the pagan past, that is, the idea that even the heathen may have had some kind of access to truth about God. This idea seems to be reflected also in the treatment of the pagan characters in *The Franklin's Tale*. Dorigen's faith, as is presented in her complaint about the rocks, relies on the belief in one eternal, stable and immutable God who governs the world through Providence, and her request to God that he may protect her husband from shipwreck shows that she believes in the possibility of divine intervention in human affairs. In the

⁷² Also Lewis has argued that Statius's conversion in the *Commedia* had been purposely made up by Dante. "The stranger who joined Virgil and Dante on the fifth *cornice* of Purgatory presently revealed himself to be Statius. He told them that Virgil had been his master in poetry, that his besetting sin had been prodigality, that his thoughts had been first turned to Christianity by Eclogue IV (5-7) and that he had been baptized before he wrote the *Thebaid*. All this may have been regarded by Dante as a *bella menzogna*." Lewis notes that since Statius was a well-known author at Dante's time Dante may have thought about the effect that his reshaping of the image of Statius in his *Commedia* could have on contemporary readers and their own image of the Latin poet. According to Lewis, the reason for Dante's portrait of Statius as a pagan who secretly converted to Christianity may lie in the fact that Dante "found in the poem [i.e., the *Thebaid*] elements which convinced him that Statius was not far from the Christian faith, or else that he thought it could be so interpreted with plausibility enough for his purpose." See C. S. Lewis, "Dante's Statius", *Medium Ævum*, 25 (1956), p.133.

⁷³ "And loveth hym the which that right for love / Upon a crois, oure soules for to beye, / First starf, and roos, and sit in hevене above" (V. 1842-44). The narrator's distance from the old customs and pagan belief presented in the poem is expressed later on: "Lo here, of payens corsed olde rites! / Lo here, what alle hire goddes may availle! [...] Lo here, the fyn and guerdon for travaille / Of Jove, Appollo, of Mars, of wich rascaille!" (V. 1849-53).

⁷⁴ Wetherbee, p.233.

constellation of Chaucer's pagan characters, Troilus seems to have a similar idea of God at a specific moment of his story. Troilus's faith is variable throughout the poem, and this "vacillation between different forms of paganism", as Minnis describes it, sees him starting as a polytheistic fatalist, who subsequently embraces monotheism, and eventually returns to his previous form of paganism.⁷⁵ The monotheistic moment, the highest point of his 'parabolic' growth in terms of wisdom, finds its most evident expression in the middle of his love story, and precisely in the so-called Troilus's song. His poem to Love – a translation of *De Consolatione*, II. m8, as has been argued by Stephen A. Barney⁷⁶ – is a hymn to God's benevolent law through which he keeps harmony among the discordant elements of the world. Clearly, Troilus's song is opposed to Dorigen's complaint in tone and scope. Troilus is, in fact, at the climax of his happiness; he does not complain to God; he praises him for his governance of the world. However, the song ends with a request to God:

So wolde God, that auctor is of kynde,
 That with his bond Love of his vertu liste
 To cerclen hertes alle and faste bynde,
 That from his bond no wight the wey out wiste;
 And hertes colde, hem wolde I that he twiste
 To make hem love, and that hem liste ay rewe
 On hertes sore, and kepe hem that ben trewe! (III, 1765-71)

As Minnis has observed, the request implied in Troilus's version is the result of Chaucer's adaptation to his character of the last lines of Boethius's version of the metre – the last lines being originally to be interpreted not as a request but as an impersonal reference to God and his unifying power in the universe.⁷⁷ Therefore, in *Troilus and Criseyde* as well as in the *Franklin's Tale*, Chaucer makes his pagan protagonists ask God for his intervention in human affairs. Both requests present similarities also from the point of view of the form in which they are expressed. Both are introduced by a conjunction – which changes on the basis of the different purpose of the

⁷⁵ Minnis, *Chaucer and Pagan Antiquity*, p.94.

⁷⁶ I refer to his note on the text of *Troilus and Criseyde* in Stephen A. Barney, ed., *Chaucer. Troilus and Criseyde with facing-page Il Filostrato*, London and New York: Norton, 2006., p.215.

⁷⁷ Minnis, *Chaucer and Pagan Antiquity*, p.100. I report here Chaucer's translation of the last lines of the metre in *Boece*: "This love halt togidres peples joyned with an holy boond, and knytteth sacrement of mariages of chaste loves; and love enditeth lawes to trewe felawes. O weleful were mankynde, yif thilke love that governeth hevene governede yowr corages." (II. m8, 21-27).

two speeches – followed by “wolde God” and the respective requests introduced by “that”.⁷⁸

However enlightening Troilus’s song may be, Duke Theseus’s speech at the end of *The Knight’s Tale* offers perhaps the most complete account of monotheism within a Chaucerian story set in pagan times.⁷⁹

The First Moevere of the cause above,
Whan he first made the faire cheyne of love,
Greet was th’effect, and heigh was his entente.
Wel wiste he why, and what thereof he ments,
For with that faire cheyne of love he bond
The fyr, the eyr, the water, and the lond
In certeyn boundes, that they may nat flee. [...]
Thanne may men by this ordre wel discerne
That thilke Moevere stable is and eterne. (2987-3004)

The passage contains the idea of God as the first cause of the benevolent order which holds together the elements of the universe for a precise purpose, as well as the idea of stability and eternity as qualities of God. As Minnis has explained, Chaucer reshaped his source text, Boccaccio’s *Teseida*, in order to make this speech “the climax of *The Knight’s Tale*”, and to make his character refer clearly to one almighty God. In this case, the description of God is heavily indebted to Boethius, notably the identification of God “with the Aristotelian first mover and primary cause”, as Minnis observes.⁸⁰ It is interesting to notice that both Troilus and Theseus make reference to divine love through the image of, respectively, the bond and the chain of love – an image that is also to be found in Boethius – whereas Dorigen simply refers to God’s “chiertee”, a term which is not specifically Boethian.⁸¹ In effect, this difference in perception of

⁷⁸ Troilus inserts a non-defining relative clause referring to God as the maker of nature in the construction, which Dorigen does not need to add, as she has already a similar relative clause in the previous lines (“thilke God that made wynd to blowe”, 888).

⁷⁹ Minnis describes Theseus as “the most perfect of all Chaucer’s good pagans” also from a metaphysical point of view, because of his “fine monotheistic vision of the first and unmoved mover who made the fair chain of love which forms the bond of the universe.” See Minnis, *Chaucer and Pagan Antiquity*, p.121.

⁸⁰ Minnis, *Chaucer and Pagan Antiquity*, p.126.

⁸¹ *Chiertee* comes from the Old French *chierite* (‘dearness’), which derives from the Latin *cāritāt-em* (‘dearness’), which derives from the Latin *cārus* (‘dear’). The term occurred both with the general meaning of “dearness (price), fondness, affection”, and with the specific sense of love belonging to Christian theology. This latter meaning was, in a second moment, taken by the Old French term *cariteō* or *charité*, which was adopted in the Middle English forms of *carited* and *charite* (and all their relative variant forms), from which the Modern English *charity* derives. See MED s.v. *chierite*, n., and OED s.v. *charity*, n. In *Boece*, *chiertee* does not occur, whereas the term *charite* is used once in the following passage: “And thus this charite and this love, that everything hath to hymself” (III. p11, 175-76). For a Chaucer concordance, see John S. P. Tatlock, Arthur G. Kennedy, *A Concordance to the Complete Works of Geoffrey Chaucer and to the Romaunt of the Rose*, Washington, D. C.: Carnegie Institute, 1927. In the quotation

God's love between Troilus and Theseus, on the one hand, and Dorigen, on the other, is probably due to her limited perception of God's intention with creation. If she could perceive the divine bond of love that informs the universe, she would not ask God about the existence of the rocks. Dorigen is therefore unable to see through God's providential reasons for the rocks; however, she maintains her faith in God's tenderness towards mankind so that she can at least hope that God may lend an ear. In effect, though she is a less enlightened pagan than Theseus or Troilus (in his monotheistic moment), she proves not to be a mere fatalist. Unlike Dorigen, Palamon in his speech against the Gods – which bears certain resemblances to Dorigen's questions about the evil in the world, as I said before – complains about the Gods, who decide the fates of individuals on the basis of their personal quarrels, and thinks that human beings come to the world to suffer by the same standards as animals.

O crueel goddess that governe
 This world with byndyng of youre word eterne,
 And written in the table of atthamaunt
 Youre parlement and youre eterne graunt,
 What is mankynde moore unto you holde
 Than is the sheep that rouketh in the folde?
 For slayn is man right as another beest,
 And dwelleth eek in prison and arrest,
 And hath siknesse and greet adversitee,
 And ofte tymes giltelees, pardee.
 (1303-12)

In Burlin's view of Chaucer's interest for paganism as shown in *Troilus and Criseyde* and *The Knight's Tale*, Chaucer intended to investigate the potentials and limitations of the human mind in its attempt to gain metaphysical knowledge without resort to Christian belief.⁸² Chaucer's use of the *Consolatio* in these narratives is due to the fact that

[i]n the dialogue of the *Consolatio Philosophiae* Chaucer found an analogue of epistemological progression, from which moments of partial and tentative insight could be spliced with dramatic propriety into his reshaped Boccaccian narratives of a pre-Christian condition.⁸³

from *Boece*, *charite* means the love that all living things have for themselves, so that they are naturally inclined to live and to provide continuance to their own species through the succession of generations. Dorigen's *chiertee* means, in effect, something different: she simply refers to the benevolence toward mankind that she attributes to God as the maker of the world and the maintainer of the order in the universe.

⁸² Burlin, pp.98-100.

⁸³ Burlin, p.100.

This explanation may be applied also to the case of Dorigen and *The Franklin's Tale*. Chaucer exploits pagan characters as a literary device, a way of representing mankind in its attempt to grasp the significance of the world with the sole use of their mind. In this process of investigation, pagans are not supposed to have full access to truth because they did not witness Christ's advent. However, they do have the ability to understand the nature of God and his relationship to man and the world he created, and Chaucer's interest in his pagan narratives seems to be the exploration of their attempts at reaching for truth as closely as they can. The different forms of pagan faith – both among pagans living at the same time and in the same place, and within the same character at different moments in the story – are symptomatic of the fact that some get closer than others.

One might compare Dorigen's idea of God as expressed in her complaint with that of Aurelius as presented in his prayer to Apollo (1031-79), in which he explicitly addresses more than a pagan deity, and refers to a place of pagan cult (Phoebus's temple at Delphi). However different, Aurelius's address to Phoebus as the god of the sun, too, may have been influenced by *Boece*, I. m5, as Jamie C. Fumo has argued.⁸⁴ At the beginning of the metre, Boethius addresses God as the governor in control of the celestial bodies, who regulates the succession of day and night through the motion of the sphere of the fixed stars:

O thow makere of the wheel that bereth the sterres, whiche that art festnyd to thi perdurable chayer, and turnest the hevене with a ravysschyngē sweighe, and constreynest the sterres to suffren thi lawe; so that the moone somtyme, schynyngē with hir fulle hornes metyngē with alle the beemes of the sonne hir brother, hideth the sterres that ben lasse; and somtyme, whan the moone pale with hir derke hornes aprochth the sonne, leeseth hir lyghtes (I. m5, 1-11).

According to Fumo, Aurelius's prayer resembles the Boethian passage because he describes Phoebus as the god who, in his identification with the sun, is in control of the growth of plants and has power over the moon, his sister. Fumo argues that, though different in names, both Dorigen's and Aurelius's gods embody the Boethian First Mover, excusing Aurelius's

⁸⁴ Jamie C. Fumo, "Aurelius' Prayer, *Franklin's Tale* 1031-79: Sources and Analogues", *Neophilologus*, 88 (2004), pp.623-65.

identification with the sun with the fact that, in the Middle Ages, pagans were frequently believed not to be good at distinguishing between creatures and Creator. However, Aurelius's paganism is actually different from Dorigen's in that he fails to recognize God as the sole maker and maintainer of the universe. Even though both forms of belief are different, they are coherently pagan. The two different conceptions of the divine presented in the *Tale* account for the fact that, as Lewis has argued,

[m]onothelism should not be regarded as the rival of polytheism, but rather as its maturity. Where you find polytheism, combined with any speculative power and any leisure for speculation, monothelism will sooner or later arise as a natural development. [...] The gods are to be aspects, manifestations, temporary or partial embodiments of the single power. They are, in fact, personifications of the abstracted attributes of the One.⁸⁵

The idea of paganism that is presented in *The Franklin's Tale* perfectly conforms to Lewis's view of paganism. On the one hand, Dorigen is a better pagan because her speculative efforts, though overtly imperfect, start from the belief in the existence of one God. On the other hand, Aurelius speaks for a form of polytheistic paganism in which gods are mentioned not so much for their mythological origins and the qualities that are traditionally associated with them – as, for example, happens in *The Knight's Tale*, in which the deities Venus, Mars and Diana are prayed for their associations with, respectively, love, physical strength and chastity by the protagonists of the tale. Aurelius's paganism is very much connected with personifications of natural elements such as the sun, the moon, the sea and the interior of the Earth in the figures of Phoebus, Lucina, Neptune and Pluto, and the fact that he mentions these natural elements is due to the relations of their respective planets (in the case of Phoebus and Lucina, the sun and the moon) to the phenomenon of the tides (embodied by the figure of Neptune, the sea) and to the underworld (the place in which Pluto dwells, and into which the rocks are supposed to sink⁸⁶), and therefore to a miraculous disappearance of the rocks.

⁸⁵ Lewis, *The Allegory of Love*, p.57.

⁸⁶ In a note on the passage in which Aurelius asks Phoebus to “Prey hire [i.e. Lucina] to sinken every rok adoun / Into hir owene dirke regioun / Under the ground, ther Pluto dwelleth inne” (1073-75), the editors V. A. Kolve and Glending Olson explain that “Lucina is here also identified with Proserpina, Pluto's queen in the underworld.” See V. A. Kolve, Glending Olson, eds., *Chaucer. The Canterbury Tales. Fifteen Tales and the General Prologue*, second ed., New York and London: Norton, 2005, p.221.

1.III Dorigen's *derke fantasye* and the compatibility of love and marriage in *The Franklin's Tale*

In the lines that precede Dorigen's complaint to God, the narrator provides the reader with a description of Dorigen's distress at her husband's two-year absence.

For his absence wepeth she and siketh,
As doon this noble wyves whan hem liketh.
She moorneth, waketh, wayleth, fasteth, pleyneth;
Desir of his presence hire so distreyneth
That al this wyde world she sette at noght. (817-21)

In this description, particular emphasis is put on the physical signs of Dorigen's emotional excess, such as tears, sighs, complaints and fast. In these lines, Pearsall has argued, "[t]here is no mistaking the heaping-up of synonyms, and the inevitable effect created that she is overdoing things."⁸⁷ In effect, the fact that the whole world means nothing to her if she cannot have her husband at her side sounds very much like a wilful exaggeration. The nature of her despair is similar to that of Boethius in that both are unable to see things properly: they just see what they lack, and not what they still have. At the beginning of the second book, after Boethius gives vent to his suffering with tears and complaints, Lady Philosophy says:

If I [...] have undirstonden and knowen outerly the causes and the habyt of thy maladye,
thow languysselst and art desfeted for desir and talent of thi rather fortune. (II. p1, 7-11)

Suffering for the desire to have back one's former fortune is the effect of a disease that has to be cured. At the same time, the narrator does not want the reader to consider Dorigen's unfortunate situation unique or unusual – the Franklin relates Dorigen's excess to a common way of reacting among "thise noble wives" –, and by adding "whan hem liketh" he is treating her weeping and sighing with irony. David Lawton quotes the passage to provide an example of what he calls "unstable irony": as opposed to "stable irony", in which the "effect is to make one believe the opposite", in the case of the Franklin and his comment on Dorigen's grief "the statement, while undercutting, does not reverse itself".⁸⁸ The comment does insert an element of instability in the

⁸⁷ Pearsall, p.149.

⁸⁸ David Lawton, *Chaucer's Narrators*, Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1985, p.4.

tone of the tale, which is generally serious, but it does not make appear Dorigen's grief insincere. This is possible because we are presented with an exceptionally happy marriage. By the same token, when the Franklin rhetorically asked "Who koude telle, but he hadde wedded be, / The joye, the ese, and the prosperitee / That is bitwexe an housbonde and his wyf?" (803-05), we were not inclined to read the question ironically. In the tale, Dorigen and Arveragus's relationship as a married couple is to be taken seriously. This would not be possible, for example, in the case of May and her husband January in *The Merchant's Tale*. If May were said to be weeping and sighing because of her husband's absence, we would be supposed to mean the opposite.

The Franklin's irony has to do with the reaction that the narrator wants the reader to have: though the tale does contain moments of intense anxiety, it does not end tragically, and the Franklin's comments aim at keeping a serene mood in the tale. This becomes all the clearer right before the denouement of the tale, after Arveragus sends Dorigen to Aurelius to keep her promise, when the Franklin interrupts the narration and, in an address to his listeners, anticipates the happy ending of the story: "Herkneth the tale er ye upon hire crie. / She may have better fortune than yow semeth" (1496-97). Lawton, pointing out that the narratorial voice in the *Tale* has nothing to do with a dramatic or psychological reading of the Franklin but with the tone and theme with which the story is set, argues that

the narration is a treasure chamber of *epanorthosis*, the more so since authorial foreknowledge and an audience's pseudo-generic expectations (of a lay) conjoin to promise a happy ending.⁸⁹

The narrator knows that Dorigen is to forget her distress as soon as her husband has come back safe and sound, and this accounts for the sense of amusement in those lines. Jill Mann has argued that the "detachment" with which Dorigen's grief is described "is not due to lack of sympathy or to criticism, but to a difference of position in time", and has explained how the narrator – and, consequently, the reader – are put at the advantage point of seeing Dorigen's distress as a

⁸⁹ Lawton, p.98. "Epanorthosis" is explained by Lawton as "constant and drastic changes of tone and therefore mood" (p.61).

temporary moment of suffering which is going to pass in due course – all that she needs to do is being patient, and everything will turn out fine.⁹⁰ Mann relates the shift in tone of the passage – which may raise difficulties in interpretation because we do not immediately understand whether the narrator is criticising his character or not – to a narratorial device, typical of Chaucer, in which different points in time, requiring different emotional responses, are put together because of the condensed way in which events are reported in short narratives, to provide the effect “of provoking reflection on the process of change and of vitalizing our sense of the moral and emotional complications created by change”.⁹¹

On the other hand, Robert Burlin, in his reading of the passage, is less sympathetic to Dorigen, and argues that through his comment the Franklin criticizes Dorigen’s exhibited suffering as “the useless prerogative of a leisure class”.⁹² However, the comment could be read as a reference to the condition of noble women that were temporarily left by their husbands because of their military enterprises, giving therefore a historical motivation to Dorigen’s particularly acute feeling of loneliness. Eileen Power, in her investigation into the condition of the medieval lady in feudal society, has explained that

social and physical conditions of life, constant wars and slow communications, inevitably threw a great deal of responsibility on ladies as representatives of absent husbands. While the lord was away at court or at war, who looked after his manor and handed it back again, with all walls in repair, farming in order and lawsuits fought when he returned? And when the lord got himself taken prisoner, who collected the ransom, squeezing every penny from the estate, bothering archbishops for indulgences, selling the family plate? Or when the lord perchance got killed, who acted as executor of his will and brought up his children? the answer to these questions, in nine cases out of ten, is – his wife.⁹³

It has to be observed that in *The Franklin’s Tale* Dorigen’s distress is never explicitly associated to the social responsibilities that Dorigen might have had as representative of her absent husband, and therefore it would be misleading not to consider her reaction as excessive, at least

⁹⁰ Jill Mann, “Chaucerian Themes and Style in the *Franklin’s Tale*”, in Boris Ford, ed., *The New Pelican Guide to English Literature*, vol. 1, Medieval Literature. Part One: Chaucer and the Alliterative Tradition, London: Penguin Books, 1982, p.141. The element of “impatience or amusement in dealing with extravagant emotion” in the voice of the Franklin has been noticed also by Derek Pearsall. See Pearsall, p.149.

⁹¹ Mann, p.142.

⁹² Burlin, p.200.

⁹³ Eileen Power, *Medieval Women*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975, p.34.

as far as the way in which it is presented is concerned. However, on the basis of the reference to “thise noble wyves”, we can suppose that in feudal society Dorigen’s reaction might have been perceived as plausible and realistic. In effect, the story does not mention any retinue, and Dorigen is portrayed as a lonely lady. Of course, she has friends who can offer her diversions, but they do not manage to take Dorigen’s worries away from her for a long time. If we relate this to the condition of the lady as depicted by Power, her description could be read as a historical justification for the inconsolable nature of Dorigen’s distress. The communication with her husband is limited to the letters that he sends to inform her that he is fine, and that he will come home soon; but his absence lasts two years, and Dorigen’s wait for her husband’s ship at the coast means that she has no precise idea of when he is really coming home, and that probably it took much longer than expected for him to be back. If we see it from the point of view of a woman who has to administrate the household on behalf of her husband, the emotional excess that is part of Dorigen’s character is easier to figure out.

Dorigen’s “hevinesse” (828) becomes the focus of the story until Arveragus’s safe coming back. On the one hand, Dorigen is consumed by the desire to have her husband back; on the other, her friends worry about her, and try to console her. The Franklin adds a few lines in which he compares the attempted consolation of Dorigen’s friends to the process of engraving of a stone:

By proces, as ye knowen everichoon,
Men may so longe graven in a stoon
Til som figure therinne emprented be.
So longe han they confortid hire til she
Receyved hath, by hope and by resoun,
The empretyng of hire consolacioun,
Thurgh which hir grete sorwe gan aswage;
She may nat alwey duren in swich rage. (829-36)

In the process described a new form is imposed on an object that is hard and resistant to change. Francine McGregor has read the passage as a description of how society tries to affect the perception of reality of the individual, and she has pointed out that Dorigen is compared to a

stone, “the most inanimate of objects”.⁹⁴ Though I see Dorigen’s friends just as her friends, not as a symbol of society, I do think that the image conveys the sense of how difficult it is for others to make Dorigen change her perception of reality. Moreover, it seems that by comparing the consolation of her friends to the process in which the engraver models a stone by gradually removing matter from the surface of the object, Chaucer puts emphasis on the fact that Dorigen’s friends try to resolve from the outside a problem that is actually within herself. At the same time, the choice of an inanimate object like the stone conveys the idea of Dorigen’s inability to get through her situation by herself.

The motif of consolation is obviously a major theme in Boethius’s *De Consolatione Philosophiae*. At the beginning of the work Boethius bewails in tears the changing of his destiny. He has been imprisoned and sees death approaching, and is tormented by the memory of his past happiness. In the first metre vocabulary about mourning is recurrent. In Chaucer’s translation, Boethius starts with the typical exclamation for complaint *Allas!*, which he repeats twice in the middle of the metre; he explicitly says that he is crying (“I wepynge” [line 1]); he anticipates the “sorwful matere” (2) of his verses and the “sorwful wyerdes” (12), the unpleasant events that have led to his present situation; he mentions his allegedly imminent death as the “sorwful houre” (24-25).⁹⁵ As in Dorigen’s case, Boethius bursts into tears and complains. (The circumstances, of course, are completely different, but the *Consolatio* shows that the source of

⁹⁴ Francine McGregor, “What of Dorigen? Agency and Ambivalence in the *Franklin’s Tale*”, *Chaucer Review*, 31 (1997), p.373.

⁹⁵ The Latin original starts with a reference to the verses that Boethius used to write in the past (first line), which he opposes to those he has to write now (second line): “Carmina qui quondam studio florente peregi, / Flebilis heu maestos cogor inire modos.” (“I that with youthful heat did verses write, / Must now my woes in doleful tunes indite.”) Chaucer inverts the sequence, starting with the interjection that in the Latin text is in the second line (*heu*) and the subject *I*, which is omitted in Latin, and translates first the content of the second line about the sad poetry he is forced to compose now and then the content of the first line about the different kind of poems he used to write when he was happy: “Allas! I wepynge, am constreyned to bygynnen vers of sorwful matere, that whilom in florysschyng studie made delitable ditees.” The repeated interjection *allas* is the translation of the Latin interjection *eheu*, occurring at line 15. As Minnis argues, Chaucer’s “sorwful wyerdes of me, olde man” – which Chaucer mistranslated because “in the Latin the adjective *maesti* (translated as *sorwful*) actually goes with *senis*” – resembles Trevet’s commentary (“id est mesta fata mei senis”), in which the adjective *mesta* is referred not to *senis* but to *fata* (translated as *wyerdes*). *Sorwful houre* is the literal translation of the Latin *tristis hora* (line 18). Chaucer’s gloss in the translation – “the sorwful houre (*that is to seyn, the deth*)” – is, as Minnis argues, an addition drawn from Trevet’s commentary, in which Trevet says that death is called “tristis hora” because the memory of death is motive of sorrow. See Minnis, *Chaucer’s Boece and the Medieval Tradition of Boethius*, p.95.

human unhappiness is always one and the same: the disappointment derived from the realisation that human happiness based on the enjoyment of earthly goods is insubstantial.) In the middle of his complaint, Boethius is visited by a lady, the personification of philosophy, whom he hardly recognizes at first, and the process of consolation takes the form of a dialogue between him and Lady Philosophy.

Jefferson has argued that the image of the stone in the *Tale* is derived from the Boethian discussion on the process of cognition, in which impressions produced by the senses are like images that are impressed or reflected on a surface:⁹⁶

as who seith that thilke Stoycienis wenden that the sowle had ben nakid of itself, as a mirour or a clene parchemyn, so that alle figures most first comen fro thinges fro withoute into soules, and ben emprentid into soules (V. m4, 10-13).

The discussion starts by reporting the theory of the ancient philosophers of the “porche”, which Chaucer glosses as the Stoics.⁹⁷ According to this theory, our knowledge of the external world is derived from an image of the object that is imprinted on our soul by sensorial perception. Chaucer’s gloss exemplifies this process by comparing the human mind to a mirror or a sheet of parchment: the external object operates on the human mind in the same way as an image is reflected on a mirror or a figure is drawn on a sheet of parchment. However, Boethius argues that this theory cannot suffice to describe how the human mind really works, and that there must be also an active involvement on the part of the mind. The mind, for example, must be able to sort out impressions in order to discern which one is true and which is not. Boethius deems this “strength” of the mind to be the real source of human knowledge, though he does not dismiss the Stoic theory as totally inadequate. Indeed, the senses do contribute to the process of knowledge insofar as they function as stimuli for cognition, directing the active force of the mind towards a specific object.

⁹⁶ Jefferson, p.148.

⁹⁷ Minnis argues that Chaucer relied on Trevet’s commentary for his gloss, and quotes a passage from Trevet in which the commentator associates the Latin term *porticus* in Boethius to the Greek *stoa*, interpreting Boethius’s term as referring to the philosophers who met in the famous porch in Athens for their philosophical discussions. See Minnis, *Chaucer’s Boece and the Medieval Tradition of Boethius*, p.161.

The imagery of the stone, which – as we have seen – exemplifies a cognitive theory that presupposes the activity of an object of knowledge over the passive mind of the subject, may have been applied to Dorigen’s consolation to convey the impression that she has in effect no active involvement in it. On the contrary, Boethius’s process of consolation takes the form of a dialogue, in which the person in need of consolation is required to answer questions and to draw conclusions from premises that have been previously explained. Like a stone that is engraved, Dorigen’s consolation scratches merely the superficial part of her conscience: the process does not ‘shape’ her from within. Her malady is only apparently healed. In fact, when her friends manage to convince her to take a walk outside, the sight of the ships in the sea brings her back to her previous condition of desperate desire.

Hire freendes sawe hir sorwe gan to slake
And preyde hire on knees, for Goddes sake,
To come and romen hire in compaignye,
Awey to dryve hire derke fantasye.
And finally she graunted that requeste,
For wel she saugh that it was for the beste.
Now stood hire castel faste by the see,
And often with hire freendes walketh shee
Hire to disporte upon the bank an heigh,
Where as she many a ship and barge seigh
Seillynge hir cours, where as hem liste go.
But thanne was that a parcel of hire wo,
For to himself ful ofte, “Allas!” seith she,
“Is ther no ship, of so manye as I se,
Wol bryngen hom my lord? Thanne were myn herte
Al warissshed of his bittre peynes smerte. (841-56)

In these lines Chaucer manages to give a realistic picture of the psychology behind Dorigen’s character and the nature of her grief. Her friends’ best intentions cannot cope with the depths of her mind. Even innocuous objects – ships that are sailing along the coast – are a pretext for Dorigen to bring her mind back to her husband, and they become dangerous to her precarious emotional balance in that they make her husband’s absence even more painful. In the passage the allusion to Dorigen’s mind is also made explicit through the use of the word *fantasye*.

The word *fantasye* was a term in medieval cerebral physiology, as critics have argued.⁹⁸

According to V. A. Kolve, in the Middle Ages the human brain was thought to be made up of three cells, which were identified as *imaginativa*, *logica* and *memorativa*. Kolve explains that the first one, often called *phantasia*, operated on the data collected by the senses, detecting their forms and producing images of them, both real and invented.⁹⁹ This creative power, however, could also be misleading:

phantasia is also a name for the *deceptive* power of the mind: our power to imagine, and sometimes to trick ourselves into believing, that something we particularly desire or fear is real.¹⁰⁰

Carolyn Collette explains this process as follows: once we have produced an image of the object perceived by our senses – a *phantasm* – we judge it in order to detect whether the object may be dangerous to us. However, she argues, our judgement could be tricky.¹⁰¹ Burnley observes that when impressions are deeply engraved in one's heart, the perception of the external world as a

⁹⁸ J. D. Burnley, *Chaucer's Language and the Philosophers' Tradition*, Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1979, pp.99-115; V. A. Kolve, *Chaucer and the Imagery of Narrative: The First Five Canterbury Tales*, London: Arnold, 1984, pp.20-24; Carolyn Collette, "Seeing and Believing in the *Franklin's Tale*", *Chaucer Review*, 26 (1992), pp.401-06.

⁹⁹ Kolve says that "[t]his three-cell tradition goes back at least as far as Galen, in the second century A.D., and it has a number of variants." He describes other versions of this cerebral anatomy, in which different names and different functions are attributed to the three cells. The three names cited above correspond to Bartholomaeus Anglicus's nomenclature. See Kolve, *Chaucer and the Imagery of Narrative*, pp.22-24. Burnley reports that in Bartholomaeus Anglicus's encyclopaedia the cell of imagination "is actually considered to be warm and soft [...] so as to receive more readily the impressions of the senses." See Burnley, p.104. Both critics make reference to *De proprietatibus rerum* ("On the properties of things"). The text is an encyclopaedia that enjoyed great popularity among scholars in the Middle Ages. It was compiled, probably toward the half of the thirteenth century, by Bartholomaeus Anglicus (b. before 1203, d. 1272), a Franciscan friar of unknown parental origins. He studied at Paris, after having probably studied in Oxford. He was active as a teacher at the school of Magdeburg, in Saxonia, and he was also an important administrator of the Franciscan order in provinces of central Europe. However, his fame is mostly to be associated with his encyclopaedia, which spread rapidly throughout Europe, being adopted at schools and universities as a textbook, referred to by preachers, and commonly consulted in the ecclesiastical libraries. The text was also translated first into French and then into English. M. C. Seymour, "Bartholomaeus Anglicus (b. before 1203, d. 1272)", *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/10791>, accessed 1 Dec 2012].

¹⁰⁰ V. A. Kolve, "Rocky Shores and Pleasure Gardens. Poetry versus Magic in *The Franklin's Tale*", in *Telling Images. Chaucer and the Imagery of Narrative II*, Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2009, p.192.

¹⁰¹ Collette, p.403. Collette says that the authority on the matter was Thomas Aquinas, who argued that *phantasmata*, i.e., sense impressions, were so fundamental for the process of thought that even when we think about abstract ideas we need to use them. Although they are produced inside the human mind, *phantasmata* maintain the individual and material nature of the senses, so that the intervention of the intellect is needed to produce abstractions and concepts. Through the human intellect we also combine together *phantasmata* that we have stored in our mind, and we can imagine things that we have never experienced in the real world. (This happens particularly when we dream, that is when our common sense is suspended.) Moreover, through *phantasmata*, we can form an opinion about the intentions of external objects so that we can judge, for example, on their dangerousness. The information on Thomas Aquinas's theory of perception is drawn from Edward P. Mahoney, "Sense, Intellect, and Imagination in Albert, Thomas, and Siger", *The Cambridge History of Later Medieval Philosophy: From the Rediscovery of Aristotle to the Disintegration of Scholasticism 1100-1600*, ed. by Norman Kretzmann, Anthony Kenny, Jan Pinborg, Eleonore Stump, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982, pp.605-11.

whole may be affected by it; moreover, he argues that usually the term *fantasye* has a negative connotation, especially when it is used as a synonym of *ymaginacioun*:

To those who are uninvolved in the fantasies of others, they may seem comic, ridiculous, or damnable; in any case, they are likely to be taken to illustrate the trivial-mindedness of their originator. But to the man experiencing these images, they may have riveting force and may occupy his entire attention.¹⁰²

Boethius, too, in his discussion about the mind and the different forms of understanding, attributes partial reliability to imagination. In V. p5, he says that the faculties of the human mind are *wittes*, *ymaginacioun*, and *resoun*. *Wittes* and *ymaginacioun*, the sensible faculties – the first concerning the matter, the second the form of things – are at variance with *resoun*, which deals with universal things, and therefore is totally divorced from the phenomena perceived by the senses. In this opposition, man should rely on *resoun*, the faculty which provides “the more stidfast” and “the mor parfit jugement” (68-69). In fact, the more detached human knowledge is from the senses, the more similar to divine *intelligence* – the ultimate unattainable form of knowledge. (However, Boethius does not dismiss sensible experience as totally useless or misleading. Indeed, he says that the senses do act as a trigger for cognition: in the same way as courage derives from suffering, sensible experience precedes and activates the activity of *resoun*.) Boethius orders these four faculties – wits, imagination, reason and intelligence – into a hierarchy in which the superior faculty contains all inferior faculties, while inferior faculties are excluded from the knowledge provided by superior faculties. Moreover, different levels of knowledge, and different faculties, belong to different species of living beings: animals that do not move are simply endowed with wits, and therefore are only able to perceive sensible data; animals that move have in addition the faculty of imagination, therefore they can also produce in their minds images of external things; man is the only living being that is also endowed with reason, the faculty with which he has access to abstract concepts not derived from sensory perception; God is the only entity that is endowed with intelligence, i.e., a kind of cognition

¹⁰² Burnley, p.112.

which embraces all knowledge with a single stroke of thought, having no need of developing it in argumentation or comparison.¹⁰³

By the same token, the idea of darkness that is associated with Dorigen's *phantasia* may have been suggested by Boethius. In the first book of the *Consolatio*, the image of darkness occurs in a number of metres and proses. In book I, metre 2, Philosophy observes how Boethius has let "his propre clernesse" go into "foreyne dirknesses as ofte as his anoyos bysynes waxeth without mesure, that is dryven with werldly wyndes." (3-6), and in the following prose she says she "will wipe a litil his eien that ben dirked by the cloude of mortel thynges." (25-26). According to Philosophy's metaphoric language, Boethius's malady is due to the fact that he let the light of his mind be obscured by dark clouds, which were driven by worldly winds; Philosophy relates Boethius's present state of despair to his concern over mortal things. The imagery of darkness is further developed in metre 3: here, Boethius's despair is depicted as the moment of obscurity caused by clouds that cover the sun in the middle of the day, while Philosophy's consolation is compared to a wind that chases away the clouds to reveal the brightness of the sun.¹⁰⁴ In the following prose, clouds are explicitly associated with Boethius's distress ("Ryght so, and noon other wise, the cloudes of sorwe dissolved and doon away" [I. p3, 1-2]). In prose 6 the image of darkness comes back:

the derknesse of perturbacion [...] that confowndeth the verray insyghte – [that] derknesse schal I assaie somewhat to maken thynne and wayk by lyghte and meneliche remedies; so that, aftir that the derknesse of desceyvynge desyrynge is doon away, thow mowe knowe the schynynge of verray light. (I. p6, 99-105)

¹⁰³ Boethius's cognitive theory is contained in *De Consolatione Philosophiae*, V. p4-m4-p5-m5. V. A. Kolve provides a summary of it in his *Chaucer and the Imagery of Narrative. The First Five Canterbury Tales*, pp.20-22.

¹⁰⁴ In Chaucer's translation there is ambiguity in the metaphor as it is not clear whether he is comparing darkness to a night in which stars are covered by clouds, or to a day in which the sun is covered by clouds. "And ryght by ensaumple as the sonne is hydd whan the sterres ben clusted (*that is to seyn, whan sterres ben covered with cloudes*) by a swyft wynd that hyghte Chorus, and that the firmament stant dirked with wete plowngy cloudes". In effect, the same kind of ambiguity is present also in the Latin original, as Scheible has pointed out. However, in the second half of the metre – both in its original version and in its translation – the ambiguity disappears, and Boethius refers only to the sun. In her interpretation of the Latin text, Scheible interprets the allusion to the stars as a way to express the paradox that it gets, because of the clouds, so dark that it is as if night fell in the middle of the day, and notes how in the second part of the image it is the sun, not the stars, that appears again. See Scheible, p.32.

Again, darkness is the source of the confusion that affects Boethius's mind. It is associated with his "perturbation" and "deceiving desires", and it is opposed to light, that is Philosophy's remedies. These are further explained in the last lines of the following metre as follows:

And forthy, yif thou wolt loken and demen soth with cleer lyght, and hoolden the weye
with a ryght path, weyve thow joie, dryf fro the drede, fleme thow hope, ne lat no sorwe
aproche (*that is to seyn, lat non of thise foure passiouns overcomen the or blenden the*).
For cloudy and derk is thilke thocht, and bownde with bridelis, where as thise thynges
reignen. (I. m7, 13-21)¹⁰⁵

"Cloudy and dark" is the thought of those who are overwhelmed by passions, whereas truth is compared to "clear light". By the end of the first book Boethius has learned that his complaints and tears are useless and wrong, because the wise man faces adversity, as well as prosperity, with imperturbability, and shows a defying attitude towards passions. To this point, Chaucer added a gloss to his translation, drawing from Trevet's commentary.¹⁰⁶ Passions are wrong because they blind people, i.e., they make them unable to see things properly. Dorigen, during her husband's absence, is overwhelmed by her passions, notably sorrow and fear, and does not manage to keep herself calm and sensible. The blindness which she is subject to is manifest in her inability to receive consolation either from her friends or from her husband's letters, and in her questioning God's governance of the rocks. Her complaint to God, though unreasonable from a philosophical point of view, does accord with the period of distress that she goes through while her husband is far from her; it is in line with the *derke fantasye* that prevents her from evaluating things properly.

¹⁰⁵ Scheible, commenting on the four passions that should be eschewed, notes that hope (*spes*) here is to be intended as the attitude of expecting things from the future in a worldly sense, and, as such, it has nothing to do with the cardinal virtue. See Scheible, p.45.

¹⁰⁶ Minnis has observed that this gloss is not paralleled in Jean de Meun's translation, and has argued that Chaucer drew from Trevet for it, quoting the following passage from his commentary: "ad depellendum turbacionem animi oportet reprimere passiones quibus regnantibus turbatur animus. Omnes autem passiones animi reducuntur ad quattuor principales que sunt gaudium et tristitia spes et timor.... Ad quietandum igitur animum hortatur reprimere istas quattuor passiones sub istis tamquam principalibus ceteras passiones comprehendens". In the passage quoted, Trevet says that in order to cast away perturbation we must suppress our passions – the basic ones, from which all the others derive, being joy, sadness, hope and fear. See Minnis, *Chaucer's Boece and the Medieval Tradition of Boethius*, p.105.

Susanna Fein has argued that Dorigen is vulnerable because of her marriage.¹⁰⁷ But what kind of marriage is presented in *The Franklin's Tale*? At the beginning of the *Tale*, we are introduced to the figure of a knight who falls in love with a lady conventionally described as “oon the fairestes under sonne” (734), and who does his best to gain her love, undertaking “many a labour, many a greet emprise” (732) to impress her, being afraid of revealing his love to her because of her “heigh kynrede” (735); eventually the lady, out of “pitee”, consents to marry him. The situation presented at the beginning – the service paid by a knight to the lady he loves with extraordinary devotion, the sense of awe felt by the lover for his lady, the pain and suffering he has to endure to gain her love – resembles the pattern of events that characterizes the courtly system of wooing. Jill Mann has argued that the way in which the *Tale* begins reflects the author's intention of providing his readers with something that they immediately recognize as belonging to a well-known kind of story:

[h]e refers to the actors only in general terms (“a knyght”, “a lady”), and attributes to them the qualities and experiences normally associated with tales of romantic courtship (beauty, noble family, “worthynesse”, “his wo, his peyne and his distresse”).¹⁰⁸

However, the story seems to detach itself from the stereotype when the lady agrees to marry her lover, as George Lyman Kittredge has argued:

[l]ove and marriage, according to the courtly system, were held to be incompatible, since marriage involves mastery on the husband's part, and mastery drives out love.¹⁰⁹

In *The Allegory of Love* C. S. Lewis has provided a definition of what is generally called “Courtly Love”. He dates back the origin of this sentiment to the end of the eleventh century, when the poetry of French troubadours was the expression of a particular form of love featuring humility, courtesy, adultery and the religion of Love. Lewis defines humility as the attitude of subjection of the lover to his beloved; with courtesy, Lewis hints at the fact that this form of love

¹⁰⁷ According to Fein, “the woman, who seems to have enjoyed a premarital state of health and wholeness [...], gives way to vulnerability and an essential neediness for the husband. Her self-sufficiency altered by marriage, she is now in a state of dependency and desire.” See Susanna Fein, “Boethian Boundaries: Compassion and Constraint in the *Franklin's Tale*”, in Wendy Harding, ed., *Drama, Narrative and Poetry in the Canterbury Tales*, Toulouse: Presses Universitaires du Mirail, 2003, p.199.

¹⁰⁸ Mann, p.133.

¹⁰⁹ G. L. Kittredge, *Chaucer and His Poetry*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1960, p.207.

involved noble people, the gentle; the object of courtship, the lady, is married to another man as a rule, and this accounts for the adulterous aspect of courtly love; love as such is venerated by the lover as a form of religious belief centred on the veneration of the God of Love.¹¹⁰ Lewis has related these characteristics to the historical background in which this form of love found expression. The presentation of the lover as a humble servant to his lady resembles the relationship of subordination between a feudal vassal and his lord. By the same token, the high social rank of the protagonists is in line with the feudal society in which this poetry developed. The adulterous nature of courtly love relationships derives from the fact that in the Middle Ages marriage and love were held to be incompatible: on the one hand, marriages in the upper classes were contracts that were stipulated – and dissolved – on the basis of interest, and the husband's dominant position within his household allowed him to have complete control over his wife, so that the idea of the male lover as a humble servant to his lady could find no place in marital life; on the other, the Church championed the idea that passionate love was morally wrong also within the bond of marriage. For these reasons, Lewis argues, courtly love could not develop into a relationship in which the man has absolute control over the woman; moreover, the fact that at the basis of the relationship between a husband and his wife there is an element of duty is at variance with the secrecy and jealousy of courtly love.¹¹¹

In the Introduction to his *Love and Marriage in the Age of Chaucer* Henry Ansgar Kelly disagrees with Lewis's inclusion of adultery to the basic elements that made up the theory of courtly love, and expresses his intention of showing that love and marriage were actually held to be compatible by most medieval readers.¹¹² To Lewis's argument against the connection of love with marriage – because, as a rule, arranged marriages exclude love, and because theologians criticized love in marriage as wicked – Kelly answers that not all marriages were arranged, and

¹¹⁰ C. S. Lewis, *The Allegory of Love. A Study in Medieval Tradition*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1936, pp.1-23.

¹¹¹ Lewis, *The Allegory of Love*, p.36.

¹¹² H. A. Kelly, *Love and Marriage in the Age of Chaucer*, Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1975, pp.19-28.

that, even in case of arranged marriages, it is absolutely possible that a sentimental affection between the partners would develop after marriage vows were made.¹¹³ To Lewis's point that, in marriage, love cannot be conceived as a reward that is granted to the humble lover by his superior lady because of the mastery of the husband over his wife, Kelly opposes the idea that

one rarely, if ever, reads of marriageable lovers in serious romances refusing to marry because the woman will lose her dominant role over the man; if the subject arises, the lady is normally allowed to keep her sovereignty, at least to some extent; or else both the man and the woman cede the mastery to the other, and a state of equality or mutuality results.¹¹⁴

Kelly therefore supports the idea of the compatibility of love with marriage, and dismisses the opposition between love and marriage as a "a minority view, and hardly a serious one."¹¹⁵ In the case of Chaucer, Kelly argues that love and marriage, in the serious love stories, are never portrayed as antithetic.¹¹⁶

The treatment of love and marriage in *The Franklin's Tale* is the object of discussion both in Lewis's and in Kelly's works, and both critics compare Arveragus and Dorigen's love to that of Troilus and Criseyde, even though they draw different conclusions. Lewis argues that

[i]n the history of love poetry Troilus represents the crowning achievement of the old Provençal sentiment in its purity. The loves of Troilus and Criseyde are so nobly conceived that they are divided only by the thinnest partition from the lawful loves of Dorigen and her husband. It seems almost an accident that the third book celebrates adultery instead of marriage. Chaucer has brought the old romance of adultery to the very frontiers of the modern (or should I say the late?) romance of marriage. He does not himself cross the frontier.¹¹⁷

Lewis sees the consummation scene in the third book of *Troilus* as the enactment of the adulterous aspect that he deems to be a fundamental element of courtly love. Kelly opposes

¹¹³ Kelly, *Love and Marriage in the Age of Chaucer*, pp.31-32.

¹¹⁴ Kelly, *Love and Marriage in the Age of Chaucer*, pp.32-33.

¹¹⁵ Kelly also argues that the medieval reception of Andreas Capellanus's *Ars honeste amandi* has been misunderstood by Lewis, who read it seriously, and derived from it the assumption that in the Middle Ages true love had to be adulterous. Kelly observes that Andreas's work does contain passages in which the idea that love and marriage are incompatible is expressed, but these passages are also contradicted by others – he mentions, for example, the passage in which it is said that lovers should not choose to love anyone who they deem to be unmarriageable. Kelly's point is that "[i]t is frequently assumed that, according to Andrew, true love must be adulterous in the strict sense or, even more specifically, that the lady must be married. But there is nothing in the foregoing to suggest this." On the other hand, Kelly observes that "[i]n all doubtful cases the presumption of the law is on the side of marriage", and prefers to base his view on marriage in the Middle Ages on that. See Kelly, *Love and Marriage in the Age of Chaucer*, pp.38-39.

¹¹⁶ Kelly argues that Chaucer "was not acquainted with the *Ars honeste amandi*, the only work in which we have found a principle of the complete incompatibility of love and marriage." See Kelly, *Love and Marriage in the Age of Chaucer*, p.60.

¹¹⁷ Lewis, p.197.

Lewis in that he deems Troilus and Criseyde's relationship to be as lawful as that of Arveragus and Dorigen. Kelly, in fact, argues that Troilus and Criseyde cannot have a regular public marriage because the plot requires their love to remain secret, not because they think that love and marriage are incompatible.¹¹⁸ On the other hand, Lewis argues that Dorigen and Arveragus's love is "lawful", i.e., within the bond of marriage. And so does Kelly.¹¹⁹ However, there are controversies among the critics in the evaluation of the lawful nature of the marriage in *The Franklin's Tale*.

The marriage between Arveragus and Dorigen is described at the beginning of the tale. After Arveragus's courtship, Dorigen is moved by such a *pitee* for him

That pryvely she fil of his accord
To take hym for hir housbonde and hir lord,
Of swich lordshipe as men han over hir wyves. (741-43)

Dorigen consents to take Arveragus as her husband. However, this happens in secrecy. Angela M. and Peter J. Lucas have argued that the use of the term *pryvely* raises the question of the clandestine nature of their marriage.¹²⁰ They start from the assumption that "their marriage is a Christian one" – because of the fact that, from their point of view, marriage in pagan times "would have been accompanied by far more ceremony than in the *Franklin's Tale*," and because pagan marriages were arranged with the bride having no real decisional power over the choice of her husband – and judge on the lawfulness of their vows on the basis of the laws of the Church in the Middle Ages, which, as they explain, held that marriages that were clandestinely stipulated were valid but subject to punishment in case they were discovered by ecclesiastic authorities. They observe how much secrecy is entailed in the terms of their marriage and their relationship – because of their agreement that Arveragus is to maintain the husband's sovereignty over Dorigen

¹¹⁸ Kelly observes how Pandarus's arrangement of Criseyde's falling in love with Troilus has been presented by Chaucer in a way that it seems to presuppose marriage as the end of their relationship. In his workings to convince Criseyde to accept Troilus as a lover, Pandarus insists on Troilus's good intentions. Moreover, after Pandarus's speech in the second book, Criseyde is presented as she is weighing the pros and cons of marrying again. See Kelly, *Love and Marriage in the Age of Chaucer*, pp.59-67.

¹¹⁹ Kelly, *Love and Marriage in the Age of Chaucer*, pp.190-91.

¹²⁰ Angela M. Lucas, Peter J. Lucas, "The Presentation of Marriage and Love in Chaucer's *Franklin's Tale*", *English Studies*, 6 (1991), p.501.

simply as a mere formality to preserve an outward appearance of respectability as a married knight – and they look with suspicion at the fact that this kind of marriage is treated positively by the narrator, arguing that “[p]erhaps we have here an instance of the narratorial voice of the Franklin taking precedence over that of Chaucer.”¹²¹

Kelly, too, observes that Arveragus and Dorigen’s vows are pronounced in the presence of no witnesses; however, he points out that Dorigen expresses her present intention of taking Arveragus as her husband very clearly:¹²²

Sire, I wol be youre humble trewe wyf –
Have heer my trouthe – til that myn herte breste. (758-59)

He also argues that, though not explicitly mentioned, we are to suppose that they made their marriage public because “that was customarily done in the vaguely pre-Christian setting of the story; for they lived together publicly as man and wife.”¹²³ In effect, the story does not provide any evident textual allusion to the fact that there might be something wrong with their marriage from the point of view of the law. The fact that Chaucer, or the narrator, does not report the celebration of the marriage does not necessarily mean that it did not happen. Certainly, there is secrecy in the way in which Arveragus and Dorigen promise each other that they will live together as husband and wife, but the story does make clear that Arveragus and Dorigen are overtly seen as a married couple by the other characters in the story, and nowhere is their marriage put into question because of the way in which it has been stipulated. Moreover, as Kelly has observed, there is a strong analogy to what happens to Troilus and Criseyde. As has been said before, Kelly opposes Lewis in that he sees Troilus and Criseyde’s love scene in the third book as licit, because they are treated by the narrator as a married couple, even if their relationship cannot be made public. Kelly, in fact, has argued that Chaucer wanted his

¹²¹ Lucas and Lucas, p.502.

¹²² Kelly, *Love and Marriage in the Age of Chaucer*, p.190.

¹²³ Kelly, *Love and Marriage in the Age of Chaucer*, p.191.

protagonists to be surrounded by a “matrimonial aura”.¹²⁴ It seems, therefore, that marriage in Chaucer’s pagan world could take different forms, and did not have to involve public celebration to be morally acceptable. If this is true for *Troilus and Criseyde*, in which the relationship of the protagonists requires not only secrecy in their exchange of vows but also furtiveness in their encounters, Arveragus and Dorigen, whose life together as a married couple is public knowledge, provide an instance of relationship that makes the fact that love and marriage are compatible in Chaucer all the clearer.

The story explicitly affirms Dorigen’s willingness to accept Arveragus’s *lordshipe*, the control that a husband has over his wife – a condition of male dominance which is referred to by the Franklin’s comment at line 743 (“Of swich lordshipe as men han over hir wyves”) as a standard in marriage. In the Norton edition of *The Canterbury Tales*, the editors V. A. Kolve and Glending Olson have inserted in the “Sources and Backgrounds” section for *The Franklin’s Tale* an extract from John Trevisa’s¹²⁵ translation of Bartholomaeus Anglicus’s *De proprietatibus rerum*, in which the husband’s sovereignty over his wife is seen as the effect of the superiority of men over women in strength and might, and St Paul’s sentence “the husband is the head of the wife” is quoted to validate the point.¹²⁶ However, the peculiarity of Dorigen and Arveragus’s marriage is due to the liberty that Arveragus grants his wife in these lines:

¹²⁴ Kelly, *Love and Marriage in the Age of Chaucer*. The quotation is on p. 230. Kelly’s argumentation for Chaucer’s presentation of Troilus and Criseyde’s consummation scene as a celebration of marriage is on pp.225-29. In his argumentation, he observes how Chaucer makes Pandarus act both as a proctor and a protector; he helps Troilus to fulfil his desire, but he also tests Troilus’s honesty of intentions before trying to convince his niece to accept Troilus as her lover. Moreover, Kelly observes, in the stanzas that follow the description of the consummation Troilus hints at marriage through his reference to Hymenaeus, the God of Marriage, (“Imeneus, I the grete”, 1255). He also notices the theological kind of love that is addressed by Troilus through the Boethian “holy bond of thynges” (1261).

¹²⁵ John Trevisa (*b. c.*1342. *d.* in or before 1402) may have come from Cornwall. He studied at Oxford, was ordained priest, and became a fellow of Queen’s College until his exclusion from it because of his involvement in a movement of opposition. His translations of encyclopaedic texts from Latin into English were accomplished after his nomination as vicar of Berkeley, Gloucestershire, and were patronized by Thomas (IV), the fifth Baron Berkeley, with the purpose of making them accessible to the lay public. His translations include Bartholomaeus Anglicus’s *De proprietatibus rerum*, completed in February 1399, extant in eight manuscripts, and printed by Wynkyn de Worde *c.*1495. Ronald Waldron, “Trevisa, John (*b. c.*1342, *d.* in or before 1402)”, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/27722>, accessed 1 Dec 2012].

¹²⁶ A passage from the extract says: “For in myght and strengthe a man passith a womman, and a man is the hed of a womman, as the apostil seith. Therefore a man is holde to his wif, as the heed hath the cure and reule of al the

And for to lede the moore in blisse hir lyves,
Of his free wyl he swoor hire as a knyght
That nevere in al his lyf he, day ne nyght,
Ne sholde upon hym take no maistrie
Agayn hir wyl, ne kithe hire jalousie,
But hire obeye, and folwe hir wyl in al,
As any love to his lady shal,
Save that the name of soveraynetee,
That wolde he have for shame of his degree. (744-752)

Arveragus renounces his right to exert mastery over his wife, swearing to Dorigen that he will never do anything against her will. The promise to obey her – to continue to be a servant to her, instead of a domineering husband – is accompanied by the resolution that Arveragus will never be a jealous husband. Although his decision is presented as unexpected because it is not what husbands would normally do, it is not criticised by the narrator as morally unacceptable.

The Lucases read Dorigen and Arveragus's marriage as problematic because they see, in the liberty granted to Dorigen, a "reversal" of Christian marriage, which represented the standard medieval marriage, and which relegated the wife to an inferior position; they, moreover, blame the narrator, that is, the character of the Franklin, for his positive appraisal of Arveragus and Dorigen's agreement.¹²⁷ However, as far as the logic of the tale is concerned, Dorigen does accept to be subject to Arveragus, and she is willing to renounce her dominant position as a courtly lady for the sake of her marriage; the liberty she is given is the result of her husband's free choice – an act of generosity, which well suits Arveragus's image of the courtly lover at the beginning of the tale, but which also pertains to the quality of *gentillesse*, a major theme within the tale. On the one hand, a judgement of the marital relationship on the basis of its validity according to the medieval law or Christian ethics seems not to consider the purposes with which marriage is discussed within the tale, which, as Timothy H. Flake has argued, are not historical:

[g]iven the ahistorical, pagan, and imaginative setting of the *Franklin's Tale*, it is hard to believe that the *Franklin's Tale* is concerned primarily with lecturing on the folly of deviating from medieval canon marriage law or censuring the Franklin's character on this account. It is unlikely that the Franklin's audience would have had this question uppermost in mind, or that they would have found intolerable the idea that pagans could

body." Kolve and Olson, p.428. The editors refer "the apostil" to St. Paul, in Ephesians 5:23, which they quote on page 283 as follows: "Because the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ is the head of the church. He *is* the saviour of his body."

¹²⁷ Lucas and Lucas, pp.503-04.

marry (apparently) without ceremony, or that pagan ladies could give themselves in marriage.¹²⁸

On the other hand, the literalism with which the Lucases read Arveragus's renunciation to his lordship over his wife, which makes them see it as a "reversal" of the standard idea of marriage, does not take into account Dorigen's character and the way in which the freedom that is unexpectedly given to her affects her as a wife.

A comparison with the treatment of marriage in *Troilus and Criseyde* may shed light on this point. In both stories questions are raised whether marriage may be a threat to the woman's happiness because of the husband's dominance. Kelly points out that, when Criseyde has to decide whether to reject Troilus's love or not, she shows concerns about husbands' jealousy and mastery; eventually she resolves to consent to Troilus's love on condition that they remain on equal terms with each other.¹²⁹ In *The Franklin's Tale*, we do not know whether Dorigen shares the same concerns because Arveragus's promise is made after Dorigen has already consented to marriage, and Dorigen's consent is simply due to her compassion for Arveragus's "meke obeysaunce" (739); the narrator seems to imply that Dorigen is so in love with Arveragus that she is willing to marry him no matter how domineering a husband he may prove to be. Indeed Dorigen's indifference to questions of mastery may be assumed in her reply to Arveragus's renunciation of lordship:

Sire, sith of youre gentillesse
Ye profre me to have so large a reyne,
Ne wolde nevere God bitwixe us tweyne,
As in my gilt, were outhere werre or stryf.
Sire, I wol be youre humble trewe wyf –
Have heer my trouthe – til that myn herte breste. (754-59)

¹²⁸ Timothy H. Flake, "Love, *Trouthe*, and the Happy Ending of the *Franklin's Tale*", *English Studies*, 77 (1996), pp.211-12.

¹²⁹ Kelly quotes the passage from *Troilus and Criseyde* (Book 3, 169-175) in which Criseyde, in order not to let Troilus's conditions get worse – Troilus is in bed, and Criseyde thinks that he is seriously ill because of his not yet requited love – she consents to accept Troilus's service as a lover, but she says to Troilus: "Ye shal namore han sovereignete / Of me in love". Kelly relates Criseyde's warning to a stanza in Book 2 in which, after Pandarus has just informed her of Troilus's love, she considers the possibility of a second marriage: "I am myn owene womman, wel at ese – / I thank it God – as after myn estat, / Right yong, and stonde unteyd in lusty leese, / Withouten jalousie or swich debat: / Shal noon housbonde seyn to me 'Chek mat!' / For either they ben ful of jalousie, / Or maisterfull, or loven novelrie" (750-756). See Kelly, *Love and Marriage in the Age of Chaucer*, p.66.

With her reply, on the contrary, she shows that she has no intentions of taking advantage of the liberty her husband has granted her, and that she is actually behaving like a humble wife, subject to her husband. Beneath the surface of a marriage that proposes liberty for both husband and wife, Arveragus and Dorigen's relationship is, actually, one of mutual obedience and faithfulness.

Two important differences between Dorigen and Criseyde must be considered: Criseyde is a widow at the moment in which the story starts, while Dorigen has never been married; Criseyde describes herself as a woman that needs neither the love of a husband, nor his financial support (see Book II, lines 750-56), while Dorigen is simply presented as a lady of a higher social rank than Arveragus, and we are not told what her idea of marriage is, and whether she expresses concerns about her status. Power puts unmarried women and widows on the same position as landowners:

under English common law the unmarried woman or widow – the *femme sole* – was, as far as all private, as distinct from public, rights and duties are concerned, on a par with men. She could hold land, even by military tenure, and do homage for it; she could make a will or a contract, could sue or be sued. On the other hand when she married, her rights, for the duration of the marriage, slipped out of her hands.¹³⁰

Therefore, unmarried women and widows enjoyed a similar state of independence in the administration of their properties, which, once they married, they were supposed to renounce, subjecting themselves to their husbands' will. Although in *The Franklin's Tale* the discussion on mastery is not specifically referred to questions of property or status (as opposed to what happens in *Troilus and Criseyde*), the characterization of Dorigen during her husband's absence as a woman in "a state of dependency"¹³¹ could find a historical justification in Power's account.

The Franklin's Tale starts with a description of a traditional courtly love story, to illustrate then a marriage which departs from conventions. Eileen Power describes how different must have been the historical figure of the lady from her idealised literary counterpart:

¹³⁰ Power, p.30.

¹³¹ Fein, p.199.

[i]n the ideal of chivalry she was the adored one, the source of all romance and the object of all worship, who had but to command and she was obeyed, and for whom all deeds of valour were performed. In law and in the fabric of feudal society she was primarily important as a landowner. In the family she was important as wife and mother, wielding great practical authority, not only in her own sphere of the home, but in a much wider sphere as her husband's representative during his absence.¹³²

Dorigen embodies both. She starts as a nameless female figure, the lady of courtly literature, but the Franklin soon dismisses this conventional representation to develop her character towards the figure of a medieval wife of high social rank, and the difficulties she has to go through as her husband is away. But the development that her character undergoes involves also the ideas of love and marriage that are presented in the *Tale*. Jill Mann observes that Dorigen and Arveragus are introduced as anonymous figures to be given a name only later on, and has argued that “[t]his generality cannot be accidental”, relating it to Chaucer’s interest for “general human experience”.¹³³ This is undoubtedly true, but perhaps it could be also that Chaucer was handling conventions as general abstractions that need to be applied to concrete situation and realistic characters in order to see if they work, or if they need to be re-established. Derek Pearsall describes this ability of Chaucer as dramatic realisation:

[w]hat Chaucer often seems to be doing is to take a conventional form of story and to render it with an intense quality of imaginative engagement, so that the enigmatic nature of the story as a representation of the matter of experience and reality is brought into sharp focus, and the reader is stimulated to unexpected feats of perceptual tolerance.¹³⁴

This is particularly evident in the treatment that Chaucer reserves to the character of Dorigen. The story starts presenting her as the lady of courtly love, the object of the wooing of a worthy knight. The narrator, however, recounts this part of their relationship briefly. What he is really interested in is how their relationship as lovers may continue after they get married. At this point, in fact, he inserts the part of the story in which Dorigen is given an identity as a character, as if she were no longer the embodiment of a conventional role but a real person. To achieve this effect, the narrator allows Dorigen to be the focus of the story from the moment in which Arveragus leaves for England. The description of her grief for her husband’s absence, which

¹³² Power, p.27.

¹³³ Mann, pp.133-34.

¹³⁴ Pearsall, p.152,

culminates with her complaint about the rocks, is an example of Chaucer's "imaginative engagement" applied to what could have otherwise appeared as a traditional situation.

1.IV Dorigen's inner debate and the Boethian two voices

The analysis of *The Franklin's Tale* has shown Chaucer's insertion of passages which contain references to Boethius's *Consolatio* in the presentation of Dorigen's grief at her husband's absence. What I would try to evaluate now is how these Boethian echoes – vocabulary, images, themes and narrative form – may influence the meaning of the *Tale*. In order to answer this question, we have to establish what may have been Chaucer's reception of the *Consolatio*, and why he may have deemed Boethius appropriate to his own literary works.

In the Preface to her study *Chaucer and Menippean Satire*, F. Anne Payne argues that Chaucer's attitude to the *Consolatio* was "satirical rather than serious", and the reason for that, she argues, lies in the fact that Chaucer read Boethius's work as a Menippean satire.¹³⁵ As Payne explains, Menippean satire is a parody in which both those who ask questions and those who have the answers are the object of criticism: on the one hand, the individual who complains about the universe is treated comically; on the other, the traditional set of beliefs which should provide final solutions to the problems raised is presented with irony. In her description of this literary genre, Payne observes that Menippean satire usually takes the form of

a dialogue between a pair of stereotyped characters speaking from two differing, clear-cut levels of perception. One is a know-it-all who is free of the restrictions and responsibilities faced by ordinary human beings. The other, his interlocutor, has a view of man's struggle with his human burdens different from the one the know-it-all proposes but is persuaded to listen, like it or not.¹³⁶

Through the application of this pattern to the *Consolatio*, Payne identifies the two stock characters of Menippean satire in the two figures that animate the dialogue in Boethius's work, the two Boethian voices: Lady Philosophy is the voice that has an answer to everything – what

¹³⁵ F. Anne Payne, *Chaucer and Menippean Satire*, Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1981, p.X.

¹³⁶ Payne, p.9.

she calls the “scientist” figure –, while the character of Boethius represents the man in search for an answer – the “human struggler”, as Payne calls it.¹³⁷

Philosophy criticises Boethius’s tendency to despair in front of adversity, and encourages the use of his rational faculties – or, as Paynes defines them, “[t]he forceful and active commitment to the world of the mind, to intelligible constructions and ideas”.¹³⁸ In effect, Lady Philosophy opposes the eternity and immutability of God to the temporality and changeability of human life, she sees a providential order behind events that are apparently ruled by chance, she speaks for the pursuit of the perfect happiness as opposed to the variety of worldly satisfactions; her viewpoint is completely detached from worldly concerns, and relies on a metaphysical system of abstractions. While Philosophy’s rational approach reflects her supernatural dimension, the character of Boethius is portrayed as a man living at a specific moment in history and affected by a personal tragic destiny; his perspective is not exclusively rational, but is also influenced by his emotional response to the circumstances in which he finds himself:

[h]e is a man who can be hurt by pain, outraged by injustice, and embittered by the ironic failure of his efforts, a man caught up in life in every sense of the word – in continuance, activity in the face of disorder, a concern with act and result in immediate as well as larger contexts.¹³⁹

Payne identifies in the *Consolatio* two different perspectives on reality which can hardly be reconciled. Her point is that Boethius may well follow Philosophy’s argument throughout the dialogue, but this does not seem to relieve him from pain: as Payne observes, by the end of the dialogue, the focus of attention has completely shifted away from Boethius’s imprisonment and the problem of his unjust death sentence, and after Philosophy’s last intervention the *Consolatio* ends abruptly, leaving unanswered the question whether Boethius’s initial pessimistic viewpoint has really changed to welcome Philosophy’s optimism.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁷ Payne, p.13.

¹³⁸ Payne, p.65.

¹³⁹ Payne, p.66.

¹⁴⁰ Payne, p.17.

On the basis of this dialogical structure, Payne has analysed in detail three of the Chaucerian narratives that are most evidently indebted to Boethius – *Troilus and Criseyde*, *The Knight's Tale* and *The Nun's Priest's Tale* – arguing that Chaucer adapted the Boethian dialogue to the more complex structure of his own stories by having different characters embody the two Boethian voices.¹⁴¹ However, in the case of Troilus's speech on predestination – Chaucer's rendering of the Boethian discussion on the compatibility between God's foreknowledge and man's free will in the form of a complaint to Jove made by a despairing Troilus in the fourth book of the poem – Payne argues that Chaucer adapted the dialogue between Boethius and Philosophy into a soliloquy, as if it were an “inner debate” that animates Troilus's interior struggle between conflicting perspectives.¹⁴²

Two irreconcilable perspectives are presented also in the Franklin's account of Dorigen's loneliness. On the one hand, Dorigen, consumed by grief for not having her husband with her, considers life meaningless; on the other, her friends do their best to convince her that she should not worry. Dorigen's pessimistic perspective is determined by her emotions, and seems to be immune to her friends' words. It is, in fact, “by hope and by resoun” (833) that her sorrow is assuaged, but the imagery of the stone with which her process of consolation is described leaves open the question whether Dorigen has actually managed to control her consuming desire for her husband or not. As has been explained, the process of imprinting of an image has been probably suggested by the *Consolatio*, where the way in which human knowledge is derived from the senses is compared to the way in which images are reflected in a mirror or written on a sheet of parchment. It may be worth comparing this passage from *The Franklin's Tale* to a passage from *Troilus and Criseyde* in which the same Boethian idea is applied:¹⁴³

Thus gan he make a mirour of his mynde

¹⁴¹ Payne, p.14.

¹⁴² Payne, p.131.

¹⁴³ In his list of Boethian influences in *Troilus and Criseyde*, Book I, Jefferson associates the moment in which “Troilus makes a mirror of his mind in which he sees Criseyde” with *De Consolatione*, V, m.4, 7-10, that is, the same metre in which he detects the Boethian analogue to the idea of the imprinting of a figure in *The Franklin's Tale*. See Jefferson, pp.137,148.

In which he saugh al holly hire figure,
And that he wel koude in his herte fynde. (I, 365-67)

The passage is part of the process by which Troilus falls in love with Criseyde after seeing her in the temple for the first time: after retiring to his room, he falls in a state of daydreaming in which he sees Criseyde as she appeared to him in the temple, and makes a mirror image out of it as if her figure were reflected in his mind. In applying the same Boethian idea to his own narratives, Chaucer was adapting the notion of the human mind as a repository of impressions to the processes of, respectively, consolation and idealisation of one's beloved. The idea applies to both characters and their diverse situations because they are both portrayed in a state of emotional imbalance – Dorigen is distressed for her husband's absence, Troilus is excited by the sight of Criseyde –, and neither is in control of what is happening to them: Dorigen puts herself in the hands of her friends, and Troilus is totally absorbed by the sight of Criseyde. However, in *The Franklin's Tale* Chaucer replaced the mirror with a stone, an object whose hardness is probably meant to represent Dorigen's resistance to her friends' attempted consolation, and the fact that, as the narrator explicitly says, it takes time to Dorigen to be happy again – in effect, she will not be happy until her husband comes back from England. Unlike Troilus – whose mind is like a mirror and reflects instantly and at one stroke the image of his beloved – Dorigen's stony mind is only partially engraved by the consolatory words of her friends. As a consequence, we may read in the narrator's comment and his presentation of Dorigen's painful wait for her husband a gentle irony, which invites the reader to look at Dorigen's emotionalism as well as to her friends' consolation with detachment.

The major effect of textual parody may be found in Dorigen's complaint. In her questioning God's creation, using terms and motifs that strongly resemble passages in the *Consolatio*, Dorigen is portrayed as a surrogate of the character of the despairing Boethius presented in the first book of the *Consolatio*. She, therefore, can be seen as embodying the point of view of the "human struggler" in the attempt to understand how the idea of a benevolent God

can be reconciled with the creation of rocks that have allegedly been the cause of the death of many human beings. Though she has no interlocutor in the form of a person or a personification, her reasoning does imply an opposing viewpoint, which, towards the end of her speech, she summarizes with the statement that all is for the best. It is this voice, the clerks' voice, in fact, that plays in her speech the role of Lady Philosophy, the role of the know-it-all figure. On the one hand, Dorigen puts into question God's benevolence toward mankind because of the dangerous presence of the rocks along the Breton coast; on the other, she is aware of the voices of those who argue that evil does not exist. Eventually, she gives up her reasoning, and asks God to protect her husband from shipwreck.

Chaucer portrays her character's failure at negotiating between the image of the world perceived by her senses and the explanation to the problem provided by the voice of authority: by the end of her speech, her questions have remained unanswered, and her fear has prevailed over any attempt at rational control. Bachman has argued that the text puts the reader in front of a choice:

We either sympathize with Dorigen's plight, experiencing with her the emotional force of those rocks to her, or we perceive her experience as a demonstration of error. In this way does the narrative interact with the philosophical frame to produce a dual perspective.¹⁴⁴

On the one hand, there is the perspective sustained by Dorigen's thesis – the presence of the rocks is the evidence of confusion in creation –, which accounts for her wish, at the end of her speech, that God may sink the rocks into hell. On the other hand, there is the voice of the clerks – all is for the best –, which Dorigen reports as the antithesis of her argument. The two perspectives reflect two different ways of approaching the problem: on the one side, Dorigen is supported by the evidence of experience – the huge number of human beings that have died of shipwreck because of the rocks –; on the other, the philosophers' optimism is the logical consequence of the fact that the world is governed by God's providence. In the case of Dorigen, her choice between conflicting perspectives is determined by her fear, and as readers we perceive

¹⁴⁴ Bachman, p.60.

her dismissal of the clerks' viewpoint as problematic. However evident her mistake may seem to the reader, her choice is not criticized by the narrator, and the problem raised by her complaint remains unresolved. Bachman detects in Dorigen's complaint the signs of

a tension between the narrative's action, the emotional force of Dorigen's fear for her husband's safety, and its philosophical Boethian demand to transcend the very limitations that define man as man, to disbelieve, if necessary, the evidence of one's own senses.¹⁴⁵

I would just add to his observation that Boethian is not only the argument attributed to the clerks that all is for the best, but also the very conflict of perspectives presented in Dorigen's speech. *De Consolatione Philosophiae* takes into account the point of view of Philosophy, but also the limitation of perception that affects Boethius as a human being in his inability to explain his downfall. The perspective of Boethius's character, the voice of the "human struggler", seems to have been the focus of Chaucer's exploration in *The Franklin's Tale*, and, as Payne has observed, in his narratives in general:

[i]n Chaucer [...] the "scientist" figure is much reduced in stature; the human struggler, Chaucer's surrogate, is inept perhaps, but nevertheless in the spotlight on center stage.¹⁴⁶

In her questioning God's providential design behind the presence of the rocks along the Breton coast, Dorigen implicitly puts into doubt the doctrine according to which the world is subject to divine order, that is, the point of view supported by Philosophy in the *Consolatio*. Her tone is quite polemical: though her questions about God's governance of the world are never allowed to have the strength sufficient to become affirmations that deny Providence, they imply some kind of doubt. Dorigen's wish at the end of her complaint is presented not only as the consequence of her love for her husband but also as a reflection of a mistrust of God's benevolence toward mankind on the basis of her painful experience of the world. By expanding the implications of Dorigen's grief for her husband's absence to the philosophical inquiry into evil in the world, Dorigen's wish about the rocks' disappearance can be read also as an attack to the optimism of the "clerkes" (885) – an attack that, however, seems to be countered ironically

¹⁴⁵ Bachman, p.60.

¹⁴⁶ Payne, p.13.

by the further development of the plot. In fact, when Aurelius tells her that he managed to remove the rocks from the sea as she had asked him to do, the consequences of her wish have turned out to be different from those expected: on the one hand, Arveragus came home safe and sound in spite of the presence of the rocks, and nobody was shipwrecked off the coast of Brittany; on the other, the removal of the rocks puts Dorigen in front of the dilemma between breaking the promise made to Aurelius and being unfaithful to her husband. The disappearance of the rocks has come too late to be of any help to Dorigen; what is worse, it has allowed Aurelius to be within his rights to ask for her love. Dorigen's reaction is therefore a speech in which she complains about what she had previously hoped for. Ironically, the rocks prove to be dangerous to Dorigen and Arveragus's marriage not because they are present, but because they have – at least apparently – disappeared. As Charles A. Owen, Jr. has pointed out, Dorigen's promise to Aurelius – she will grant him her love, if he manages to remove the rocks from the sea – is the moment in which she unconsciously changes the significance of the rocks:

[u]p to this point they have represented to her the menace of natural forces to her husband's life. Hereafter their permanence is a guarantee of her enduring love for her husband. The rocks occur to her not only because her husband's life is in danger from them but because their immutability is like her love.¹⁴⁷

At the moment of her promise to Aurelius, we might be reminded of Dorigen's former fear for the *presence* of the rocks, as well as of her former wish that God could make them disappear, and we may wonder whether it is stronger in Dorigen her worry about her husband's safety or her rejection of adultery. However, as far as the plot of the story is concerned, it would have been better for Dorigen if she had never expressed her wish about the rocks. If we relate this to Dorigen's idea of evil in creation, the *Tale* seems to suggest that what appears to be dangerous turns out not to be so, and that real danger lies in the deceitful nature of human perception of reality. This is even more evident if we consider that when Dorigen is told that the rocks have disappeared she is deceived by her own senses once again. In fact, it seems more likely that the

¹⁴⁷ Charles A. Owen, Jr., "The Crucial Passages in Five of the *Canterbury Tales*: A Study in Irony and Symbol", *JEGP*, 52 (1953), p.295.

rocks have been covered by water, rather than removed “stoon by stoon” (993) as Dorigen asked.¹⁴⁸ Therefore, Chaucer may have been parodying human understanding of the world by showing that man’s emotional response leads human beings to draw, unconsciously, the wrong conclusions.

At the same time, the ending of the tale is marked by a certain degree of confidence in a happy resolution of the story. This optimism is introduced through the character of Arveragus in his reply to Dorigen’s despair at her dilemma. When Arveragus has to face the consequences of Dorigen’s rash promise, his question to his wife – “Is ther oght elles, Dorigen, but this?” (1469) – reveals an attitude to reality that is clearly intended to counterbalance Dorigen’s overwrought reaction. His answer confirms, in fact, his ability to remain calm in a difficult situation:

Ye, wyf, [...] lat slepen that is stille.
It may be wel, paraventure, yet to day.
Ye shul youre trouthe holden, by my fay!
For God so wisly have mercy upon me,
I hadde wel levere ystiked for to be
For verray love which that I to yow have,
But if ye sholde youre trouthe kepe and save.
Trouthe is the hyste thyng that man may kepe (1472-79, italics added).

Arveragus’s solution to Dorigen’s dilemma is the literal application of the principle that one must be faithful to what he or she has sworn. By stating this as an irrevocable premise to any kind of subsequent decision, Arveragus gives preference to the strict adherence to the value of *trouthe* to any kind of consequence that may follow from it. Moreover, the confidence displayed is derived by the fact that, as he says, “perhaps it may be well even today”.

In Arveragus, we may read the embodiment of a viewpoint that is opposed to that of Dorigen. Gertrude M. White, who sees Arveragus as “‘trouthe’ incarnate”, argues that he represents “the authority of an ideal”.¹⁴⁹ A. M. Kearney attributes to Arveragus “a fairytale kind of superiority”, and opposes “*his* firm trust in Providence” to Dorigen’s and Aurelius’s “gross

¹⁴⁸ Anthony E. Luengo has even put into doubt that the disappearance of the rocks is due to magic, arguing that the clerk should actually be seen as a scientist who, through careful calculations, predicts a period of high tide: “much of the astrological terminology which is laid on so thickly ([*The Franklin’s Tale*] 1273-93) is so much hocus-pocus or, at best, irrelevant to the matter at hand.” See Anthony E. Luengo, “Magic and Illusion in *The Franklin’s Tale*”, *JEGP*, 77 (1978), p.12.

¹⁴⁹ Gertrude M. White, “*The Franklin’s Tale*: Chaucer or the Critics”, *PMLA*, 89 (1974), p.461.

impatience”.¹⁵⁰ Both critics point out, on the one hand, the high degree of emotional detachment that informs his character, and, on the other, his optimistic faith in the possibility of a happy resolution. Both traits are a reflection of his ability to let reason dominate over passion, and to evaluate problems as an impartial judge. As a consequence, we may see Arveragus as representing the perspective of reason and faith in divine providence that characterizes the voice of Philosophy in the *Consolatio*. One might see a contradiction in the second part of his reply to Dorigen, in which he bursts into tears and brutally orders Dorigen not to tell anybody of her “aventure” (1483). However, his unexpected emotional involvement shows that Arveragus’s former cold rationality is not the effect of his indifference to Dorigen and her situation, but the result of a painful self-sacrifice in virtue of his moral stature.

After Arveragus sends his wife to Aurelius, his hopeful perspective is echoed in the narrator’s comment, in which the Franklin asks his audience to refrain from evaluating Arveragus’s decision until the story is over, arguing that Dorigen “may have bettre fortune than yow semeth” (1447). One may argue that the happy resolution of the tale provides indisputable evidence of the victory of the “scientist” point of view over that of the “human struggler”. However, it must be considered that when Dorigen heads for the garden to keep her promise, she has not been consoled by Arveragus’s hopeful words. In fact, when Aurelius meets her halfway, and asks her where she is going, she answers in a tone of complaint and “half as she were mad, / ‘Unto the gardyn, as myn housbonde bad, / My trouthe for to holde – allas, allas!’” (1511-13). Dorigen’s lack of emotional control, which the *Tale* seems to present as one of the circumstances that lead Dorigen to her promise to Aurelius,¹⁵¹ is explicitly mentioned by Aurelius as the cause – together with Arveragus’s display of *gentillesse* – of his act of generosity, and therefore of the story’s happy ending:

¹⁵⁰ A. M. Kearney, “Truth and Illusion in *The Franklin’s Tale*”, *Essays in Criticism*, 19 (1969), p.249.

¹⁵¹ As Ian Bishop has argued, in the case of Dorigen we have an instance of Chaucer’s interest in presenting his characters’ actions as the result of their particular psychologies, and he interprets Dorigen’s promise to Aurelius as the effect of her fear for the rocks: “the black rocks have not sunk into hell: they have merely sunk into her ‘subconscious’, from which they arise (an upsurge of her ‘derke fantasye’) to cause her irrationally to make her offer to Aurelius.” See Ian Bishop, “Chaucer and the Rhetoric of Consolation”, *Medium Ævum*, 52, (1983), p.47.

Madame, seyth to youre lord Arveragus
That sith I se his grete gentillesse
To yow, and eek *I se wel youre distresse*,
That him were levere han shame (and that were routhe)
Than ye to me sholde breke thus youre trouthe,
I have wel levere evere to suffre wo
Than I departe the love bitwix yow two. (1526-32, italics added)

In his speech to Dorigen, Aurelius seems to see behind her emotionalism the true love that binds her to Arveragus, and his recognition – together with the lengthy treatment that the *Tale* reserves to Dorigen’s *derke fantasye* and *hevinesse* – seems not to dismiss her perspective as silly or totally wrong. By the same token, even though the happy ending does imply that “all is for the best”, the clerks’ perspective is presented as unable to explain man’s emotional nature, and to console human distress effectively. Therefore, it seems that the *Tale* does not want to present Dorigen’s emotionalism as positive or negative in itself, and a happy ending is not achieved by the sole use of reason. Susanna Fein, in her Boethian interpretation of Arveragus and Dorigen’s marriage, argues that

[a] Boethian viewpoint embraces both divine omniscience and human blindness, so having Dorigen represent human despair within a constricted understanding is as fitting as having Arveragus display a high-minded confidence that sending his wife to a would-be lover will turn out well.¹⁵²

The two opposing viewpoints are therefore presented as irreconcilable, but also as complementary. They limit each other, and the predominance of one over the other is only partial or temporary. In her analysis of *De Consolatione Philosophiae* as a Menippean satire, Payne has pointed out that Boethius’s work presents

the same ironic suggestion that no one, neither the masterful Philosophy nor the struggling Boethius, is capable of attaining absolute knowledge, only capable of knowing that the mind must be kept free to continue its search.¹⁵³

If Chaucer’s reading of the *Consolatio* reflected the irony that Payne has detected in her interpretation, we may conclude that an analogous effect is produced in his adaptation of the two Boethian voices to the characters in *The Franklin’s Tale*.

¹⁵² Fein, p.201.

¹⁵³ Payne, pp.59-60.

Morton Bloomfield, commenting on *The Franklin's Tale*, sees a flaw in the happy ending of the story in that the theological question raised by Dorigen in her complaint to God about the rocks remains unanswered.¹⁵⁴ However, it should be considered whether the story is thought to provide an answer to Dorigen's question: the fact that her argument against the rocks is presented as part of a more general discussion about creation and God's relationship with mankind may not imply the fact that the story is constructed upon that specific question, for which the ending should provide an answer. The fact that Dorigen is led, because of her fear for the rocks, to question God's benevolent governance of the world is in line with the previous characterization that the narrator has made of her, in which he does not conceal her inclination toward emotional exaggeration. Through the Boethian reference Dorigen is presented as a character who embodies the limited understanding of reality that leads human beings to draw conclusions that are wrong from the philosophical point of view. As readers, we are therefore allowed to experience the situation from at least two points of view, two opposing voices, in which none seems really to have the better of the other: the know-it-all voice of the clerks does not really console the suffering of the individual, while the voice of the human struggler has limited perception of truth and is led to self-deception.

¹⁵⁴ Bloomfield, "*The Franklin's Tale: A Story of Unanswered Questions*", p.198.

CHAPTER TWO

The Character of Dorigen

2.I Playfulness and earnestness in Dorigen's promise to Aurelius

Dorigen's grief for her husband's absence has important consequences for the development of the tale. In particular, the disappearance of the black rocks that are first mentioned in Dorigen's complaint to God becomes the object of Dorigen's request to Aurelius, made in reply to his avowal of love. The occasion for the encounter between Arveragus's wife and the young squire is provided by a feast held in a garden, an occasion that is supposed to create a diversion for Dorigen in the hope that she may forget about her distant husband for a moment, and enjoy the beauty of the natural environment, the sumptuousness of the banquet prepared and the excitement of dancing. The narrator points out how Dorigen, unable to appreciate the pleasures offered by the gathering, reverts to her usual sulky mood; however, she eventually manages to put her grief aside, and joins the dances. At this point the narrator introduces the character of Aurelius, a young man who has been secretly in love with Dorigen for two years, who gets into conversation with Dorigen, and finds the courage to reveal his love for her. Though perfectly aware of being unrequited, he pleads with Dorigen to have pity on him, and to grant him a merciful word, since, he says, "with a word ye may me sleen or save" (975).

Dorigen's reply to Aurelius starts with an affirmation of her intention of being faithful to Arveragus. In fact, she solemnly expresses that

By thilke God that yaf me soule and lyf,
Ne shal I nevere been untrewre wyf

In word ne werk, as fer as I have wit;
I wol been his to whom that I am knyht. (983-85)

Dorigen's rejection of Aurelius's love is immediate and absolute. As Alan T. Gaylord has pointed out, in these lines Dorigen replicates the promise she made to Arveragus when she consented to marry him: "Sire, I wol be youre humble trewe wyf – / Have heer my trouthe – til that myn herte breste" (758-59).¹⁵⁵ However, after being interrupted for a moment, she adds "in pley" (988):

Aurelie [...] by heighe God above,
Yet wolde I graunte yow to been youre love,
Syn I yow se so pitously complayne.
Looke what day that endelong Britayne
Ye remoeve alle the rokkes, stoon by stoon,
That they ne lette ship ne boot to goon –
I seye, whan ye han maad the coost so clene
Of rokkes that ther nys no stoon ysene,
Thanne wol I love yow best of any man;
Have heer my trouthe, in al that evere I kan. (989-998)

In these lines Dorigen unfortunately promises that she will give her love to Aurelius, if he manages to "remove all the rocks stone by stone", that is, when "there is no stone to see" along the Breton coast. David M. Seaman has pointed out the importance of Dorigen's reformulation of her request, which – supposedly added by her for clarity's sake – ends up making the terms of her promise ambiguous.¹⁵⁶

There is no real contradiction between Dorigen's affirmation of marital faithfulness and her promise to Aurelius. As Gaylord has argued, Dorigen's promise is to be taken as a reaffirmation of her initial rejection of Aurelius's love.¹⁵⁷ In fact, the promise has been made playfully, and, because of the kind of task requested, it is thought by Dorigen, as well as by Aurelius, to rely on an impossible thing: Aurelius's reply to Dorigen, in fact, betrays his disappointment ("Is ther noon oother grace in yow?" [999]), and Dorigen explicitly affirms that she has made such a promise only because she is positive it will never be fulfilled ("No, by that

¹⁵⁵ Alan T. Gaylord, "The Promises in *The Franklin's Tale*", *ELH*, 31 (1964), p.346.

¹⁵⁶ Seaman argues, in fact, that "[i]t is with the second clause – 'That ther nys no stoon ysene' – that Aurelius can be said to comply when he arranges for the rocks to be out of sight." See David M. Seaman, "'As thynketh yow': Conflicting Evidence and the Interpretation of *The Franklin's Tale*", *Medievalia et Humanistica*, 17 (1991), pp.47-48.

¹⁵⁷ Gaylord, p.347.

Lord [...] that maked me! / For wel I woot that it shal never bityde” [1000-01]). At the same time, the irony with which the promise is made is to be forgotten as soon as Aurelius, through the intervention of a magician, manages to make the impossible possible, and goes to Dorigen in order to ask her to keep her word; from that point onwards, Dorigen’s request is to all characters a binding promise, and the breaking of it on the basis of the original intentions is never considered a legitimate solution. Gaylord argues that the high degree of seriousness attributed by all characters in the *Tale* to Dorigen’s promise is symptomatic of the idea of *gentillesse* that informs the tale.¹⁵⁸ He observes, in fact, that the principle at work in the *Tale* behind promises is that of mere literalism:

[o]ne’s words *is* his words, no more, no less. This kind of fanatical literalism cannot take “entente” or connotations into account at all, nor can it observe degrees of earnestness, nor discriminate between various categories of vows and promises according to their intrinsic merit and importance.¹⁵⁹

By separating the voice of the narrator from that of Chaucer, Gaylord attributes to the former this idea of *gentillesse*, and argues that no fourteenth-century author or reader would have accepted it as correct.¹⁶⁰ Therefore, he argues that Chaucer must have been exposing the Franklin’s limited moral view to criticism.¹⁶¹

I agree with Gaylord that the morality at the basis of the mechanism of promising within *The Franklin’s Tale* is basically reduced to a form of literalism, but I do not think that this has much to do with the Franklin and his allegedly limited ethical system. Promises in the *Tale* just provide the characters of the story with events that bring them in front of dilemmas. Dorigen’s rash promise to Aurelius well describes this need: as Gaylord has observed, “[w]ithout this, there would be no plot for lack of complication.”¹⁶² Criticism about the ethical and legal validity of her

¹⁵⁸ Gaylord, p.347.

¹⁵⁹ Gaylord, p.347.

¹⁶⁰ Gaylord embarks on an analysis of texts that are external to *The Franklin’s Tale*, but that, as they are believed to have influenced medieval ethics, must be taken into account for an interpretation of the *Tale*. On the basis of this analysis, he argues that no promises could be held to be as important as, or even take the precedence over, the marital bond, and, therefore, Dorigen’s promise to Aurelius had no validity either in ethical or in legal terms. See Gaylord, pp.350-357.

¹⁶¹ Gaylord, p.365.

¹⁶² Gaylord, p.334.

promise seems to be irrelevant to the purposes of the tale itself. As far as this point is concerned, Kathryn Hume, researching the relationship of *The Franklin's Tale* to Breton lays, has argued that Chaucer may have purposely made the Franklin call his tale a Breton lay in order not to run the risk of being criticized from the point of view of Christian ethics and medieval common sense.¹⁶³ She has observed that, in lays, “promises, especially vows related to love, are a common plot device”, and that “Chaucer’s use of a vow as principal plot device is in accord with lai practice.”¹⁶⁴ Furthermore, Hume has argued that an analysis of the actions that form the plots of Breton lays shows that the morality that is implied in the stories is often at variance with Christian ethics, especially on the point of marriage and adulterous relationships.¹⁶⁵ She ends her essay with the consideration that characters in *The Franklin's Tale* are ultimately literary inventions, and should not be evaluated on the basis of the principles of real life:

Dorigen and Arveragus are not Christian; they are not even “real” medieval people. Rather, they are pagan, and they are literary characters in a highly artificial, highly conventionalized art form. Their every action should no more be judged by strict Christian standards than should the deeds of the heroes of folktales or medieval romances.¹⁶⁶

The fact that Dorigen makes her promise to Aurelius playfully, and that her promise is to be taken seriously later on may be due therefore to a need that is intrinsic to the plot. In the tale, questions are never raised about the validity of Dorigen’s promise, even by Dorigen herself, and the principle upon which all morality depends is whether or not people are able to keep their word. In his interpretation of the scene in which Dorigen tells Arveragus about her promise to Aurelius, and her husband orders her to go and keep her word, Gaylord observes, in fact, how in Arveragus’s line “Trouthe is the hyeste thyng that man may kepe” (1479) we are supposed to read “the moral assumption behind Dorigen’s *gentillesse*” – the very motto that is now mentioned as

¹⁶³ Kathryn Hume, “Why Chaucer calls the *Franklin's Tale* a Breton Lai”, *PQ*, 51 (1972), p.374.

¹⁶⁴ Hume, “Why Chaucer calls the *Franklin's Tale* a Breton Lai”, p.370.

¹⁶⁵ Hume, “Why Chaucer calls the *Franklin's Tale* a Breton Lai”, p.371.

¹⁶⁶ Hume, “Why Chaucer calls the *Franklin's Tale* a Breton Lai”, p.378.

the fundamental principle guiding him [i.e., Arveragus] in his heart-rending decision: personal agony must be overlooked, one's word is one's word, and a promise must be kept – "biheste is dette".¹⁶⁷

Arveragus, therefore, just gives voice to a principle that has already been at work in the tale, and which seems to be *the* principle upon which the plot of the story depends. As far as this point is concerned, Hume argues that

[h]olding one's promise whatever may result is a literary *donné*, a folklore motif. Its purpose is to allow the plot to unfold, and it should be interpreted aesthetically as a narrative device, not theologically.¹⁶⁸

W. A. Davenport, too, supports the idea that Dorigen's oath is valid, and that arguments against its validity should not depend on the legal or ethical conditions under which promises were believed to be licit in the Middle Ages, and this is because of two reasons: the historical distance that separates the characters portrayed from medieval society; the particular freedom that is granted to Dorigen as a married woman by Arveragus at the beginning of the tale:

[b]y creating special conditions within the marriage and emphasising the historical setting, he [i.e., Chaucer] excludes from the world of the narrative the normal fourteenth-century social and religious criteria about binding oaths.¹⁶⁹

What is to evaluate, therefore, is not the moral or legal terms in which promises could be seen as binding in the Middle Ages, but the way in which Chaucer managed to adapt a narrative device – a promise that, as such, must be kept at all costs – to his characters.

In the scene of the garden mentioned above, Chaucer had to reconcile the character of a devoted wife, whom he has previously portrayed as being desperately worried for her distant husband, with the motif of a promise whose consequences go far beyond the expectations of both parts involved. This is achieved by imagining Dorigen giving her secret wish – that the rocks may disappear for the sake of her husband's safe return – away in the form of a task whose fulfilment would grant Aurelius what he most desires, but that, at the same time, since it is thought to be an impossibility, should simply prevent her would-be lover from fancying her any longer. Perhaps, one of the most difficult points to interpret in the scene is the adverbial "in pley"

¹⁶⁷ Gaylord, pp.338-39.

¹⁶⁸ Hume, "Why Chaucer calls the *Franklin's Tale* a Breton Lai", p.378.

¹⁶⁹ W. A. Davenport, *Chaucer: Complaint and Narrative*, Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1988, p.187.

(988) – used to describe the way in which Dorigen utters her promise to Aurelius – which is significantly at variance with the seriousness that characterizes the first part of Dorigen’s reply, not to mention Dorigen’s speeches in general. The interpretation is even more complicated because, after pronouncing her promise, and affirming the impossibility of the task requested, she launches into a severe attack on adultery. With reference to Aurelius’s love for her and his request for pity, Dorigen says to her suitor:

Lat swiche folies out of youre herte slyde.
What deyntee sholde a man han in his lyf
For to go love another mannes wyf,
That hath hir body whan so that hym liketh? (1002-05)

Dorigen having concluded with this condemnation of adulterous love, Aurelius can do nothing but take Dorigen’s rejection as irrevocable: he has to face the fact that the removal of the rocks is an impossible task, and therefore that there is no possibility for his love to be requited. In his last words to Dorigen, Aurelius is soon to meet his death, sanctioned by Dorigen’s allegedly merciless reply.

Michael Calabrese sees Dorigen’s words “as an inflammation of the male rivalry that Aurelius is conducting”; noticing that Dorigen transforms Aurelius’s rhetorical avowal of love into an explicitly sexual question – “what delight could you possibly have in loving a woman whom another man can have whenever he likes”, as Calabrese paraphrases – he argues that Dorigen “only encourages Aurelius to commit himself to achieving the ‘impossible’ and to have what his rival freely enjoys.”¹⁷⁰ Calabrese sees the focus of the plot in the male competition, especially in the character of Aurelius; the character of Dorigen, he argues, is the trigger of this competition:

[h]owever adorned Dorigen’s performance may be throughout the tale with tears and sorrow, Chaucer wants us to see the engine of desire and the moral culpability beneath her “play,” her colorful lamentation, and her perpetual complaint.¹⁷¹

¹⁷⁰ Michael Calabrese, “Chaucer’s Dorigen and Boccaccio’s Female Voices”, *Studies in the Age of Chaucer*, 29 (2007), p.264.

¹⁷¹ Calabrese, p.265.

Calabrese's unsympathetic interpretation of Dorigen is mostly due to his reading of Dorigen's reply to Aurelius's advances; though her purpose is not explicitly expressed in the *Tale*, he argues that

the result is tangible, and her dangerous play abuses the affectations of a man doing the single most dangerous thing a wife can do with an unwanted suitor. She gives him hope.¹⁷²

However, if we are to judge Dorigen's intentions by the effect of her words on Aurelius, the result seems rather the opposite. In fact, at the end of Dorigen's reply, Aurelius's reaction is not hopeful at all: "Aurelius ful ofte soore siketh; / Wo was Aurelie whan that he this herde" (1006-07), and sees himself condemned by Dorigen to imminent death; the narrator insists on his hopelessness by contrasting the general euphoria among the people leaving the party with Aurelius's state of mind ("And hoom they goon in joye and in solas, / Save oonly wrecche Aurelius, allas!", 1019-20); the story, then, goes on with Aurelius's prayer to Phoebus, in which, in his wishing that the deities may collaborate on the removal of the rocks, he shares with Dorigen in her complaint to God not only the same wilful desire but also the desperate awareness that what he is asking for is hardly going to be satisfied. It is true that, later on, Aurelius engages a magician to fulfil Dorigen's request, but this is due to the intervention of his brother, who, well-informed about the nature of the problems that affect Aurelius, and worried about his extremely bad conditions – Aurelius's grief forces him to lie in bed for no less than two years –, eventually is reminded of an old acquaintance, a fellow at Orléans, who secretly read about magic, and who, by means of his art as an illusionist, could help Aurelius to have what he most desires. As a result, the fact that at a certain point in the tale Dorigen's wish appears as feasible, and therefore as the hopeful answer of a lady to her would-be suitor, is the consequence of events that go far beyond the scope of the characters' intentions and expectations at the moment in which the promise is pronounced; to talk about Dorigen's playfulness as a culpable act is to pass over an aspect on which Chaucer seems, actually, to have been particularly clear. Alison

¹⁷² Calabrese, p.288.

Ganze, who sees how Aurelius's advances are patently absurd to Dorigen – Dorigen's "fynal answer" (987) that she will never be unfaithful to her husband determines the way in which the subsequent parts of her reply are to be interpreted –, argues that Dorigen's promise is clearly meant to be "a playful way of saying 'when pigs fly', and Aurelius should know it" – which does not imply that it has no validity as a promise.¹⁷³ Dorigen's promise is therefore read as a rejection of Aurelius's request both by Dorigen and by Aurelius, but with an important difference: while the former intends her rejection to be absolute, the latter thinks that it is valid as long as her request remains unfulfilled.

The fact that Dorigen's promise can be perceived as valid and, at the same time, as not contradicting her sincere intention of being a faithful wife is one of the difficulties that Chaucer may have had to face when he wrote *The Franklin's Tale*. On the one hand, the promise could have exposed the dubiousness of Dorigen's fidelity as Arveragus's wife and her affection as his lady, if it had been presented as a serious task that would put Aurelius's love to the test; on the other, if the promise had been nothing but a joke, the rest of the story – Dorigen's complaint about the impossible dilemma she has to face and Arveragus's grief for ordering his wife to go to Aurelius – would have appeared comic rather than tragic. Chaucer therefore had to balance the playful intention with which the promise is made by Dorigen with the dire consequences that her promise is going to have for the happiness of her marriage. This is achieved, on the one hand, by applying the conventions of courtly romance to Dorigen and Aurelius's dialogue in the garden, and, on the other, by making Dorigen's request to Aurelius about the disappearance of the rocks echo her fear for her husband's safety.

¹⁷³ Ganze imagines that, when Dorigen has to face the fact that Aurelius has accomplished her task in some way, her fear is that if she were not to keep her word, Aurelius would expose her to defamation by making her promise known. Ganze's point relies on an interpretation of line 1362 in which Dorigen expresses her fear of losing her name as she weighs up the pros and cons of committing suicide to free herself from the impossible dilemma of being faithful to Arveragus or keeping her promise to Aurelius. In this way, Ganze explains why Dorigen's promise is seen as valid in the tale, even though it is not serious and goes against the conditions in which promises were correctly made according to medieval thought. See Alison Ganze, "'My Trouthe for to Holde – Allas, Allas!': Dorigen and Honor in the *Franklin's Tale*", *Chaucer Review*, 42 (2008), pp.318-19. However, as Dorigen's fear of losing her name at line 1362 could be referred also to the possibility of being publicly known as an adulterous wife, I relate the validity of Dorigen's promise to the reasons I have mentioned before.

The Franklin's Tale's indebtedness to courtly love is evident from the beginning of the story, when Arveragus is introduced as “a knight that loved and dide his payne / To serve a lady in his beste wyse” (730-31).¹⁷⁴ Aurelius, too, is portrayed as the typical courtly lover, who is in love with a woman but dares not reveal himself because he considers her unattainable. In making his avowal of love to Dorigen, Aurelius appeals to his lady's compassion, her *pitee*, for his sufferings, advising her to be on her guard, “For with a word ye may me sleen or save” (975). Richard F. Green, in his analysis of the way in which characters talk about love in *Troilus and Criseyde*, has pointed out the conventional nature of ideas such as the notion that a man may die of unrequited love, arguing that these expressions, clearly understood as metaphorical by late medieval readers, were part of the polite language used in conversation between a man and a woman of the noble society; however, he observes, by the late fourteenth century, this kind of language had become highly ambiguous, so that courtiers would make use of this conventional imagery with the purpose of covering their attempts at seducing ladies under the appearance of innocent good manners.¹⁷⁵ Green concludes with a reflection on how this blurred distinction between earnestness and playfulness in conversation influenced medieval authors' literary works:

[i]n the hands of a skilful poet, this ambiguity inherent in his material might become a fruitful source of irony; it provided him with ample raw material for mannered comedy, and, at a deeper level, allowed him to explore the inevitable and pathetic inability of the human to contain the ideal.¹⁷⁶

This ambiguity may be at work also in Dorigen and Aurelius's dialogue in the garden. At line 925 – the point in which the Franklin introduces the character of Aurelius as one of the men who dance in front of Dorigen at the party – the focus passes from Dorigen to Aurelius, and the reader is informed about Aurelius's two-year secret love for Arveragus's wife. We are induced to

¹⁷⁴ C. Hugh Holman, in his interpretation of *The Merchant's Tale* and *The Franklin's Tale* as satires of courtly love, mentions the description of Arveragus's courtship as well as the character of Aurelius as evidence of the influence of courtly love tradition in the *Tale*. See C. Hugh Holman, “Courtly Love in the *Merchant's* and the *Franklin's Tales*”, *ELH*, 18 (1951), p.249.

¹⁷⁵ Richard F. Green, “Troilus and the Game of Love”, *Chaucer Review*, 13 (1979), pp.201-20, reprinted in Stephen A. Barney, ed., *Chaucer. Troilus and Criseyde with facing-page Il Filostrato*, London and New York: Norton, 2006, pp.522-28.

¹⁷⁶ Green, p.528.

see dancing and talking with Dorigen as Aurelius's attempts at courting the lady, but only because, as readers, we share Aurelius's point of view. Dorigen, on the contrary, has never had the slightest suspicion that Aurelius might be in love with her, and she enjoys his companionship simply for the sake of friendship and good manners, as the narrator explicitly says:

By cause that he was hire neighebour,
And was a man of worshipe and honour,
And hadde yknowen hym of tyme yoore,
They fille in speche (961-64).

The situation seems to be constructed so as to introduce ambiguity and misunderstanding. In fact, Aurelius takes advantage of the moment to tell her of his secret affection:

Madame, [...] by God that this world made,
So that I wiste it myghte youre herte glade,
I wolde that day that youre Arveragus
Wente over the see, that I, Aurelius,
Hadde went ther nevere I sholde have come agayn.
For wel I woot *my servyce* is in vayn;
My gerdon is but brestyng of myn herte.
Madame, *reweth upon my peynes smerte*;
For with a word *ye may me sleen or save*.
Heere at youre feet God wolde that I were grave!
I ne have as now no leyser moore to seye;
Have *mercy*, sweete, or ye wol me *deye*! (967-78, italics added).

In the first lines of his speech, Aurelius displays a sympathetic attitude to Dorigen's grief for her husband's absence, saying that he would have left for England instead of Arveragus if he knew that this could make her feel better. However, when he adds that if he had left he would have never come back, it transpires that Aurelius regrets having stayed in Brittany also, and probably first and foremost, because his love for Dorigen has been completely unnoticed and unrequited by her. All that is left for him to do is asking Dorigen to take pity on him and be merciful, putting the responsibility of his life in her hands.

At this point, Aurelius's real intentions behind his courtly behaviour with Dorigen at the party are revealed to her, and the fact that Aurelius's love sounds totally unexpected to her accounts for the manifest incredulity implied in her rhetorical question at the beginning of her reply: "Is this youre wyl, [...] and sey ye thus?" (980). Her immediate affirmation of her irremovable decision of being faithful "to whom that I am knyght" (986) accounts for the fact that

Dorigen's fidelity to Arveragus is her sole real concern in the dialogue. However, Dorigen adds a promise that is going to disclose a possibility for Aurelius, and that makes her resemble the conventional courtly lady who is moved by *pitié* on her lover's suffering.

At the basis of the dilemma that Dorigen has to face because of her promise to Aurelius there is a difference in the use of conventional language and behaviour between Dorigen and her would-be lover. While Aurelius acts and speaks in a way that is consonant with analogous lovers in Chaucerian narratives – incidentally, only at the end of the story, he is allowed to grow as a character when he releases Dorigen from her promise; the fact that his act of generosity in the end is totally unexpected accounts for the conventionality of his character in the rest of the story –¹⁷⁷ the character of Dorigen is allowed to depart from what is usually expected of a woman of her rank in a story of courtly love. In effect, Dorigen is presented at the beginning as the traditional lady of courtly romance, but through her marriage to Arveragus, she evolves into a much less conventional kind of character, who has to take decisions that involve conflicting codes of behaviour: the conventional code of courtly love, according to which a lady is supposed to have compassion for her would-be lover, and the ethics of conjugal love, according to which a wife's main concern is to maintain herself true to her marital oath of fidelity.¹⁷⁸ Susan Crane has argued that

Dorigen attempts to parody the role of haughty lady with Aurelius, revealing that role to be no more than a sham construction from which she herself is alienated. She chooses to

¹⁷⁷ Holman, too, has pointed out Aurelius's character indebtedness to courtly love conventions, observing how the squire in *The Franklin's Tale* is very much like the one in *The Merchant's Tale*, if we do not take into account the act of generosity that the former performs at the end of his own tale: "Aurelius [...] is so similar in actions and motives to Damien that the feeling that they are radically different characters comes from the fact that Aurelius (unhappily from his viewpoint) is given an opportunity to be generous and Damien is confronted with no such dilemma". See Holman, p.249. Though I believe that a difference between the two characters is also due to the different ways in which Aurelius and Damien are presented by their respective narrators, Holman correctly sees that Aurelius is to play the role of the "model courtly lover".

¹⁷⁸ Malcolm Golding sees in the conflict of promises presented in *The Franklin's Tale* the representation of "two kinds of rightness or honour: that created by and maintained in the story world of the Tale itself, and that demanded by the code of real life". He maintains that this duplicity of ethical behaviour is also reflected in the two different kinds of love that the *Tale* presents: while Aurelius's love is "essentially adolescent" and represents more genuinely courtly love, Arveragus's is "more mature" and develops from courtly into conjugal love. See Malcolm Golding, "The Importance of Keeping 'Trouthe' in *The Franklin's Tale*", *Medium Ævum*, 39 (1970), pp.307,310. On the basis of Golding's interpretation, we can see how Dorigen's promise is conceived in a way that it allows both courtly and conjugal love, and the two kinds of honour related, to remain at work throughout the story.

distance herself from convention, but Aurelius takes her parody seriously and forces her back into the position of courted lady.¹⁷⁹

This departure from conventions is a problem in the *Tale* because it is not understood by Aurelius: Dorigen is being playful, while Aurelius is not. The latter lives and speaks within these conventions: his character is entirely contained in the role of a courtly lover, who is consumed by the desire for the lady he loves, and whose sole purpose is to be requited; he is not able to understand the reason behind Dorigen's rejection, so that, at the end of their dialogue, he is disappointed not because he has to face the fact that Dorigen is not willing to betray her husband, but because he does not see how he is going to fulfil the terms of the promise. On the contrary, Dorigen, through her playful promise, proves that she is so well aware of the way in which conventions work that she is able to use them to subvert them, though with unexpectedly tragic consequences: she frees herself from the charge of being insensitive to Aurelius's love because, by means of her promise, she appears to Aurelius as if she were giving him a task to fulfil in order to gain her love, but at the same time – the task being apparently impossible – she makes fun of this conventional way of dealing with a potential suitor.¹⁸⁰

Dorigen's reply to Aurelius's wooing is a parody of a promise of love and the sole kind of mercy she is willing to grant her would-be suitor. Her playfulness is due to the fact that she is making fun of Aurelius's request to be merciful: the fact that Aurelius has seriously hoped that she may reciprocate his love and that she may betray her husband with him is so patently absurd for her that she is led to transform her rejection into an equally absurd promise. Though Dorigen is evidently mocking Aurelius's pretension to being her suitor, she has to face the fact that Aurelius, with his question "Is ther noon oother grace in yow?" (999), fails to see the reason of her rejection, and she is forced to state it "in surprisingly frank, even churlish terms", as Hansen

¹⁷⁹ Susan Crane, "The Franklin as Dorigen", *Chaucer Review*, 24 (1990), p.246.

¹⁸⁰ Elaine Tuttle Hansen points out that Dorigen, in her reply to Aurelius, shows that she is too-well aware of the rules that are at work in courtly love: "[s]uch excessive knowledge [...] can hardly reinstall her in the position of the perfect, bodiless courtly lady whose devotion to Arveragus is altogether self-chosen, nor can it reassure Aurelius that he knows how to act the part of the proper courtly lover in this tricky situation." See Elaine Tuttle Hansen, *Chaucer and the Fictions of Gender*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992, <http://ark.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/ft2s2004t2/>, p.276.

has observed.¹⁸¹ To Dorigen, Aurelius's love is questionable in that it is an attempt at adultery: in her reproachful remark – What deyntee sholde a man han in his lyf / For to go love another mannes wyf, / That hath hir body whan so that hym liketh? (1003-05) – she reduces Aurelius's courtly wooing to a base attempt at making love to another man's wife, dismissing it as a foolish delight. Hansen argues that

Dorigen makes it clear that in his attempt to seduce a married woman, Aurelius, the very type of the courtly lover as that type is repeatedly defined in the *Tales*, is seeking [...] a woman whose body is not his exclusively, nor his by rights.¹⁸²

The shift in Dorigen's tone – from playful promising to severe scolding – reflects the fact that Dorigen, in front of Aurelius's insistent advances, cannot stand the pose of the courtly lady any longer, and launches into a condemnation of Aurelius's love as a very stupid thing: “Lat swiche folies out of youre herte slyde” (1002). We may read in Dorigen's reproach the unmasking of an attempted seduction perpetrated under the appearance of gentle companionship. Even though Aurelius's portrayal is not that of an unrepentant seducer, and shares the other characters' semblance of gentleness, he is asking a married woman to commit adultery through the dangerous ambiguity of courtly manners that Green has pointed out. In the love relationships presented in *The Franklin's Tale* Chaucer may have wanted to investigate the advantages, as well as the shortcomings, of courtly love: on the one hand, through Arveragus's wooing and the unusual liberty that Dorigen is granted as a wife, courtly love accounts for a happy marital relationship in which both parts are equally subjected to each other's will, and reciprocal sentimental affection is maintained; on the other, in Aurelius's approach to Dorigen, courtly love makes it possible for an individual to threaten the happiness of a married couple for the selfish satisfaction of his desire.

So far, we have treated Dorigen's promise as a playful way to get around an unexpected attempt of seduction by a courtly lover. Within her playfulness, however, there is a certain degree of seriousness. Davenport, observing that Dorigen's task to Aurelius is related to her wish

¹⁸¹ Hansen, p.275.

¹⁸² Hansen, p.276.

about the rocks previously expressed within her complaint to God, has argued that “[e]ven in her moment of ‘pley’, Chaucer gives his heroine a desperate sincerity.”¹⁸³ This sincerity hints at the fact that the cause of the distress that Dorigen is to endure because of her promise may be her emotionalism. Dorigen’s fear about the rocks, which the *Tale* presents as the effect of her desire for her husband, is revealed as an obsession that, as such, escapes any rational control, coming back to her mind in the most unexpected and dangerous ways. Anne Thompson Lee argues that Dorigen

is so consumed with anxiety that the only thing she can think of to say to Aurelius relates to her obsessive fear of the rocks.¹⁸⁴

Dorigen therefore displays rather a bitter kind of playfulness, mostly due to a moment of frailty in which she expresses a serious concern that has been affecting her for a long time. The fact that the *Tale* wants the reader to see this lack of control as problematic, though common and understandable, seems to be underscored by the narrator’s comment at the beginning of the story, when he praises a patient attitude to life because “Wyn, wo, or chaungynge of complexioun / Causeth ful ofte to doon amys or speken” (782-83). His pointing at the fact that emotional imbalance may lead people to do or say something wrong perfectly applies to Dorigen’s behaviour in the garden.

Michael J. Wright, pointing out that Dorigen’s peculiarity as a Chaucerian heroine consists in the moral autonomy as a character she is granted, has underlined her “unusual individuality”, arguing that isolation – a condition which the description of her unquenchable grief at her husband’s absence epitomizes – is the price she must pay for her status of autonomous individual; by relating Dorigen’s unfortunate promise to her “obsessional concern with the beloved”, Wright maintains that Dorigen’s act of promising in front of her would-be lover’s proposal is symptomatic of “her intention to treat Aurelius [...] as an individual, with his

¹⁸³ Davenport, p.185.

¹⁸⁴ Anne Thompson Lee, “‘A Woman True and Fair’: Chaucer’s Portrayal of Dorigen in the *Franklin’s Tale*”, *Chaucer Review*, 19, (1984), p.173.

own feelings to consider”.¹⁸⁵ Wright’s observations shed light on the motivations that are behind Dorigen’s promise to Aurelius. The act of promising, in effect, takes the form of an act of generosity: Dorigen, moved by sympathy for Aurelius’s sufferings, is led to put the happiness of her married life at risk in order not to dismiss her would-be suitor with a brutal rejection. Therefore, her promise is, however impossible the assigned task may be, a reflection of the fact that she is sincerely sorry for Aurelius’s grief because she, too, is suffering because of her unfulfilled desire. The seriousness with which even Dorigen is to take her promise after Aurelius’s fulfilment of her request is exactly the result of the fact that the very act of promising is motivated by a heartfelt sympathy for the sufferings of someone who is in despair because of love as much as she is.

Dorigen and Aurelius, in fact, present a number of affinities. Jamie C. Fumo, who notices parallels between the two characters in their own prayers and in their shared request that God may clear the Breton coast of the rocks, as well as in their tendency to avert the death they previously seem to wish for, has argued that

Dorigen is vulnerable to the designs of Aurelius in part because he is a projection of her own worst tendencies, and is in some ways a fitting complement to her.¹⁸⁶

I would add that one significant parallel between the two characters consists in their lack of patience as lovers, that is, in their common dependency on their beloved husband and lady, respectively. The *Tale*, in fact, significantly explores Dorigen’s grief at her husband’s absence and Aurelius’s lovesickness, and seems to imply that the potential for tragedy in the story – not to mention the possibility of ‘redemption’ at the end – is the result of a mutual need for somebody else’s compassion. Aurelius needs Dorigen’s sympathy to put an end to his suffering

¹⁸⁵ Wright’s interpretation of the scene of the garden points to “Aurelius’s blurring of the distinction between formal and fully intended eroticism” – a distinction of which Dorigen, on the contrary, is perfectly aware when she utters her promise. Wright, who highlights the conventional nature of the companionship between Dorigen and Aurelius in the garden, and who observes how Dorigen is unaware of Aurelius’s real intentions behind his gentleness, has pointed out how the latter eventually keeps in mind Dorigen’s reply “in the absolute manner of oracy, as a rash promise, rather than in the contextualized, interpretation-seeking mode of literacy”. Michael J. Wright, “Isolation and Individuality in the *Franklin’s Tale*”, *Studia Neophilologica*, 70 (1998), pp.183-84.

¹⁸⁶ Jamie C. Fumo, “Aurelius’ Prayer, *Franklin’s Tale* 1031-79: Sources and Analogues”, *Neophilologus*, 88 (2004), p.626.

caused by unrequited love, while Dorigen needs Aurelius's pity in the end to be released from her promise.

If it were not for Dorigen's fear for the rocks and her desperate concern for her distant husband, there would be no playful promise and no pitiful reaction to Aurelius's request. Therefore, it seems that complications in the story are generated by Dorigen's mind and her indulgence in tragic thoughts. In fact, no external circumstances intervene and destroy the happiness of Dorigen and Arveragus's marriage, and Dorigen's grief seems to be the product of her personal inability to cope with the temporary separation from her husband. The adversities Dorigen has to face, therefore, do not derive from blind chance but from the lack of confidence that informs her character – a perception of the possible dangers that may affect her conjugal relationship, which is so exaggerated that it proves to be *the* real danger that puts her marriage at risk.

2.II Dorigen's complaint to Fortune: her list of famous women

After Aurelius tells Dorigen that he has removed the rocks as she asked, and urges her to keep her promise (1311-38), the *Tale* presents Dorigen in a situation of distress that is, to a certain extent, similar to the moment that followed Arveragus's departure for England. In fact, Dorigen is left alone again – Arveragus has gone out of town for some time, and there is no mention of her friends –, and she is brought back to her sorrowful mood: “She wepeth, wailleth, al a day or two, / And swowneth, that it routhe was to see” (1348-49). It is, again, fear that makes her despair; this time, however, she is afraid of her own life, not her husband's, and her worries are not due to allegedly evil rocks created by God for obscure ends but to a promise that she made herself. Again, Dorigen is allowed to give her thoughts direct expression in the form of a complaint:

Allas, [...] on thee, Fortune, I pleyne,
That unwar wrapped hast me in thy cheyne,
Fro which t'escape woot I no socour,

Save oonly deeth or elles dishonour (1355-58).

In the opening lines of her complaint, Dorigen presents herself as a person who has been chained by Fortune. The reference to Fortune and the idea of imprisonment that is implied in Dorigen's words may have been suggested by the incipit of *De Consolatione Philosophiae*, in which Boethius bewails his present state of prisoner and blames Fortune for it. However, in the *Consolatio* Boethius's imprisonment is not solely the condition of having been sentenced to death for treason, but also a metaphor of a particular state of the mind. This is in fact the sense of the lines spoken by Lady Philosophy immediately after her appearance:

his nekke is pressyd with hevvy cheynes, and bereth his chere enclyned adoun for the grete weyghte, and is constreyned to loken on the fool erthe! (I, m.2, 29-32)¹⁸⁷

In this passage the chains whose heaviness forces Boethius's neck to the ground are an image of his present inability to look up at the sky as he used to do in the past, i.e., to understand the ultimate causes of the world going beyond the appearances.

The notion of chaining is associated to Fortune in the first prose of the second book of the *Consolatio*, in which Philosophy describes Fortune's nature and how she works. Fortune is the personification of the insubstantial nature of worldly things. Man's unexpected fall from prosperity to adversity is described by Philosophy as the result of Fortune's agency, who subjects people to her lordship through lures, only to forsake them suddenly and for no particular reasons, depriving them of the gifts she has bestowed. The dependency of man on Fortune is illustrated through the image of the yoke: as Philosophy says to Boethius, "thou hast oonys put thy nekke undir the yok of hir" (II. p1, 94-95).¹⁸⁸

From Philosophy's viewpoint the complaint is symptomatic of perspective on things that must be corrected: the wise man accepts anything Fortune offers him with detachment; he is able to enjoy prosperity without being dependent on it, and to endure adversity without losing the

¹⁸⁷ Chaucer's translation is close to the Latin original: "Et pressus grauibus colla catenis / Decliuemque gerens pondere uultum / Cogitur, heu, stolidam cernere terram" ("with his neck compassed in ponderous chains; / His countenance with heavy weight declined, / Him to behold the sullen earth constrains" [I. m2, 25-27]).

¹⁸⁸ The image of the yoke is identical in the Latin text: "cum semel iugo eius colla submiseris" ("when once thou hast submitted thy neck to her yoke" [II. p1, 51]).

hope in a positive change of his condition. The notion that Fortune has put her chains on Dorigen signifies her difficulty in coping with the unexpected disappearance of the rocks, maintaining herself calm and hopeful about the development of events. Significantly, Dorigen does not complain to Aurelius because he has succeeded in the enterprise, but lays all the blame on Fortune, a metaphysical entity, as she did in her former complaint, in which she attacked God for the creation of the rocks. As she releases human beings of all responsibility for their own happiness or distress, she sees herself as an innocent victim of an unjust power. Her unawareness of her imprisonment through Fortune's chains is here used as a metaphor to indicate her pessimistic perception of her situation, according to which things have developed to her own disadvantage, and there is no honourable way out except death:

But natheles yet have I levere to lese
My lif than of my body to have a shame
Or knowe myselfen fals, or lese my name;
And with my deth I may be quyt, ywis. (1360-63)

Dorigen's complaint develops into a list of Greek and Roman women whom she looks at with either compassion for their tragic destinies or with admiration for their exemplary behaviour in terms of chastity and fidelity to their husbands or sweethearts; however, the models of moral integrity illustrated by these famous women of pagan antiquity are diverse, and it is not easy to identify a unifying principle that may account for the choice of the *exempla* and the order in which Dorigen presents them in her soliloquy. Dorigen starts with three stories of virgin suicides: Phidon's daughters' drowning into a well to escape the violence of thirty tyrants, the killing of fifty Lacedaemonian maidens by the men of Messene because they refused their sexual aggression, and Stymphalis's violent death in the temple of Diana in which she had sought shelter from an attempt of rape by her would-be lover (1367-94). Each of these stories involves women who killed themselves or let themselves be killed in order to preserve their virginity. On the one hand, these stories put emphasis on male wickedness and brutality: the men involved are portrayed as villains whose wickedness is a reflection of the "foul delyt" (1372) or "lecherye" (1381) that they want to satisfy – in the case of Phidon's daughters, they force their victims to

dance naked “in hir fadres blood” (1373) in front of them, as part of their entertainment. On the other, these young women are portrayed as completely defenceless – in the case of Phidon’s daughters and Stymphalis, their fathers have just been killed –, terrified of their would-be rapists – “thise woful maydens, ful of drede” (1375) –, strenuous defenders of their virginity – Stymphalis seeks refuge in the temple of Diana from the tyrant Aristoclides, and is killed as she keeps the image of the goddess in her hands –. Therefore, the ethical argument that is behind all these stories is based on a neat distinction between perpetrators and victims, i.e., between male offenders, object of Dorigen’s severe reproach, “God yeve hem mischaunce!” (1374), and female victims, who stir Dorigen’s compassion and admiration for their “good entente” (1383).

Dorigen introduces the second part of her list (1399-1418) with the following consideration:

Now sith that maydens hadden swich despit
 To been defouled with mannes foul delit,
 Wel oghte a wyf rather hirselves slee
 Than be defouled, as it thynketh me. (1395-98)

Her comment makes explicit the opposition between maidens and men that has been traced so far, and the implication that the maidens mentioned preferred to die instead of subjecting themselves to rape. This *should* be, Dorigen argues, even truer for a married woman, and she provides stories of exemplary suicidal wives: Hasdrubal’s wife, Lucretia and Abradates’s wife. In these stories, too, emphasis is put on the brutality of the suicides – Hasdrubal’s wife threw herself into the fire with her children, Abradates’s wife slew herself letting her blood run into her dead husband’s wounds –, as well as on male immoral nature – Hasdrubal’s wife committed suicide to eschew the Romans’ “vileinye” (1404). However, in this series of *exempla*, which should apparently involve only wives, Dorigen inserts between the *exempla* of Lucretia and of Abradates’s wife the story of the seven maidens of Miletus who killed themselves in order not to be raped by the Galatians, which should have been presented in the first part of the list. Moreover, even among the *exempla* of good wives there is heterogeneity: unlike what happened to Hasdrubal’s and Abradates’s wives, who both lost their husbands and killed themselves in

order not to be exposed to the risk of being the object of other men's desire, Lucretia is not a widow, and she commits suicide *after* being raped by her offender:

Hath nat Lucesse yslayn hirself, allas,
At Rome, whan that she oppressed was
Of Tarquyn, for hire thoughte it was a shame
To lyven whan she hadde lost hir name? (1405-08)

Her decision provides an example of a suicide which is committed not to prevent an attempted rape, but to put an end to the sense of shame that affected her for having been raped.

Donald C. Baker has pointed out how the *exemplum* of Lucretia introduces a kind of suicide that is different from the previous cases because it was committed after her defilement, and has argued that this *exemplum* is symptomatic of the fact that Dorigen, in the course of her complaint, is gradually led to change her dilemma from *whether* she should commit suicide to *when* she should commit it, that is, before or after rape.¹⁸⁹ Baker correctly highlights the difference in kind of Lucretia's suicide, but I do not think that Dorigen is considering the possibility of committing suicide after eventually being defiled by Aurelius. The fact that the *exemplum* of Lucretia is followed by the stories of the virgins of Miletus – an *exemplum* that not only is at variance with that of Lucretia because they commit suicide before rape, but also because Dorigen goes back to stories involving virgins – may be significant of the fact that Chaucer wanted the reader to see Dorigen's despairing attempt at finding a solution to her dilemma through the examples of ancient women as problematic.

After the seventh *exemplum*, that of Abradates's wife, Dorigen says that she has mentioned a sufficient number of women who preferred to die rather than being defiled, and seems to have reached a conclusion with her list:

What sholde I mo ensamples heerof sayn,
Sith that so manye han hemselven slayn
Wel rather than they wolde defouled be?
I wol conclude that it is bet for me
To sleen myself than been defouled thus.
I wol be trewe unto Arveragus,
Or rather sleen myself in som manere (1419-25).

¹⁸⁹ Donald C. Baker, "A Crux in Chaucer's *Franklin's Tale*: Dorigen's Complaint", *JEGP*, 60 (1961), p.62.

However, what seemed to be intended by Dorigen to be a conclusion to her complaint and a confirmation of her initial willingness to commit suicide turns out to be only a pause, and Dorigen launches into a new list of women. It is as if Dorigen were afraid to reach a conclusion to her list: the more examples come to her mind, the more time she takes to postpone her suicide. The first four are maidens who committed suicide in order not to be forced into losing their virginity or to make amends for their unwilling loss of virginity: Demotion's daughter, Seedasus's daughters and two Theban maidens. Then, Dorigen adds one *exemplum* of a woman who killed herself after her husband's death: Niceratus's wife. The two groups of *exempla* resemble the former division of maidens and widows who killed themselves respectively to preserve their virginity or to maintain themselves chaste; however, information is more compressed, and Dorigen does not indulge in details, so that the overall effect is that of an accumulation of *exempla* which are merely mentioned to postpone the ending of the complaint rather than to make Dorigen progress in her reasoning about suicide.

In the last part of her complaint Dorigen radically cuts out information about famous women to the extent that in many cases she limits herself to mention them merely by their names without even explaining how these women proved to be exemplary wives. This last group – Alcibiades's concubine, Alcestis, Penelope, Laodamia, Portia, Artemisia, Teuta, Bilia, Rhodogune and Valeria – is composed of women among whom only Laodamia and Artemisia can conform to the pattern of wives previously presented, that is, widows who chose to commit suicide. The other *exempla*, in fact, present a kind of exemplary chastity and fidelity which does not involve suicide either as a way of eschewing the possibility of being unwillingly seduced by men, or as a way of redressing the honour lost because of male violence. However, also these stories seem to be mentioned by Dorigen to remind her that female chastity does require some kind of sacrifice, and, therefore, they do not dissuade her from the intention of committing suicide.

Dorigen's complaint to Fortune is a passage in which Chaucer makes use of textual sources that are not meant to be related with the narrative he is working on. In fact, Dorigen's series of *exempla* is an adaptation of a passage from Jerome's *Adversus Jovinianum* (*Against Jovinian*), as critics have argued.¹⁹⁰ As the editors V. A. Kolve and Glending Olson explain, the treatise was written by Jerome about 393 A.D. to oppose the heretical opinions of the monk Jovinian, who argued, among other things, that virginity and chastity in women were not values in themselves; in the first book, which is specifically intended to counterfeit Jovinian's idea that "virgins, widows, and married women, once they have been baptized, are of the same merit, as long as they do not differ because of other actions", Jerome inserted a long catalogue of pagan women who were allegedly supposed to teach Christian women the importance of chastity.¹⁹¹ Germaine Dempster has interpreted and evaluated Dorigen's complaint on the basis of a careful analysis of the *exempla* that Chaucer included in and excluded from his own narrative, as well as of the different order that he gave to his list.¹⁹² More recently Warren S. Smith has explained and justified Chaucer's use of Jerome's 'good women' as an adaptation of the *exempla* from the Latin treatise to the character of Dorigen and the needs of his own narrative.¹⁹³ It is, in fact, worth comparing the list of famous women in Dorigen's complaint to that contained in Jerome because changes and similarities among the two versions may shed light on the way in which Chaucer wanted the complaint to be read within *The Franklin's Tale*.

From Chapter 41, Book One, of *Adversus Jovinianum* Chaucer drew *exempla* of women who either preferred to die for fear of losing virginity, or committed suicide for having

¹⁹⁰ The passage of Jerome's *Adversus Jovinianum* in which all famous women mentioned by Dorigen are contained – Book I, 41-6 – has been published in Robert M. Correale, Mary Hamel, eds., *Sources and Analogues of the Canterbury Tales*, vol. 1., Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2002, pp.256-65.

¹⁹¹ V. A. Kolve and Glending Olson have inserted passages from A. G. Rigg's English translation of the First Book of *Adversus Jovinianum*, with summaries of the other parts of the text, as part of the "Sources and Backgrounds" section for *The Wife of Bath's Tale* in the Norton edition of *The Canterbury Tales*. See V. A. Kolve, Glending Olson, eds., *Chaucer. The Canterbury Tales. Fifteen Tales and the General Prologue*, second ed., New York and London: Norton, 2005, pp.357-73.

¹⁹² Germaine Dempster, "Chaucer at Work on the Complaint in the *Franklin's Tale*", *Modern Language Notes*, 52 (1937), pp.16-23.

¹⁹³ Warren S. Smith, "Dorigen's Lament and the Resolution of the *Franklin's Tale*", *Chaucer Review*, 36 (2002), pp.374-90.

unwillingly lost their virginity: Phidon's daughters, Demotion's daughter, the fifty maidens of Sparta, Stymphalis, Scedasmus's daughters, the seven virgins of Miletus, Nichanor's captive, the Theban maiden raped by a Macedonian. As he left out two stories in which maidens escape defilement without committing suicide, the prerequisite of Chaucer's selection was "suicide committed for the sake of chastity", as Dempster has argued.¹⁹⁴ It is significant also that in adapting the story of Nichanor's captive, Chaucer cut out details in order to present the male character as a potential violator like all male characters in the other *exempla*; in Jerome, in fact, Nichanor is portrayed as a man who, having fallen in love with one of the captured virgins, proposes to her; after she kills herself, Nichanor is moved by compassion for her suicide. Chaucer also eliminated the act of vengeance committed by the Theban virgin, who, in Jerome, kills her rapist before committing suicide; this detail was probably removed to put emphasis on women's passivity in front of male violence, and to arrange it to a pattern in which it is not satisfaction of revenge but compassion for defenceless victims that makes these women appear exemplary to Dorigen.¹⁹⁵ These two changes may be due to the fact that Chaucer wanted these stories to represent an opposition between women, innocent and meek, and men, wicked and violent. A similar opposition has been detected also by Smith, who argues that Dorigen "elevates their [i.e., of Jerome's chapters] moral tone by additions of sympathy for the victimized women and disapproval for the actions of their oppressors."¹⁹⁶

Chapter 42 is ignored by Dorigen because it deals neither with virgin suicides nor with faithful wives: Jerome provides a series of examples of virgin births and of ancient women who were renowned for their self-chosen virginity. In Chapter 43 Jerome explicitly affirms that he is moving to examples of chaste wives – an intention that is echoed in Dorigen's introduction to the second part of her list (1395-98). From this chapter and from the following 44, 45 and 46,

¹⁹⁴ Dempster, p.19.

¹⁹⁵ Smith, noticing Chaucer's omission, has argued: "Dorigen omits the latter fact, thereby stressing only the woman's status as victim." See Smith, p.386.

¹⁹⁶ Smith, p.376.

Chaucer drew all the other *exempla* mentioned by Dorigen: Hasdrubal's wife, Niceratus's wife, Artemisia, Teuta, Alcibiades's concubine, Abradates's wife, Rhodogune, Alcestis, Penelope, Laodomia, Lucretia, Bilia, Portia and Valeria. Dorigen's account of many of these *exempla* is concentrated in very few words. Chaucer radically cuts out information, basically reducing their exemplary behaviours as wives to their famous names. On the contrary, Jerome gives the motivation of their fame, with the only exception of Penelope: Alcestis willingly died in place of her husband; Artemisia's fame is associated to her refusal to remarry and to the enormous and extraordinarily beautiful tomb she built for her husband; Teuta was a queen who submitted powerful men maintaining her chastity; Bilia was renowned for her outstanding wifely patience because she never told her husband of his unpleasant breath; Rhodogune killed her nurse in order not to be forced into a second marriage; Valeria refused to marry another man after her husband's death because she maintained that her husband was still alive in her memory.

The second half of Dorigen's *exempla* – Alcibiades's concubine, Alcestis, Penelope, Laodomia, Portia, Artemisia, Teuta, Bilia, Rhodogune and Valeria –, whom Jerome inserted in his list because they provided models of female chastity and fidelity to their husbands (or lover, in the case of Alcibiades's concubine), are *exempla* of a different kind because these women had not to commit suicide to eschew male violence or to make amends for having been raped: as Smith has observed, these last *exempla* simply involve “women whose love for their husbands, even to the point of death, is to be admired.”¹⁹⁷ However, there is no indication that Dorigen intends this part of the *exempla* to be opposed to the list of suicides previously presented, and she does not seem to have come up with a solution that is alternative to suicide. Indeed this last series of women follows without interruption the story of Niceratus's wife, who committed suicide for fear of men's violence; moreover, at the end of the complaint the narrator explicitly says that Dorigen is unable to come up with any solutions to her dilemma but suicide: “Thus pleynded Dorigen a day or tweye, / Purposynge evere that she wolde deye” (1457-58).

¹⁹⁷ Smith, p.388.

In the last *exempla* Dorigen shows reticence about the reasons why these women gained immortal fame:

How trewe eek was to Alcebiades
His love, that rather for to dyen chees
Than for to suffre his body unburyed be.
Lo, which a wyf was Alceste [...].
What seith Omer of goode Penelopee?
Al Grece knoweth of hire chastitee.
Pardee, of Laodomya is writen thus,
That whan at Troie was slayn Protheselaus,
Ne lenger wolde she lyve after his day.
The same of noble Porcia telle I may;
Withoute Brutus koude she nat lyve,
To whom she hadde al hool hir herte yive.
The parfit wyfhod of Arthemesie
Honored is thurgh al the Barbarie.
O Teuta, queene, thy wyfly chastitee
To alle wyves may a mirour bee.
The same thyng I seye of Bilyea,
Of Rodogone, and eek Valeria. (1439-56)

Significantly, in the cases of women who put their life at risk for their lover (Alcibiades's concubine) or committed suicide after their husband's death (Laodomya and Portia), Dorigen does not restrain herself from giving a brief account of their exemplary fidelity: Alcibiades's concubine challenges the Greeks' enemies to get back her lover's corpse in order to give him a proper funeral, while Laodomya and Portia are widows who committed suicide because they could not live without their husbands. On the other hand, in the cases in which women do not face death or commit suicide, Dorigen leaves untold the ways in which their exemplary chastity was put to the test. Moreover, in this last series of *exempla* Dorigen makes no mention of male offenders and their immoral lust: these women, in fact, are praised for their wifely fidelity, even though they are not victims of male vice. Dorigen seems here to be thinking about a kind of womanly virtue that is not necessarily dependent on somebody else's vice. The fame that is attributed to these women is exclusively due to their wifely perfection, and even in the cases of wives whose lives ended tragically, emphasis is never put on suicide: even in the cases of widows who killed themselves because they could not outlive their husbands – Portia and Laodomya – Dorigen never mentions their suicides explicitly, but simply hints at them saying that they could or would not live without their men. Dorigen's complaint to Fortune, like her

complaint to God, witnesses to her difficulty in coping with adversity. As in her previous complaint she asked herself why there cannot be a world without the black rocks – that is, why her husband’s life must be put to risk because of an apparently meaningless natural order –, here she seems to wonder why ancient women had to become victims of men in order to be remembered for their virtue – that is, why her faithfulness to Arveragus must necessarily be tested on her rejection of Aurelius’s advances.

In the last part of the complaint Dorigen seems to be gradually moving her interest from suicidal women to more general exhibitions of wifely virtues. Therefore, if at the beginning of the complaint Dorigen, having to face a choice between killing herself or betraying her husband with Aurelius, is on the horns of a dilemma, by the end of the complaint her series of *exempla* has developed into a praise of fame and female chastity that seems to have brought Dorigen away from her personal concerns. James Sledd, who sees behind Dorigen’s complaint Chaucer’s intention of playing down the pathos of the situation, has argued that

desperately, she will heap name upon name, regardless of propriety, and her intent to die will grow ever less convincing until she accomplishes her masterpiece with Valeria and Rhodogune and Bilian.¹⁹⁸

In fact, the choice of the women mentioned toward the end of the complaint is not due to the fact that they provide Dorigen with precedents that could conform to her own situation. If Dorigen seems to associate, in the first half of the *exempla*, male violence on women with Aurelius’s attempted seduction, in the last *exempla* women are seldom exposed to the threat of unwanted suitors – apart from Penelope, who anyway managed to eschew the risk by means of her crafty never-ending weaving. Therefore, it is difficult to see how some of the *exempla* may be relevant to the solution of Dorigen’s dilemma.

The order and the way in which Jerome’s *exempla* have been inserted in *The Franklin’s Tale* may be explained on the basis of two conflicting perspectives that are both present in Dorigen’s words. The reader follows Dorigen’s reasoning about suicide as it is explicitly stated

¹⁹⁸ James Sledd, “Dorigen’s Complaint”, *Modern Philology*, 45 (1947), p.43.

at the beginning and in the middle of her complaint: when circumstances force a virtuous pagan wife to betray her fidelity to her husband and her chastity, she should put her reputation above her life, and kill herself. However, as this reasoning develops into a series of *exempla* in which womanly virtue is not strictly dependant on suicide, Dorigen seems implicitly to oppose this solution, even though she is unable to formulate a different one as well.

Ambivalence in Dorigen's complaint is first due to the source from which the *exempla* are drawn. Jerome's treatise, in fact, is explicitly mentioned by Chaucer in *The Legend of Good Women* and *The Wife of Bath's Tale* as either a repository of stories concerning female models of absolute integrity or an antifeminist account of female wickedness, respectively. The same text, therefore, was used by Chaucer in his own narratives with two opposite purposes and according to two divergent readings. I will briefly explain the two passages in which Jerome is mentioned in the two Chaucerian works, and trace the different readings of *Adversus Jovinianum* proposed by the two narrators.

In the Prologue of the *Legend* Chaucer, who portrays himself as the narrator of the poem, is reproached by the God of Love for having written about Criseyde's infidelity to Troilus while he should have chosen a story which could display female "goodnesse" (G 268). Chaucer's choice of Troilus and Criseyde's love story for his tragedy, the God of Love seems to imply, was not due to the fact that stories about exemplary virtuous women are difficult to find. According to his viewpoint, in fact, clerks have given account of plenty of great stories "That bothe Romainys and ek Grekes trete / Of sundry wemen, which lyf that they ladde" (275-76). One of these, the God of Love argues, is Jerome, and he provides a quite long account of his treatise:

What seith Jerome agayns Jovynyan?
How clene maydenes and how trewe wyves,
How stedefaste widewes durynge alle here lyves,
Telleth Jerome, and that nat of a fewe,
But, I dar seyn, an hundred on a rewte,
That it is pite for to rede, and routhe,
The wo that they endure for here trouthe.
For to hyre love were they so trewe
That, rather than they wolde take a newe,
They chose to be ded in sondry wyse,
And deiden, as the story wol devyse;

And some were brend, and some were cut the hals,
And some dreynt for they wolden not be fals;
For alle keped they here maydenhede,
Or elles wedlok, or here widewehede.
*And this thing was nat kept for holynesse,
But al for verray vertu and clenness,*
And for men schulde sette on hem no lak;
And yit they were hethene, al the pak,
That were so sore adrad of alle shame. (G 281-300, italics added)

In the God of Love's account of Jerome's *Adversus Jovinianum* the Latin treatise is presented as a compendium of exemplary women who can be divided into three categories: innocent virgins, faithful wives and loyal widows. These women had to endure violent deaths for the sake of virginity, marital chastity and love, and the effect that these stories are expected to have on the reader is compassion for their sufferings: emphasis is put on self-inflicted violence which is seen as evidence of their attachment to moral integrity. This seems even more extraordinary because it was not due to the fact that they were motivated solely by their truly virtuous nature. Smith has observed how Dorigen's sympathy for the women she mentions in her complaint resembles the attitude of the narrator of *The Legend of Good Women* to the same stories presented by Jerome,

but such sympathy is an innovation by Chaucer which would be out of place in Jerome's account, since the latter wants to show that virginity (or, fidelity to a single partner), always held precedence among women of virtue.¹⁹⁹

In effect, the account of *Adversus Jovinianum* given by the God of Love accounts only for a part of the *exempla* provided throughout the treatise. In the Prologue to her tale the Wife of Bath mentions Jerome's work as one of the texts which were collected by her husband Jankyn in the "book of wikked wyves" (685); the treatise is therefore presented as a compendium of stories which the God of Love would severely condemn. The Wife of Bath too expresses her contempt for such texts, arguing that men like her husband are unable to say anything good of a woman unless she is one of the "goode wyves in the Bible" (687) or of the "hooly seintes" (690). Significantly, the stories of faithful wives and virgin suicides reported in Jerome are neglected by the Wife of Bath, who, on the contrary, gives an account of women who are believed by clerks to exemplify female evil nature: starting from Eve – "that for hir wikkednesse / Was al mankynde

¹⁹⁹ Smith, p.380.

brought to wretchedness” (715-16) –, she launches into a series of wives – taken from the Bible but mainly from pagan antiquity – who unscrupulously caused damage to their husbands or sweethearts, or even killed them through mean tricks and deceit because they loved another man or simply because they hated them. Some of these women – Socrates’s wife Xantippe, Pasiphae, Clytemnestra and Eryphile – are mentioned in *Adversus Jovinianum* as instances of morally reprehensible wives.²⁰⁰ As far as Chaucer’s use of Jerome is concerned, Joseph D. Parry, who has drawn a comparison between the Wife of Bath and Dorigen, argues that whereas the former’s intentions behind her mentioning *Adversus Jovinianum* are to ridicule and to reject the treatise – “[t]he Wife desires to negate the text in its received form as a text that would teach women proper behavior by positive and, especially, negative models” – the latter takes it seriously: “Dorigen seems intent on discovering in this text the right actions to perform for a woman who would be moral.”²⁰¹ Chaucer’s rewriting of Jerome through the Wife of Bath’s and Dorigen’s voices, he suggests, is symptomatic of his adaptation of Jerome’s characterization of women “as belonging to one of two dichotomized groups – wicked wives or noble wives –” to the needs of his own narratives; in the case of *The Franklin’s Tale*, Dorigen’s use of Jerome “aims to typify moral women of the past.”²⁰²

In the Prologues to both *The Legend of Good Women* and *The Wife of Bath’s Tale* *exempla* are cited as pieces of evidence of women’s allegedly good or bad nature. In both cases female integrity is tested upon women’s ability to maintain themselves chaste, according to the principles that virgins should not fall into the hands of seducers, and that married women should love their husbands not only, as wives, by rejecting all kinds of adulterous affairs, but also, as widows, by showing resistance to the possibility of a second marriage. The *exempla* provided by the God of Love and those presented by the Wife of Bath represent the extremities of an ideal

²⁰⁰ V. A. Kolve and Glending Olson have indicated the references made by the Wife of Bath in her Prologue to Jerome’s treatise. See Kolve and Olson, pp.370-71.

²⁰¹ Joseph D. Parry, “Dorigen, Narration, and Coming Home in the *Franklin’s Tale*”, *Chaucer Review*, 30 (1996), p.275.

²⁰² Parry, p.278.

ethical ladder in which at the top there are women who sacrifice their lives for chastity and marital love, and at the bottom there are those who are perfectly willing to betray their husbands out of pure lust. It is also significant that in both cases a distinction is drawn between women from pagan antiquity – mainly Grecian and Roman women – and those who lived after Christ's advent.

Giovanni Boccaccio (1313-1375) wrote *De Mulieribus Claris* (*Famous Women*), a collection of short biographies concerning women whose life, character or achievements were remarkable for different reasons. The text takes the form of a compendium in which each chapter is dedicated to one of these famous women, with only very few exceptions in which Boccaccio puts together two women in a single chapter because their lives are strictly connected with each other. The biographies are anticipated by a Prologue, in which Boccaccio provides information about the composition of his work, and gives indications on the way in which these stories should be read. The book was firstly conceived as part of a tradition of texts which were written in ancient times to preserve the memory of men who had been rewarded with immortal fame; Boccaccio, following the example of Petrarch, wants to rehabilitate that tradition and to renovate it by applying it to women instead of men. Therefore, the first purpose of the book is a celebration of fame: as Boccaccio explains, fame was conceded in ancient times to men who, with their deeds, managed to go beyond the achievements of those who had preceded them; if women are allegedly less endowed than men in terms of physical strength and intellectual proficiency, famous women should be all the more surprising and praiseworthy, as they should be remembered not only because they provide examples of extraordinary deeds but also because they managed to achieve what is hardly possible in spite of the shortcomings that are allegedly typical of their sex.

The large majority of the women presented in *De Mulieribus Claris* come from pagan antiquity. As far as this point is concerned, Boccaccio points out that the *exempla* of pagan women should not be put together with those concerning Hebrew and Christian women:

Attamen visum est, ne omiserim, excepta matre prima, his omnibus fere gentilibus nullas ex sacris mulieribus hebreis christianisque miscuisse; non enim satis bene conveniunt, nec equo incedere videntur gradu.

He quippe ob eternam et veram gloriam sese fere in adversam persepe humanitati tolerantiam coegere, sacrosancti Preceptoris tam iussa quam vestigia imitantes; ubi ille, seu quodam nature munere vel instinctu, seu potius huius momentanei fulgoris cupiditate percite, non absque tamen acri mentis robore, devenere; vel, fortune urgentis impulsu, nonnunquam gravissima pertulere.

(Nevertheless, it seemed advisable, as I want to make plain, not to mix these women, nearly all of them pagan, with Hebrew and Christian women (except for Eve). The two groups do not harmonize very well with each other, and they appear to proceed in different ways.

Following the commands and example of their holy Teacher, Hebrew and Christian women commonly steeled themselves for the sake of true and everlasting glory to an endurance often at odds with human nature. Pagan women, however, reached their goal, admittedly with remarkable strength of character, either through some natural gift or instinct or, as seems more likely, through a keen desire for the fleeting glory of this world; sometimes they endured grievous troubles in the face of Fortune's assaults.) (Preface, 9-10, pp.12-13)²⁰³

At the basis of the distinction between Hebrew and Christian women on the one side, and pagan women on the other, there seems to be a question about what could have led the heathen to eschew vice and pursue virtue. According to the ethical system of the women who believe in the God of the Bible, moral behaviour is to be recommended also because it is a necessary condition for being rewarded in the afterlife with “true and everlasting glory” (“eternam et veram gloriam”). On the other hand, pagan women did not share this optimistic perspective, and the renunciations that some of them endured in order not to betray their moral integrity must have been motivated by reasons that do not involve any kind of metaphysical hope. At the same time, Boccaccio is more interested in *exempla* of pagan women than in those of Christian or Hebrew because the latter exemplify an endurance that a human being is hardly able to imitate. The stories of virtuous pagan women, on the other hand, provide the medieval reader with instances of individuals who managed to find a solution to Fortune's adversities solely with the strength of

²⁰³ All quotations from Boccaccio's *De Mulieribus Claris* – the Latin original text and its translation into English – are drawn from Virginia Brown, ed. and transl., *Boccaccio. Famous Women*, Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 2001. Immediately after the quotation I have transcribed in brackets the part of the book – Dedication, Preface, Conclusion or the number of the chapter –, the number of the paragraph and the pages from which the passage is drawn. In Brown's translation Boccaccio's Latin original is rendered into more fluent, but less literal, English sentences. This target-oriented approach is part of the translator's choice, as explained in her Note on the Text, 4, p.478.

their character, since their moral commitment was either the reflection of a natural disposition or ability with which they had been endowed, or the consequence of their thirst for earthly fame.

In a number of stories, the strength of character of these pagan women takes the form of a scorn of death so deeply rooted that it makes them commit suicide or submit to murder without betraying the slightest hesitation. It is exactly this fearless disposition that makes Polyxena so admirable to the eyes of the narrator. The young daughter of King Priam, after the fall of Troy, is forced by the Greeks to a sacrificial death to appease the spirit of Achilles, who had fallen into the trap planned by the Trojans to kill him because of his love for her. Boccaccio considers the figure of Polyxena an illustration of how an exemplary scorn of death could inhabit the body of a very young woman:

Crediderim facile hoc generose nature opus, ut ostenderet hac mortis parvipensione quam feminam produxisset, ni tam cito hostis surripuisset fortuna.

(I can easily believe that Polyxena's action was the creation of noble Nature who wished to show by the maiden's scorn of death what kind of woman she might have grown into had a hostile fortune not snatched her away so quickly) (XXXIII, 4, 132-33)

Polyxena is described as an innocent victim of unfavourable Fortune, who despite her young age faces an unjust premature death without complaining, and displays a surprising courage instead of being driven to despair.

Violent death is presented as a praiseworthy solution to eschew rape and the loss of virginity in the case of Hippo, a Greek woman who, after being made a prisoner of pirates, drowned herself into the sea to preserve her virginity. Boccaccio praises her decision because with her exemplary behaviour she gained immortal fame through the written accounts of her life:

Quis tam severum mulieris consilium non laudet? Paucis quidem annis, quibus forsan vita protendi poterat, castitatem redemit et immatura morte sibi perenne decus quesivit. Quod virtutis opus procellosum nequivit mare contegere nec desertum auferre litus quin literarum perpetuis monumentis suo cum honore servaretur in luce.

(Who will not praise so austere a resolve on the part of this woman? At the cost of the few years by which she might have prolonged her life, Hippo ransomed her chastity, exchanging a premature death for everlasting glory. The tempestuous sea could not hide her virtuous deed, nor could the deserted shore prevent its brilliant preservation, with the accompanying personal renown, in the enduring records of literature.) (LIII, 3, pp.220-21)

Fame is the reward that these virtuous pagan women received for their courageous deeds; suicide is therefore a much more praiseworthy choice if life is supposed to mean loss of honour. This moral is also implied in the case of Dido – the story of a suicidal woman which provides the occasion for a praise of a widow's extraordinary fidelity to her dead husband as well as a severe reproach of the impudence with which Christian widows remarry.

In Boccaccio's version of Dido's story, the Queen of Carthage committed suicide to remain faithful to her dead husband Acerbas, and to escape thereby the advances of the king of Massitani.²⁰⁴ At the end of her biography Boccaccio launches into a long comment in which he praises Dido's fidelity, and invites Christian women to look at her chastity with admiration. According to Boccaccio, Dido showed how mental strength and determination are sufficient to make a woman prefer death to a dishonourable life; moreover, Boccaccio insists on the fact that it was a pagan woman, not a Christian, to take such a difficult decision, arguing that the heathen were not endowed with the faith in a God who would never forsake them:

Sed nobis, qui nos tam desertos dicimus, nonne Christus refugium est? Ipse quidem Redemptor pius in se sperantibus semper adest. [...] Flecte in terram oculos et aures observa atque ad instar scopuli undas venientes expelle et immota ventos efflare sine: salvaberis.

(But we who say that we are so abandoned, do we not have Christ as our refuge? Truly our holy Redeemer is always there for those who place their hopes in Him. [...] Lower your eyes to the ground, close your ears, and like a rock hurl back the oncoming waves; be still and let the winds blow. You will be saved.) (XLII, 17, pp.176-77)

These pagan women are completely alone in their difficulties, as they lack the sense of security and hopefulness that are supposed to accompany their Christian counterparts. These, in fact, are prevented from falling into hopeless despair because they should always bear in mind that a providential entity is going to save them in some ways. As a consequence, Christian women should be able to face difficulties with the steadfastness of a rock in the sea, which remains

²⁰⁴ Boccaccio recounts that the king of Massitani threatened the elders of Carthage with war if Dido were not to consent to marry him. The elders, who knew that she would never willingly accept such a proposal because of her devotion to her dead husband, managed to make her approve the king's request through deceit. Even though Dido realised that the elders had played a trick on her, she did not protest; she thought up a plan so that she managed to kill herself in front of her people, who had gathered to assist to a ritual that was thought to be simply a celebration of her dead husband.

immovable despite the violent attacks of the storms: the acts of lowering their eyes and of closing their ears suggest an attitude of total passivity and calmness in front of danger, as well as a complete trust in divine intervention. Significantly, Boccaccio never recommends suicide as a solution, but takes stories of suicidal women to encourage Christian women to virtue, and, as in the case of Dido, to remain faithful to their husbands even as widows.

These three stories present three pagan women who meet violent death – in the form of suicide or murder – for the sake of honour, and from the narrator's comments it transpires that their deeds are a reflection of an admirable strength of character, of the fact that a virtuous death pays more than a miserable life, and that the heathen could only count on the effects of their own decision because they knew nothing about a divine entity that could succour them. These ideas may have influenced Chaucer's characterization of Dorigen, especially in the moment in which she weighs the possibility of suicide, and makes her complaint about famous women. As has been explained, her address to Fortune and the notion of being imprisoned by her chain are symptomatic of her condition as a hopeless victim of unfavourable circumstances who has to choose death to preserve her reputation as a honourable lady and a faithful wife. By introducing a series of *exempla* of virtuous women who were murdered or committed suicide for the sake of honour, Chaucer may have wanted to compare the strength of character that those pagan virgins and wives were supposed to represent in the eyes of a Christian readership with the heroine of his tale, a pagan wife but also a courtly lady.

The first thing that differentiates Dorigen from the famous women of pagan antiquity is the act of complaining. Dorigen is far from being portrayed as a courageous woman endowed with a strong control of her emotional crises. Nobody among Boccaccio's famous women complains about their difficult situations or even reflects about the possibility of committing suicide: they simply act, and their strength of character is so admirable because they seem to have no consideration for anything but their reputation as undefiled virgins or chaste widows. Boccaccio's comments seem to imply the notion that if virtue is paramount, then the strength of

character required to maintain it is a necessity, the two things being the two sides of the same quality. In Dorigen, on the other hand, a different logic seems to be at work. *The Franklin's Tale* offers clear evidence that she is a faithful wife throughout the story, so that the fact that chastity – a quality that is described as the most important virtue for a wife by both Jerome and Boccaccio – is of absolute importance for her is never put into question. At the same time, we are presented with a woman who does not have the strength of the female models of virtue she has in mind. Her fragility is first revealed in the story during her husband's absence, which she spent despairing about the possibility that Arveragus might be the victim of a shipwreck; it is partly responsible for her promise to Aurelius; eventually it takes the form of a psychological paralysis when Dorigen has to face the fact that Aurelius has fulfilled the terms of her promise.²⁰⁵ Dorigen's complaint, in which at the beginning she tries to convince herself to commit suicide, is actually a literary device that is meant to prevent her from taking action to solve her problem.

Secondly, the question of fame and reputation must be considered. According to Boccaccio, self-sacrifice for a good reputation is the price that pagan women had to pay in order to be remembered by posterity, and to gain thereby an earthly kind of immortality. This may seem to be due to a sense of vanity too deeply rooted in these women's heart, but if we consider Boccaccio's version of Lucretia's suicide we may derive a different opinion. During the reign of Tarquinius Superbus, Sextus, the king's son, raped Lucretia, the wife of Collatinus, a man of royal blood, who had taken part along with Sextus in the conquest of the city of Ardea; after the rape Lucretia gathered her husband and her relatives to tell them what had happened, and stabbed herself in front of them. In Boccaccio's account, Lucretia pronounces the following words before she commits suicide:

Ego me, si peccato absolvo, supplicio non libero; nec ulla deinceps impudica Lucretie
vivet exemplo.

²⁰⁵ Elaine Tuttle Hansen describes Dorigen's reaction at Aurelius's words as a "kind of paralysis". Hansen, p.278.

(Although I absolve myself of the sin, I do not exempt myself from the punishment, and in the future no woman will live dishonorably because of Lucretia's example.) (XLVIII, 7, pp.198-99)

From Lucretia's justification of her suicide it transpires that, in Boccaccio's idea of pagan antiquity, reputation and fame had important consequences in the determination of commonly accepted ethics. It seems that, in imagining how the heathen may have developed a sense of morality without relying on a religious textual authority – as Hebrews and Christians did –, Boccaccio thought that the heathen would regulate their behaviour on the basis of how the individuals whom pagan antiquity rewarded with immortal fame had solved analogous dilemmas before them; their extraordinary deeds were collected in their memories in the form of *exempla* from which people derived what was better to do in their own situations. For Lucretia, therefore, suicide is a moral necessity not so much for her own good, but for the good of those whose behaviour is going to depend upon her decision. Her self-inflicted punishment is not due to guilt on her part, as she states, but is motivated by the fact that she does not want her story to be used by women to justify the satisfaction of their adulterous relationships. Commenting on this point, Ian Donaldson has explained Lucretia's suicide partly with the mechanism that is generally at work in heroism – “grandly stupid, unamenable to logical analysis” –, and partly with the principles of ethical behaviour that were typical of Roman society.²⁰⁶ Donaldson, in fact, argues that at that time a victim of rape had to endure a loss of honour that put her on the same level as an adulterous woman, and the reputation of the entire family of the victim was supposed to be damaged by her situation.²⁰⁷

Chaucer too associates Lucretia's suicide with her concern for reputation. In *The Legend of Lucrece* Lucretia kills herself in front of her family providing an analogous explanation:

She sayde that, for hir gylt ne for hir blame,

²⁰⁶ Ian Donaldson bases his analysis of Lucretia on Livy's account of her story. However, in this version the words pronounced by Lucretia before committing suicide are almost exactly those cited in Boccaccio's account and reported above. He interprets Lucretia's justification in the following terms: “Her death, she says, will prevent other women who have willingly committed adultery from citing her case as a precedent and thus escaping the Roman punishment for adultery, death.” See Ian Donaldson, *The Rapes of Lucretia. A Myth and its Transformations*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1982, p.22.

²⁰⁷ Donaldson, p.23.

Hir husbonde schulde nat have the foule name,
That wolde she nat suffre by no wey. (1844-46)

Moreover, he ends her biography with a description of the great fame she was granted because of her death: “and she was holden there [i.e., in Rome] / A seynt, and ever hir day yhalwed dere / As in hir lawe” (1870-72). In these lines Lucretia’s demonstration of virtue is rewarded by making her a saint ahead of time. Dorigen includes Lucretia among her *exempla*, providing the following account of her death:

Hath nat Lucesse yslayn hirself, alas,
At Rome, whan that she oppressed was
Of Tarquyn, for hire thoughte it was a shame
To lyven whan she hadde lost hir name? (1405-08)

Lucretia’s suicide is here due to her sense of shame at the perspective of a life lived under the burden of the loss of reputation, and death is therefore presented as a better alternative. Though there is no explicit mention of Lucretia’s posthumous fame, Dorigen’s presentation of her women does imply the fact that they have been granted earthly glory among the heathen. Indeed this becomes all the clearer in the last part of the complaint, in which women are simply mentioned by their names, and an explanation of their exemplary deeds is hardly provided. In fact, unlike what has been previously done, Dorigen says that these stories have been written down – she even mentions Homer for Penelope –, and that their names are renowned in all heathendom or in all Greece. In this section Chaucer moves away from the moral concerns of his heroine in order to introduce a problem that is specifically literary. By making Dorigen draw comparisons between herself and other characters of classical literature, Chaucer may have wanted the reader to see her story as a contribution to a well-established canon of virtuous women. The complaint ends with a list of three names which are put together for the sole fact of representing women who, according to Dorigen, should be a “mirour” (1454) of chastity to all wives – a list which, Chaucer seems to imply, Dorigen may wish she could fill with her name.

As far as the point of faith is concerned, throughout her complaint Dorigen does not address God, nor does she ask him for help in the form of a prayer, as she did in her previous

soliloquy about the rocks. Indeed, she addresses Fortune, who is described by Dorigen as a merciless entity: “Fro which t’escape woot I no socour” (1358). Chaucer may have conceived Dorigen’s complaint in line with the idea – at the basis of Boccaccio’s characterization of pagan women in *De Mulieribus Claris* – that in front of difficulties the heathen could rely on nobody but themselves and former models. Through this complaint Chaucer may have wanted the reader to see things from the specific viewpoint of a person who lacks the optimistic faith that some kind of intervention that is not within one’s own grasp may be a major determinant of a positive resolution to his or her problems, and who thinks that a way out is only to be achieved through one’s own actions. In effect, the element of unity that keeps together the *exempla* mentioned by Dorigen despite their differences is exactly the notion that individuals have been able to provide models of extraordinary virtuousness by means of their own deeds. According to this viewpoint, suicide becomes the most evident act of rejection of the idea that one’s own life is not solely dependent on one’s own decisions, and by contemplating suicide Dorigen seems to conform to this pattern of behaviour.

In adapting *Adversus Jovinianum*, a text written by a Christian author for a Christian readership, to the pagan setting of his tale, Chaucer may have turned to Boccaccio’s *De Mulieribus Claris*. Significantly, Dorigen mentions her stories without providing their source, and Chaucer seems to have imagined Jerome’s *exempla* as part of the knowledge commonly shared by pagan women as if they provided them with models of virtuous behaviour. Indeed Boccaccio intends his biographies to be instances of exemplary women of pagan antiquity on the basis of which medieval women should test their virtuousness. In the Dedication of his book to Andrea Acciaiuoli,²⁰⁸ Boccaccio says to his dedicatee

²⁰⁸ Virginia Brown in the Introduction to her edition of *De Mulieribus Claris* explains that she was “a Tuscan noblewoman living in southern Italy. Andrea was the sister of Niccolò Acciaiuoli, an old friend of Boccaccio who was a member of an eminent Florentine family and a major power behind the throne of Joanna, Queen of Naples.” As the same author recounts in his Dedication, Boccaccio gave the book, still unfinished, to Andrea as a gift. Brown says that the present was given as a sign of gratitude for her brother’s hospitality after Boccaccio was invited to Naples by Niccolò in June 1362. See Brown, pp.XI-XIII.

et quotiens in gentili muliere quid dignum, christianam religionem professa legeris, quod in te fore non senseris, ruborem mentis excita et te ipsam redargue quod, Christi delinita crismate, honestate aut pudicitia vel virtute supereris ab extera; et, provocato in vires ingenio, quo plurimum vales, non solum ne supereris patiare, sed ut superes quascunque egregia virtute coneris

(Whenever you, who profess the Christian religion, read that a pagan woman has some worthy quality which you feel you lack, blush and reproach yourself that, although marked with the baptism of Christ, you have let yourself be surpassed by a pagan in probity or chastity or resolution. Summon up the powers of your already strong character and do not allow yourself to be outdone, but strive to outdo all women in noble virtues.) (Dedication, 9, pp.4-7)

In this passage there is the notion that women should compete with those who have preceded them so that they should prove to themselves to be better than the women of the past in terms of virtuousness. By making Dorigen mention her famous pagan women, Chaucer exploits an analogous principle. Unlike Andrea Acciaiuoli, Dorigen is herself a pagan; however, a sense of emulation similar to that which is expected by Boccaccio of the Tuscan countess accounts for her intention of committing suicide to save herself from dishonour.

2.III The resolution of Dorigen's dilemma: Arveragus's *trouthe* and Dorigen's fidelity

Through her complaint to Fortune Chaucer presents Dorigen as a pagan woman who faces adversity with hopelessness, and who seems to be willing to sacrifice her life rather than losing her reputation as a good wife. Dorigen's moral perception is based on renowned precedents of women who committed suicide to eschew infamy, and who were thereby rewarded with eternal fame. At the same time, however, Dorigen indulges in her accumulation of *exempla*, so that toward the end of her speech we wonder whether she is still taking suicide seriously into account. In effect, her complaining goes on "a day or tweye" (1457), taking much longer than Arveragus's further absence. Eventually, Arveragus comes home in the meantime, and Dorigen's suicide is wished away. As a result, Dorigen seems to have been weighing up suicide at great length, only to see this possibility discarded by external circumstances. The logic behind this development of events may have been intended as a reflection of the fact that suicide in itself was problematic for the medieval readership.

Ian Donaldson, in his study into Lucretia's story and its various adaptations, has argued that from the Early Fathers of the Church onwards Lucretia was held in great esteem for her extraordinary resolution in committing suicide, so that she became a sort of pre-Christian martyr; Donaldson explains how many Christian martyrs were women who preferred to die rather than being raped:

[t]he very high value placed upon virginity made female martyrdom a subject of particular interest to the Church, and there were many Christian women who were renowned for acting with Lucretia-like resolution.²⁰⁹

This tradition seems to have been well established also later in the Middle Ages: Donaldson mentions the examples of Dante, who placed Lucretia among the virtuous heathen who dwell together with the great authors of pagan antiquity in the fourth canto of *Inferno*, as well as of Chaucer, who in *The Legend of Good Women* says that after her death she was celebrated in Rome as a saint.²¹⁰ However, this way of praising suicide for the sake of honour, Donaldson explains, was challenged by a critical reading according to which it was hardly possible to reconcile Roman with Christian moral values.²¹¹ This "new scepticism", Donaldson argues, derived primarily from Augustine's judgement on Lucretia's case in *De Civitate Dei (The City of God)*, and stimulated a debate on the rightfulness of suicide after rape which led to the condemnation of suicide:

[c]hastity is not a 'treasure' that can be stolen, nor is it a possession in the common sense at all. One's body cannot be polluted by another's act, if one's mind does not go along with that act; purity is essentially a matter of the will, not of the body. [...] If will is the essential thing, then the accidents which overtake the body, however regrettable and distressing they may appear, are ultimately trivial.²¹²

Virtuousness is, therefore, reflected in the intentions that guide human behaviour, so that what a woman is forced to endure because of another man's will has no consequences on her reputation as a faithful wife. Moreover, Donaldson also notices that from the viewpoint of a Christian the significance of suicide changes radically:

²⁰⁹ Donaldson mentions Eusebius's account of the Emperor Maxentius, who "found it difficult to rape Christian women, who preferred to kill themselves rather than allow him any liberties." See Donaldson, p.26.

²¹⁰ Donaldson, pp.26-27.

²¹¹ Donaldson, p.28.

²¹² Donaldson, pp.29-31.

For Augustine, Lucretia's suicide is not a heroic act, but an act of murder. [...] Suicide was often regarded by Christians as being even more heinous than murder [...]. Suicide betokened spiritual despair; and unlike the murderer, the person who took his or her own life was liable to die without the chance of repentance and the benefits of grace. Suicide was also regarded as an act of spiritual impatience. Only God, it was argued, has the right to bring our lives to an end; as God's creatures and property, we must patiently abide his will.²¹³

According to this viewpoint, suicide for the sake of honour is more a blameworthy than an admirable solution; on the basis of the different value that the life of a human being has for a Christian, the act of committing suicide is read as an offence to God's will, and a sign of cowardice: if heroism is intended as the ability to be patient in front of adversity, suicide seems to be the sign of a lack of endurance and a display of weakness.

The question of Lucretia's suicide seems to have been much debated at Chaucer's time, so that Chaucer may have had similar concerns in mind when he conceived the character of Dorigen and the resolution of *The Franklin's Tale*.²¹⁴ The controversial nature of suicide as the solution to Dorigen's moral dilemma may have been hinted at even in her soliloquy. As has been said previously, the very tone of complaint and the notion of imprisonment because of Fortune's chain are symptomatic of Dorigen's tendency to lose rational control and to become impatient in front of adversity. Furthermore, after her account of the fifty Lacedaemonian maidens' suicide Dorigen asks a particularly telling question: "Why sholde I thanne to dye been in drede?" (1386). This fear of death is, in fact, what makes Dorigen a different character from her pagan heroines. Gerald Morgan has argued that

we should suppose not that Dorigen is incapable of the tragic resolve shown by the Lacedaemonian maidens, but that their solution is no moral solution for her at all.²¹⁵

The question therefore may have been intended by Chaucer as a veiled attempt to put into doubt the rightfulness of these suicides. Morgan purposely rejects psychological explanations to the Chaucerian text, arguing that we should read it on the basis of the moral ideas that inform

²¹³ Donaldson, p.31.

²¹⁴ Gerald Morgan argues that "[t]he setting of the Franklin's Tale is no doubt a pagan setting, but the tale is informed throughout by Christian values, for example, the repugnance of suicide". See Gerald Morgan, "Experience and the Judgement of Poetry. A Reconsideration of the *Franklin's Tale*", *Medium Ævum*, 70 (2001), p.214.

²¹⁵ Gerald Morgan, "A Defence of Dorigen's Complaint", *Medium Ævum*, 46 (1977), p.85.

Chaucer's narratives rather than as the reflection of the characters' psychologies,²¹⁶ but I would suggest that the question works perfectly at both levels. From the point of view of Dorigen, a pagan woman, her question may be a reflection of her lack of the strength of character for which suicidal pagan women are explicitly admired by Boccaccio. However, from the point of view of Chaucer's Christian readership, the question may have been read as a hint at the problem of suicide. In this case, Chaucer provides an instance of his ability to write pagan narratives in which, by dealing with problems which concern mankind as such, pagan characters do not prevent a Christian reader from sympathising with their personal concerns, as the stories in these works are informed with moral dilemmas and solutions which are not at all different from those that may be found in a story set in Christian times.

The scene that follows Dorigen's complaint, in which she seems to put her decision in Arveragus's hands, introduces a viewpoint that sharply contrasts with her own. Arveragus finds Dorigen in the depth of despair, and the words with which she starts her confession are in line with the tone of complaint that informed her previous soliloquy: "Allas, [...] that evere was I born! / Thus have I seyde, [...] thus have I sworn" (1463-64). The first line closely resembles the opening of Arcite's complaint to Fortune in *The Knight's Tale* – "Allas that day that I was born!" (1223) –, and in both cases the exclamation betrays the character's distress and hopelessness in front of an unexpected change of his or her present situation.²¹⁷ The second line associates Dorigen's despair to the unfortunate promise made to Aurelius, and shows that Dorigen blames nobody but herself for what has happened. Anne Thompson Lee interprets Dorigen's confession to Arveragus as the sign of her *trouthe* as a wife to her husband:

²¹⁶ Morgan argues that the principle at the basis of all medieval literature is "moral and not psychological". He explains that "[b]y psychological is not to be understood the presence or absence of emotions or natural dispositions, for clearly no poet at any period can ignore them. What is meant by psychological interest is rather that the perspective of a particular character within a work is seen as the principle of the work's organization." Morgan, therefore, concludes that it is "action and not character" that informs medieval and Chaucerian art. See Gerald Morgan, "Boccaccio's *Filocolo* and the Moral Argument of the *Franklin's Tale*", *Chaucer Review*, 20 (1986), p.288.

²¹⁷ In the case of Arcite, the young knight laments his liberation from imprisonment and his exile from Thebes, because he has lost the chance of seeing his beloved Emily as he used to do from the window of the tower in which he was secluded with his cousin Palamon.

Dorigen's confession represents not a weak avoidance of the problem: she does not expect Arveragus to make it go away, but rather she recognizes what she takes to be her own limitations as a woman, and she thinks that it is her duty as a wife to entrust her fate to her husband. That is, in sum, the nature of her "trouthe".²¹⁸

Dorigen's confession is in line with her humble acceptance of Arveragus's renunciation of mastery over his wife at the beginning, and with the fact that she has never taken advantage of the freedom generously granted by her husband. Dorigen's spontaneous confession to her husband and her asking him for advice may be read as the fulfilment of her marital oath of fidelity with which their marriage was sanctioned at the beginning. Wifely chastity in the *Tale* takes a wider meaning than that of not being adulterous. This was, in fact, the idea of chastity that informed the first part of Dorigen's *exempla*, but in the second part chastity was not related exclusively to the rejection of adultery by means of suicide. We may see this idea reflected also in Boccaccio's comment to Sulpicia in *De Mulieribus Claris*, LXVII, a woman who was selected by the Senate among Roman matrons to consecrate the statue of Venus Verticordia. At the beginning of her biography Boccaccio says that her fame as a virtuous wife equalled that of Lucretia, and he concludes the chapter countering those who may raise an objection against her praise because, unlike the other chaste wives included in the collection, her fame is not due to an explicit act of rejection of adultery. In her defence, Boccaccio defines the way in which a chaste woman should behave in the following terms:

Equidem oportet matronam, ut pudica integre dici possit, ante alia cupidos vagosque frenare oculos eosque intra vestimentorum suorum fimbrias coercere, verba non solum honesta sed pauca et pro tempore effundere, ocium, tanquam certissimum et perniciosissimum pudicitie hostem, effugere, a comesationibus abstinere cum absque Libero et Cerere frigeat Venus, cantus atque saltationes, tanquam luxurie spicula, evitare, parsimonie ac sobrietati vacare, domesticam rem curare aures obscenis confabulationibus obturatas habere, a circuitionibus abstinere, pigmenta et supervacaneos odores abicere, ornatus superfluos respuere, cogitationes appetitusque noxios totis calcare viribus, meditationibus sacris insistere atque vigilare; et, ne per cuncta discurram pudoris integri testimonia, virum solum summa dilectione colere, ceteros, nisi fraterna diligas caritate, negligere et viri etiam, non absque frontis animique rubore, in amplexus ad prolem suscipiendam accedere.

(Indeed, for a woman to be considered completely chaste, she must first curb her wanton and wandering eyes, keeping them lowered and fixed on the hem of her dress. Her words must be not only respectable but brief and uttered at the right moment. She must avoid idleness as a sure and deadly enemy of chastity, and she must abstain from

²¹⁸ Anne Thompson Lee, "'A Woman True and Fair': Chaucer's Portrayal of Dorigen in the *Franklin's Tale*", *Chaucer Review*, 19 (1984), p.175.

feasting, for Venus is cooled in the absence of food and wine. She must avoid singing and dancing as the weapons of lasciviousness and attend to temperance and sobriety. She must take care of her house, close her ears to shameful conversation, and avoid gadding about. She must reject make-up, useless perfumes, and superfluous ornaments. Trampling with all her strength on harmful thoughts and desires, she must be vigilant and persistent in holy meditation. In short, so as not to rehearse all the signs of real chastity, she must give all her love to her husband alone and take no notice of other men, unless it is to love them like brothers. Even to her husband's embraces she must go with a modest face and heart and for the sake of procreation.) (LXVII, 6, pp.278-81)

Among the things that according to Boccaccio a chaste wife should and should not do, the fact that she should be careful with her words, that she should avoid dancing, as well as enjoying the pleasure of eating and drinking at social gatherings, and that she should not indulge in blasphemous thoughts and desires may shed light on Dorigen's behaviour during Arveragus's absence. Dorigen's initial aversion to enjoying the company of her friends in the garden, her inability to put an end to her obsessive thinking about her husband, as well as her severe condemnation of Aurelius's adulterous proposal are evidence of the fact that she conforms to Boccaccio's idea of a chaste wife. Incidentally, Dorigen's irreverent meditation on God's providential plan behind the Creation, her eventual participation in dances and her playful words to Aurelius may be interpreted, in the light of the further development of the story, as incautious acts for a chaste woman, that show Dorigen a less perfect, though probably more human, character than her ancient counterparts. Therefore, Chaucer's portrayal of Dorigen may have been conceived on the basis of a similar idea of a chaste wife, which included not only bodily fidelity, but also modesty and sincerity to her husband. These latter aspects account for her confession to Arveragus, who seems to take it as an important sign of Dorigen's *trouthe* to him.

We may read in Dorigen's words an implicit request for forgiveness, not so much for having made the promise to Aurelius but for not having told Arveragus of the promise so far – a request which Arveragus is willing to accept on condition that she may assure him of her total honesty:

This housbonde, with glad chiere, in freendly wyse
Answerde and seyde as I shal yow devyse:
"Is ther oght elles, Dorigen, but this?"
"Nay, nay," quod she, "God helpe me so as wys!
This is to mucche, and it were Goddes wille." (1467-71)

Arveragus's reply sounds unexpected to Dorigen: his "glad chiere" and "freendly wyse" (1467), as well as his question "Is ther oght elles, Dorigen, but this?" (1469) drastically contrast with his wife's despairing attitude. Mary J. Carruthers, who imagines that Dorigen was surprised at Arveragus's friendly manners after her confession because she would have expected him to get angry about her promise to Aurelius, has argued that

[t]he moment signals a correction in the value basis of the tale and emphasizes the wisdom of the teacher, who inhabits a more inclusive moral plane than does the audience.²¹⁹

Arveragus's intervention marks an improvement in the impasse which Dorigen as well as the tale itself seem to have reached but also a change in the perspective from which her dilemma should be reconsidered. We may compare Arveragus's coming home in this part of the tale with his previous return from England. In that case both characters behaved in a significantly different way:

O blisful artow now, thou Dorigen,
That hast thy lusty housbonde in thyne armes,
The fresshe knyght, the worthy man of armes,
That loveth thee as his owene hertes lyf.
No thyng list hym to been ymaginatyf,
If any wight hadde spoke, whil he was oute,
To hire of love; he hadde of it no doute. (1090-96)

Totally careless of what happened with Aurelius, Dorigen rejoices at the sight of her husband, and Arveragus does not have the slightest suspicion of it. Their only concern is living the same blissful life they had before their long separation: Dorigen does not tell him of Aurelius's advances – in effect, she seems to have completely forgotten his proposal and her promise –, and Arveragus is unable to imagine that somebody may have taken advantage of his absence to attempt to seduce his wife. However, in the second part of the story, Dorigen has to face the failure of her attempt to counter Aurelius's avowal of love by herself, and, as she is caught by Arveragus in the middle of her emotional crisis when he comes home, she has to tell him what happened with Aurelius in the garden. Arveragus, on the other hand, has to face the fact that

²¹⁹ Mary J. Carruthers, "The Gentlese of Chaucer's Franklin", *Criticism*, 23 (1981), p.294.

what he deemed impossible – that somebody could even try to force his wife into adultery – has actually happened. (Among the parallels that inform the structure of the *Tale*, there is the fact that Dorigen and Arveragus are both forced, in the course of the story, to face the occurrence of what they thought to be impossible – the disappearance of the rocks and the existence of a would-be lover, respectively.) It seems that the two moments of the tale in which Arveragus and Dorigen meet again after a temporary separation were conceived as parallel scenes in which the differences are meant to shed light on how both characters are required to change their perception of reality: on the one hand, Dorigen sees herself unable to find another solution to her problem with Aurelius by herself, and willingly subjects herself to her husband’s decision; on the other, Arveragus has to put his endurance to the test, and has to accept the dire consequences that Dorigen’s promise to Aurelius may have on their relationship. Carruthers interprets Arveragus’s decision as “an act of moral courage”, arguing that

[i]t is because Arveragus respects Dorigen, values his love for her, and has promised to value her integrity by respecting her will that he sends her Aurelius.²²⁰

Unlike Dorigen, Arveragus has no doubts about the sole possible solution to take, and he says in reply to his wife’s confession:

Ye, wyf, [...] lat slepen that is stille.
 It may be wel, paraventure, yet to day.
 Ye shul youre trouthe holden, by my fay!
 For God so wisly have mercy upon me,
 I hadde wel levere ystiked for to be
 For verray love which that I to yow have,
 But if ye sholde youre trouthe kepe and save.
 Trouthe is the hyeste thyng that man may kepe (1472-79).

Arveragus starts inviting Dorigen to keep calm and not to make her situation worse than it actually is. He seems significantly less worried for what has happened than Dorigen, so that he does not deem his wife to be in trouble; indeed he hopes in a happy resolution of the situation. His solution is that Dorigen should keep her promise, adding that this is the only way by which God may be merciful with him, and spare the true love he has for his wife. Arveragus’s reply ends with the aphorism according to which nothing is more important than *trouthe*. After saying

²²⁰ Carruthers, p.295.

these words, Arveragus bursts into tears, and adds, as if he had just realised what his decision may cost him:

I yow forbede, up peyne of deeth,
That nevere, whil thee lasteth lyf ne breeth,
To no wight telle thou of this aventure –
As I may best, I wol my wo endure –
Ne make no contenance of hevynesse,
That folk of yow may demen harm or gesse. (1481-86)

In the end he sends Dorigen to Aurelius accompanied by a squire and a maid, who are told nothing about the purpose of the encounter.

Arveragus's reply to Dorigen is split into two parts, to which two different reactions correspond – the first, more rationally controlled, and the other, evidently emotional. As Carruthers has pointed out, “two moral imperatives” are implied in Arveragus's speech: “first, that Dorigen should keep her *trouthe*, and second, that she shall keep her honor.”²²¹ The word *trouthe* is mentioned three times in the first part of Arveragus's reply, each time with a different meaning.²²² In the first case Arveragus means Dorigen's word, which she should keep at all costs; however, one may ask which of the two promises Dorigen is supposed to keep, her marital oath to Arveragus or her adulterous pledge to Aurelius. The question has been posed by David Raybin, who, highlighting the deliberate ambiguity of Arveragus's words in this part of his reply, has argued that “Arveragus's determinant utterance speaks loudly on the theoretical edges but skirts the practical central issue.”²²³ The abstract nature of Arveragus's language in this part is even more evident in the other two occurrences of the word *trouthe*: in those cases, in fact, the

²²¹ Carruthers, p.294.

²²² On the variety and multiplicity of the meanings that the word *trouthe* may assume in Middle English, Alison Ganze has explained that “[t]he MED gives no fewer than sixteen different definitions of the word *trouthe*, including ‘loyalty’ (to one's kin, one's country, one's beloved, one's God); ‘adherence to vows and promises’; ‘constancy’; ‘honor, nobility integrity, or moral soundness’; ‘honesty’; ‘character or behavior that conforms to religious or divine standards, righteousness, or holiness’; ‘faith’, especially Christian faith, the tenets of Christian belief; ‘absolute truth,’ usually identified with spiritual reality; ‘factual information’; and ‘justice,’ usually in the context of natural law.” See Ganze, p.312.

²²³ Raybin insightfully notices how Arveragus is vague about the kind of *trouthe* meant in his words, but I disagree with his interpretation of Arveragus as somebody who “dissipates his power in the production of empty phrases”, leaving “the arena for action, for meaningful choice, entirely to Dorigen.” Arveragus's use of “abstract, self-orientated philosophizing” seems to me not to be due to the fact that he is “incapable of appropriate action”, as Raybin argues, but symptomatic of the different point of view he champions in the scene. See David Raybin, “‘Wommen, of Kynde, Desiren Libertee’: Rereading Dorigen, Rereading Marriage”, *Chaucer Review*, 27 (1992), pp.68-69.

word is intended to represent a quality of Dorigen's character and the most important value in man's life. In the second part of his reply, Arveragus is concerned about Dorigen's and his honour, that is, their social reputation as wife and husband – a problem which is not a reflection of his hypocrisy but a consequence of the noble social status of these characters. Incidentally, this same concern was expressed by Arveragus when he renounced his mastery over Dorigen at the beginning of the tale “Save that the name of soveraynetee, / That wolde he have for shame of his degree” (751-52).

D. S. Brewer has argued that honour in Chaucer has a double meaning:

[o]n the one side honour looks towards goodness, virtue, an inner personal quality; on the other side looks towards social or external reputation, to marks of dignity, like giving generous feasts, or making honorific gestures like kneeling.²²⁴

Brewer has observed that the distinction between these two different kinds of honour is to be found also in Boethius's discussion of honour in *De Consolatione Philosophiae* – notably in Book III, proses 2 and 4, and in Book IV, prose 4 –, whereby marks of dignity are often given to morally reprehensible individuals, and, as a result, a good reputation does not necessarily presuppose an inner personal quality.²²⁵ As Brewer argues

The Franklin's Tale is explicitly about *trouthe's* superiority to honour. [...] *Trouthe* is loyalty, and in the cluster of notions that compose the sentiment of honour, the keeping of *trouthe* must be isolated as so much the superior inner moral value as to be, as on this occasion, positively hostile to social relationship and reputation. [...] Honour as social virtue, and honour as chastity or possession, are subordinated to honour as obedience to a high moral ideal, perforce an inner, indeed a spiritual value.²²⁶

The Franklin's Tale seems to investigate the paradox contained in the situation in which Dorigen and Arveragus, the embodiment of wifely chastity and knightly worthiness respectively, are forced to do something which threatens the maintenance of their good reputation for the sake of *trouthe*.

Arveragus's speech clearly differentiates the respectability that comes from the conformity to social expectations, from the personal commitment to a moral value, giving

²²⁴ D. S. Brewer, “Honour in Chaucer”, *Essays and Studies*, 26 (1973), p.2.

²²⁵ Brewer, pp.2-3.

²²⁶ Brewer, pp.16-18.

absolute priority to the latter, though he is perfectly aware of the importance of the former. As Brewer explains, a good reputation in the case of knights was associated with military prowess, whereas ladies' honour consisted mostly in their renown as chaste women.²²⁷ In *The Franklin's Tale*, in fact, Arveragus leaves for England "To seke in armes worshipe and honour – / For al his lust he sette in swich labour" (811-12), while Dorigen makes of chastity and marital fidelity her most important values in life, as her second complaint clearly shows. As Brewer argues, if a wife is faithful, the honour of the husband is enhanced, but "dishonour comes to both husband and wife if *she* commits adultery."²²⁸ Moreover, in a society in which belonging to a group is a matter of identity – as Brewer argues, "[i]f one loses one's name, one loses honour, one's place in the honour-group and thus in society" –²²⁹ Arveragus's threatening to kill Dorigen if she lets people find out about her promise to Aurelius is symptomatic of the extreme risk which Arveragus accepts to run for the sake of Dorigen's *trouthe*. An analogously sympathetic reading of Arveragus's concern for reputation has been provided also by Gerald Morgan, who argues that

[t]he emphasis on the moral worthiness and knightly dignity of Arveragus is by no means gratuitous. We are shown thereby how much he stands to lose in terms of merited dignity by any act of infidelity on the part of his wife. The generosity of Arveragus is manifested above all in the fact that he can set aside all that is most precious to him as a knight in the cause of his wife's fidelity to the word that she has freely pledged.²³⁰

In effect, Arveragus's generosity in sending his wife to her suitor is one of the reasons that induce Aurelius to renounce his reward at the end of the tale, and the fact that we interpret Arveragus's decision as highly dangerous for his own identity as a knight and as a husband is clearly coherent with the displays of generous deeds that the Franklin wants his tale to illustrate.

In Arveragus's reply to Dorigen Chaucer transforms a fundamental principle of the chivalric code into the essential quality that makes an individual worthy of respect – in this case, a devoted wife worthy of her husband's love. Lee Patterson, pointing out that Arveragus's

²²⁷ Brewer, pp.6-12.

²²⁸ Brewer, p.9.

²²⁹ Brewer, p.4.

²³⁰ Morgan, "Boccaccio's *Filocolo* and the Moral Argument of the *Franklin's Tale*", p.301.

sententious “Trouthe is the hyeste thyng that man may kepe” (1479) strongly resembles formulas which were part of the chivalric code in fourteenth-century England, has argued that

[f]or Arveragus, *trouthe* is an internal condition, a sense of integrity specific to the individual and wholly within his or her own keeping. Dorigen must keep her *trouthe* to Aurelius despite the fact that to sleep with him will, in society’s (and Scrope’s) terms, dishonor both her and her husband. For Arveragus, if she breaks her promise, regardless of who knows, she violates her inner integrity as a person.²³¹

Being loyal is therefore the condition Dorigen has to fulfil in order to prove her integrity to her husband, not to society. The fact that Arveragus wants Dorigen to keep her adventure with Aurelius secret underlines the fact that he deems society unable to honour *trouthe*. This quality, in fact, may even be at variance with what people would commonly think appropriate – to the extent that, for example, a husband is required to order his wife to go to her would-be lover.

One may argue that Arveragus’s calm reaction to Dorigen’s confession and his decision to let Dorigen go to Aurelius to keep her promise are symptomatic of a careless husband, who does not really love his wife, or of a pitiless man, who does not save a woman from a potential rapist. Russell A. Peck depicts Arveragus as an egoistic parvenu, who marries Dorigen to improve his social rank, and whose sole concern at the moment of crisis is how to maintain the public image he has gained:

Arveragus’s stand for “trouthe” should be regarded with suspicion. He sees only the social implication of the virtue, not the moral. [...] The happy ending is due more to the Franklin’s faith in the competitive spirit – Aurelius and the magician striving to outdo Arveragus – than to any real virtue Arveragus might himself possess.²³²

An unsympathetic reading of Arveragus’s character has been provided also by Alison Ganze, who argues that Arveragus, as a knight, should have defended his wife from her potential suitor instead of offering her to him – Ganze compares Dorigen with Homer’s Penelope, arguing that

²³¹ Patterson reports how after two English noblemen, Sir Richard Scrope and Sir Robert Grosvenor, contended the right to bear arms with a specific pattern of colours by means of legal actions in front of the Court of Chivalry – a long-drawn-out dispute in which what was at stake was of utmost importance because weapons belonged to the identity of a knight, and were signs strictly connected with the privileges of his own family – Scrope, who eventually won the cause, rejected Grosvenor’s request of forgiveness, because Sir Robert had had disrespect for his troth and his arms, the two most important things for a knight. Scrope’s answer, pronounced in front of the king and other important members of the English aristocracy, must have been known also to Chaucer, who, as one of the king’s esquires, had been required to give his own testimony during the trial. See Lee Patterson, “The *Knight’s Tale* and the Crisis of Chivalric Identity”, in *Chaucer and the Subject of History*, Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1991, pp.179-98.

²³² Russell A. Peck, “Sovereignty and the Two Worlds of the *Franklin’s Tale*”, *Chaucer Review*, 1 (1967), p.261.

she would have expected Arveragus to react as Ulysses did when he, on his long-awaited return from the war of Troy, did not hesitate to kill the men who had been threatening his wife's fidelity during his absence:

Dorigen wants Arveragus to be an Odysseus and get rid of the suitor – in other words, to respond as a chivalric knight and act as a champion for her honor.²³³

Both critics seem not to consider Arveragus as the embodiment of a point of view that is intended to oppose Dorigen's, and probably also the reader's, expectations. As a consequence, Arveragus's decision is not intended to show his courage or cowardice, but to offer an alternative to Dorigen's ethical argument as has been presented in her complaint to Fortune.

Arveragus's unexpected reaction to Dorigen's confession and the narrator's emphasis on his self-control and calmness sharply contrast with his wife's extreme anxiety. Significantly, Dorigen started her complaint with a despairing address to Fortune, whereas Arveragus tackles the problem with the hopeful conviction that a positive outcome is still possible. I would suggest that Chaucer's intention behind the first part of Arveragus's reply was to make his knight above all a wise man. According to *De Consolatione Philosophiae*, in fact, a man endowed with wisdom must see Fortune's adversity with the same strength with which a man of arms faces the beginning of a battle:

for ryght as the stronge man ne semeth nat to abaissen or disdaignen as ofte tyme as he herith the noyse of the bataile, ne also it ne semeth nat to the wise man to beren it greuously as ofte as he is lad into the stryf of fortune. (IV. p.7, 76-81)²³⁴

The Boethian comparison may have led Chaucer to see Arveragus as an adequate character in the story to express the strength needed to make adversity the occasion of testing one's virtue. Moreover, Arveragus does not illustrate what virtuous behaviour consists in through a series of exemplary men – as Dorigen did with her famous women – but simply makes reference to the idea of *trouthe*. This, of course, perfectly conforms to the ethics of a good knight, but, most importantly, allows for the rejection of suicide as the sole moral solution to Dorigen's dilemma,

²³³ Ganze, p.325.

²³⁴ The comparison is also to be found in the Latin text: “ita uir sapiens moleste ferre non debet, quotiens in fortunae certamen adducitur, ut uirum fortem non decet indignari, quotiens increpuit bellicus tumultus” (“a wise man must be no more troubled when he is assaulted with adversity, than a valiant captain dismayed at the sound of an alarum.”)

replacing it with a different kind of self-sacrifice, which puts to test Arveragus's endurance no less than Dorigen's, as his bursting into tears and the second part of his reply show.

2.IV The averted 'tragedy' of Dorigen: the happy conclusion of *The Franklin's Tale*

Trouthe may well be the most important thing that one can keep, and this accounts for the high moral value of Dorigen's and Arveragus's willingness to sacrifice wifely chastity and social reputation because of a rash promise, but the ending of the *Tale* seems to hint at the fact that ethical integrity should not be at variance with human happiness. Significantly, Chaucer wanted the Franklin to interrupt the sequence of events to restrain his audience from making any rash judgment on Arveragus's reply to Dorigen:

Paraventure an heep of yow, ywis,
Wol holden hym a lewed man in this
That he wol putte his wyf in jupartie.
Herkneth the tale er ye upon hire crie.
She may have bettre fortune than yow semeth;
And whan that ye han herd the tale, demeth. (1493-98)

The passage implies not only the fact that the Franklin champions the principle that all's well that ends well – and that, therefore, Arveragus's decision should be judged positively or negatively on the basis of its outcome – but also that by the time Dorigen is sent to Aurelius, no positive solution has been seriously taken into account by either of the two main characters, nor by any of the pilgrims that have been listening to the tale: Arveragus's confidence in the line "It may be wel, paraventure, yet to day" (1473) is soon replaced with an attitude of distress, and the narrator feels himself in need of reassuring the reader that Dorigen may have better chance "than yow semeth" (1497). Therefore, it transpires that if we are to guess how the story is going to end, we are supposed to expect a tragic ending.

To the expectation of a tragic ending a major contribution has been provided by the character of Dorigen and her agency throughout the tale. Now, Chaucer's notions of tragedy and comedy have been objects of discussion among scholars. Chaucer's use of the terms *tragedye* and *comedye* in his narratives – as he does, for example, in *Troilus and Criseyde*: "Go, litel bok,

go, myn tragedye, / Ther God thi makere yet, er that he dye, / So sende myght to make in som comedye!” (V. 1786-88) – does not imply the fact that he was referring to specific theories of genre that were known in the Middle Ages, nor that he was imitating texts that were commonly held to be tragedies and comedies, nor that he intended tragedies and comedies to be texts written to be performed by actors on a stage.²³⁵ Scholars have pointed out that *De Consolatione Philosophiae* and, in particular, the Boethian idea of Fortune were fundamental to Chaucer’s understanding of tragedy, and have taken Chaucer’s translation and gloss to Boethius’s rhetorical question about tragedy as an important starting point in defining what may have been Chaucer’s notion of tragedy.²³⁶

What other thyng bywaylen the crynges of tragedyes but oonly the dedes of Fortune, that with an unwar strook overturneth the realmes of greet nobleye? (*Glose. Tragedye is to seyn a dite of a prosperite for a tyme, that endeth in wrecchidnesse.*) (II. p.2, 67-72)²³⁷

From the passage we may infer that tragedy is supposed to present the following characteristics: it involves lamentation; it is associated with the unexpected change of Fortune, notably the fall of kings or noblemen; it has a happy beginning and a sad ending.²³⁸

²³⁵ Monica E. McAlpine has argued that “[I]ike the rest of his contemporaries, Chaucer would have had practically no knowledge of the Greek dramatists, a limited knowledge of Roman drama, and only a vague idea of the form of classical drama. One result was that medieval writers, like Nicholas Trivet in his fourteenth-century commentary on the tragedies of Seneca, made no clear-cut distinction between narrative and acted forms of tragedy and comedy.” See Monica E. McAlpine, *The Genre of Troilus and Criseyde*, London: Cornell University Press, 1978, p.87. As for Chaucer’s knowledge of theory on tragedy, H. A. Kelly, in his article on the reception of the *Poetics* of Aristotle and Averroes’s *Poetics Commentary* in the Middle Ages, has argued that Chaucer, “who did not know about Horace’s *Ars Poetica*, not to mention Seneca’s tragedies, and did not use Isidore’s *Etymologies* at first hand, was hardly likely to have had any knowledge of Averroistic or Aristotelian teachings on tragedy.” See H. A. Kelly, “Aristotle-Averroes-Alemannus on Tragedy: the Influence of the *Poetics* on the Latin Middle Ages”, *Viator*, 10 (1979), p.207. In his book specifically dedicated to the genre of tragedy in Chaucer’s works, Kelly maintains that “Chaucer was doing something very original when he started to compose tragedies”, as he argues that Chaucer hardly knew of previous or contemporary medieval authors who considered themselves to be writers of tragedies. See H. A. Kelly, *Chaucerian Tragedy*, Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1997, pp.39-40.

²³⁶ D. W. Robertson, McAlpine and Kelly, in their studies about Chaucer’s idea of tragedy, quote Chaucer’s translation of *De Consolatione Philosophiae*, Book II, prose 2, 67-72. See D. W. Robertson, Jr., “Chaucerian Tragedy”, *ELH*, 19 (1952), p.2; McAlpine, pp.50,89; Kelly, *Chaucerian Tragedy*, p.50.

²³⁷ Both McAlpine and Kelly quote Trevet’s commentary on which Chaucer may have drawn for his gloss: “Tragedia enim est scriptum de magnis iniquitatibus a prosperitate incipiens et in adversitate desinens.” Both critics have pointed to Chaucer’s omission of *de magnis iniquitatibus* – that is, Trevet’s reference to the great immoral actions that are supposed to be the causes of the tragic hero’s fall – and have argued that Chaucer, in accordance with Boethius, may have thought misfortune not to be necessarily the punishment of an individual’s vice, so that in tragedies adversity could befall innocent as well as wicked people. See McAlpine, pp.89-90; Kelly, *Chaucerian Tragedy*, p.51.

²³⁸ Kelly summarizes the characteristics of tragedy that are to be found in the passage quoted from *Boece* as follows: “[t]ragedy was normally, though not always, written in verse [...], and could be recited like other verse [...]; it was a

In *The Monk's Tale* Chaucer, through the narrator's voice, explicitly describes the series of stories presented as a collection of tragedies; this classification follows a definition which closely resembles that which is provided in *Boece*, as both definitions hint at the fact that the subject treated is the fall of a noble man from great prosperity into misery.²³⁹ This is the theme which unifies the stories told by the Monk, whose tale, as Paul G. Ruggiers argues, is "Chaucer's most classical exercise" in the development of his idea of tragedy into one of his narratives; however, Ruggiers also points out that Chaucer's tragic work in *The Canterbury Tales* is not limited to *The Monk's Tale*. As a reflection of his "proclivity for pathos" – which Ruggiers describes as "the talent which accounts for the major part of tragic tone in Chaucer" – it mostly takes the form of a story

in which the emotional responses are those of pity induced by incidents arousing tears, sobbing lamentation, without the deeper coloration of terror. In this kind of utterance from both men and women (but principally from the latter), mainly on the subject of love and betrayal Chaucer is particularly adept.²⁴⁰

The Franklin's Tale may provide, through its female protagonist Dorigen, an instance of this kind of story – this "pathetic tragedy", as Ruggiers calls it.²⁴¹ Dorigen, in fact, is given a tone of lamentation throughout the story. The moments in which narration focuses exclusively on her character, and in which her thoughts and feelings become the object of attention – mainly in her two soliloquies, but also in her recounting to Arveragus of her rash promise, as well as in her heading for the garden to fulfil her promise – may be symptomatic of an interest on Chaucer's part in the exploration of the suffering which even an otherwise happy married couple like that of Dorigen and Arveragus may stumble across. Moreover, Dorigen's complaining does not lack the motif of Fortune's unforeseeable change, which seems to be an essential element of Chaucer's idea of tragedy in *The Monk's Tale*. Indeed she faces the fact that she may have to go

narrative account [...] that usually dealt with persons of high standing [...] and began in joy [...] and ended in sorrow[...]; and there was emphasis on Fortune, that is, the unexpected [...], and on lamentation [...]." See Kelly, *Chaucerian Tragedy*, pp.64-65.

²³⁹ The Monk anticipates the subject matter of his stories as follows: "I wol biwaille in manere of tragedie / The harm of hem that stode in heigh degree, / And fillen so that ther nas no remedie / To brynge hem out of hir adversitee." (1991-94)

²⁴⁰ Paul G. Ruggiers, "Notes Towards a Theory of Tragedy in Chaucer", *Chaucer Review*, 2 (1973), p.92.

²⁴¹ Ruggiers, p.92.

through a reversal of her conjugal happiness when she is told that the rocks have disappeared, and she sees herself condemned to a miserable choice between adultery and disloyalty.

One may assume that the rationale behind Chaucer's handling of the *Tale* is the question whether Dorigen is to blame for her promise to Aurelius, to the extent that the sufferings she has to endure at the thought of a tragic resolution may be read as a somewhat deserved punishment. Edwin B. Benjamin, for instance, sees Dorigen as guilty of the "sin of pride" in her complaint about the rocks, arguing that "she, and no one else, is responsible for the rash promise that causes all the difficulties"; moreover, he compares Chaucer's treatment of Dorigen's alleged guilt to that of Criseyde, saying that

Chaucer does not condemn her any more than he condemns Criseyde, but in the comparatively long account of her reaction to Arveragus' departure he may be said to expose her.²⁴²

However philosophically wrong Dorigen's observations about God's creation may appear, it seems that Chaucer was simply expressing, through her voice, a point of view that is analogous to that embodied by the character of Boethius in the *Consolatio*, whose limitations are not due to the sin of pride but to human despair. In the description of Dorigen's grief at her husband's absence, emphasis is put, in fact, on her fear that Arveragus may not come back, that is, on her deeply distressed state of mind, and therefore it is more likely that Chaucer's intention was to present the reader with a character whose flaws are more understandable than blameworthy. Of course Dorigen is the sole responsible for the difficulties that her promise causes to her and Arveragus, but this simply provides the story, as Derek Pearsall argues, with "a poignant irony, for Dorigen's promise allows momentarily for the destruction of all that she holds most dear."²⁴³ Dorigen does realise it when she tells Arveragus of her promise, and Aurelius gently rebukes her for having sworn, when he adds after her release: "But every wyf be war of hire biheeste! / On Dorigen remembreth, atte leeste" (1541-42). However, Dorigen is never exposed, and, after she is released from her promise, she is praised as "the treweste and the beste wyf / That evere yet I

²⁴² Edwin B. Benjamin, "The Concept of Order in the *Franklin's Tale*", *Philological Quarterly*, 38 (1959), p.120.

²⁴³ Derek Pearsall, *The Canterbury Tales*, London, New York: Routledge, 1985, p.154.

knew in al my lyf” (1539-40), as Aurelius acknowledges at the end of the story. Therefore, the story seems ultimately to avoid making an accusation against Dorigen, implying that her temporary shift from blissful conjugal life to dire sorrow is due to the mutability of things that escapes human control – that is, to Fortune, to whom Dorigen addresses her second, not completely unjustified, complaint – rather than somebody’s fault, and even if Dorigen’s lack of patience may be seen as a major menace to her happiness, the *Tale* seems to argue that one’s character is one’s fate – a principle that Ruggiers sees at work in *The Monk’s Tale*:

in some of the tales in which catastrophe is brought upon the hero by some weakness or inadvertence within himself, we may say for these heroes that their character is their fate.²⁴⁴

As for the question of the *Tale*’s happy closure, notably how the positive solution to Dorigen’s dilemma may have been thought appropriate to the tragic tone which is reserved for Dorigen’s character, we may argue that *The Franklin’s Tale* accomplishes two impossibilities: the first one is performed by the clerk/magician, and is the apparent disappearance of the rocks; the other is performed by the Franklin, and is the development into comedy of a potential tragedy. Timothy H. Flake, who has taken into account the coexistence of tragedy and comedy in the *Tale*, argues that

[t]he real reversal of fortune happens with Aurelius’s epiphanal response to the lovers’ *gentillesse*. [...] Insofar as his response is the key to the tale’s modulation from tragedy to comedy, it is the change in his thinking that is the key to the dramatic problem of the tale. However, without some explanation of how this change comes about, the *Franklin’s Tale* retains the sense of having a *deus ex machina* lurking about, who, much like the magician, seems to have created a comic ending out of thin air.²⁴⁵

Flake correctly identifies Aurelius’s reaction to Dorigen’s desperate fulfilment of her promise as the moment in which the shift to the *Tale*’s happy ending is accomplished, and points to the unexpectedness and inexplicability of such a renunciation on the part of Aurelius, who, up to that point, has been portrayed as being so deeply in love with Dorigen that his sole purpose in the story seemed to consist in managing to induce Dorigen to requite his love in some ways.

²⁴⁴ Ruggiers, p.91.

²⁴⁵ Timothy H. Flake, “Love, *Trouthe*, and the Happy Ending of the *Franklin’s Tale*”, *English Studies*, 77 (1996), pp.222-23.

However, an explanation may actually be found in the Franklin's description of Aurelius's reaction at Dorigen's despairing fulfilment of Arveragus's command:

Aurelius gan wondren on this cas,
And in his herte hadde greet compassioun
Of hire and of hire lamentacioun,
And of Arveragus, the worthy knyght,
That bad hire holden al that she had hight,
So looth hym was his wyf sholde breke hir trouthe;
And in his herte he caughte of this greet routhe,
Considerynge the beste on every syde,
That fro his lust yet were hym levere abyde
Than doon so heigh a cherlyssh wrecchednesse
Agayns franchise and alle gentillesse. (1514-24)

Compassion is the element that allows for the tale's happy resolution. In Dorigen's series of *exempla* men were portrayed as shameless rapists, whose sole concern was the satisfaction of their vice; in Arveragus's there was a hint at a positive outcome of the situation, but it could only be intended as a triumph of *trouthe* over the difficulties implied in Dorigen's case. The fact that Aurelius could renounce his claim on Dorigen never occurred to them. Therefore, the *Tale's* potential for tragedy is averted by means of a totally unexpected emotional response, deriving from the pathos that has informed the previous scenes, and contributing to the growth of one of the characters.

The positive turn of events at the end of *The Franklin's Tale*, however, does not contradict Chaucer's notion of tragedy; indeed it seems to conform to it even better. Ruggiers points out that

[i]n accordance with the virtue of hope which sustains Christian literature, the softening of the serious in the direction of the redemptive ending accords well with the tone of the pathetic.²⁴⁶

Ruggiers argues that Chaucer's reception of tragedy was indissolubly the product of his Christian culture, notably the idea of a benevolent God's governance of the world, as well as the notion of Christ's innocent sacrifice for the sake of mankind, and derives from this observation an explanation of the fact that

Chaucer seems always to be searching for a way to dissolve the knot of unrelieved suffering; that is to say he prefers the affects of romance to those of tragedy, lightening

²⁴⁶ Ruggiers, p.93.

the tone, providing touches of comic irony, salvaging his heroes and heroines, or, where he cannot, as in the melodramas, making them richly deserve the fate that befalls them.²⁴⁷

Chaucer's intention of giving happy endings to tragic stories is at the basis of Charles S. Watson's interpretation of *The Nun's Priest's Tale*, in which he points out the development of the pessimistic attitude to Fortune's mutability of *The Monk's Tale* – which Watson summarizes in the following terms: “[w]hen Fortune abandons a man, he is helpless” – into a more optimistic viewpoint, according to which “if a man acts promptly and intelligently he may regain his good fortune.”²⁴⁸ Watson sees in this coupling of the tales the opposition between tragedy and comedy, as he argues that for Chaucer the difference between the two genres may have consisted in the different kind of ending they presented.²⁴⁹ Moreover, McAlpine has observed how in Chaucer the development of his narratives into tragedies or comedies depends on the choices that the characters make when they must face dilemmas brought about by the course of events:

[b]y defining the context within which man exercises his free will, fate provides situations that are weighted toward the tragic or the comic, but the potentiality in the situation must be actualized by a human choice. A potential tragedy might be transcended by a truly heroic choice, and a potential comedy might be wasted by a cowardly choice. [...] In Chaucer's terms, a tragic change moves the character toward rigidity and disfigurement, a comic change toward growth and healing.²⁵⁰

We may argue that *The Franklin's Tale* presents a similar case of development of a comic ending from a story in which pathos and lamentation are given particular emphasis, and in which its heroine is portrayed as a helpless victim of circumstances up to the turn of events in the end. Aurelius's renunciation is the point which most evidently shows the power that these characters are given to redress their situation: not only does his choice prevent destroying Dorigen and Arveragus's happy marriage but it also improves his moral nature, which will tellingly be rewarded by the clerk/magician later on. However, his growth as a character presupposes the choices previously made by Arveragus and Dorigen. The latter, in particular, emerges as the

²⁴⁷ Ruggiers, p.95.

²⁴⁸ Charles S. Watson, “The Relationship of the *Monk's Tale* and the *Nun's Priest's Tale*”, *Studies in Short Fiction*, 1 (1964), p.281.

²⁴⁹ Watson, p.287.

²⁵⁰ McAlpine, p.149.

prime mover of all the tragedy and comedy contained in the *Tale*. Her inability to commit suicide, that is, to put into practice the only solution she could come up with, turns out to be the condition that makes her revert to Arveragus's decision, and therefore the first step toward the story's happy ending. Chaucer seems to have been considering how events evolved from Dorigen's complaint to Fortune and her series of exemplary women to whom she would like to liken herself so much when he conceived Aurelius's reply to Dorigen at the end. The squire's presentation of Dorigen as the most faithful wife he has ever met in his life, as well as his giving immortal fame to her case as a reminder for women to be careful with their promises, may be read as the best personal reward Dorigen could wish for.

After Dorigen humbly thanks Aurelius for his generosity, she goes home and tells Arveragus how things have eventually reached a positive conclusion; the narrator concludes their story with an account of the "sovereyn blisse" (1552) in which their conjugal life continues: Arveragus keeps on loving her "as though she were a queene" (1554), and Dorigen remains faithful to him forever. The Franklin seems to think that all the questions raised by Dorigen and Arveragus's story have been answered, and the *Tale* continues with the account of the payment of the thousand pounds Aurelius owes to the clerk of Orléans for the magic performed: Aurelius is in despair because he can only pay half the money, but, as he is determined to keep his promise at all costs, he goes to the magician, who, being told how things went with Dorigen, compassionately forgives his debt. The Franklin's speech ends with a question addressed to the pilgrims, "Which was the mooste fre, as thynketh yow?" (1622) – a question which remains unanswered.

This conclusion veers away from the discussion of marriage and of equality between husband and wife presented at the beginning of the *Tale*, but it may also seem that Dorigen, who has received so much attention so far, is almost forgotten in favour of the question of generosity which seems to concern only the male protagonists. Mary R. Bowman, who maintains that the character of Dorigen is treated as a sort of commodity throughout the story – and most evidently

in its last part, that is, from the moment in which Arveragus sends her to Aurelius up to the clerk's renunciation of his payment –, has argued that her “objectification” is meant to serve the Franklin's concluding question about generosity, to which Dorigen is excluded:

Since she is not an agent in the privileged exchanges, she ceases to be of interest to the interpreter in search of the prized virtue. The actions of the knight, the squire, and the clerk are held up for our evaluation, but Dorigen's thoughts, words, and deeds become irrelevant.²⁵¹

In my interpretation of the *Tale*, I see Aurelius's behaviour as the result of his portrayal as a courtly lover, and Arveragus's reply to Dorigen as a reflection of his knightly loyalty. Moreover, I would argue that if Dorigen may seem to be merely an object of exchange as she is sent to Aurelius against her desire, there is definitely on Chaucer's part an attempt to make her agency an important factor in the positive resolution of the story, even though I do not see it as deliberate attack on Arveragus's marital authority. Instead, Chaucer seems to attribute Dorigen's manifestation of her inward turmoil to her inability to keep calm, as much as he associates Aurelius's act of generosity to a spontaneous upsurge of compassion.

Although I do not think that Dorigen has completely disappeared by the end of the *Tale*, Bowman correctly underscores how the emphasis that has been put on Dorigen is greatly reduced at the end of the story, to the extent that we may even doubt that her character is, after all, still of any interest. I would argue that the end of the *Tale* provides, in effect, further evidence of the fact that *The Franklin's Tale* witnesses to Chaucer's interest in the character of his heroine, rather than in the series of gentle deeds that leads all male characters to be generous

²⁵¹ Mary R. Bowman, “Half as She Were Mad’: Dorigen in the Male World of the *Franklin's Tale*”, *Chaucer Review*, 27 (1993), p.242. The question of “commodification of women” in *The Franklin's Tale* has been tackled by Nina Manasan Greenberg too, who points out how Dorigen's promise to Aurelius “is read according to the rules of masculinist discourse, in which trickery is a non-issue and a woman's love is equated with an afternoon of a man's physical fulfillment.” She also sees Arveragus as Dorigen's “interpreter of masculinist discourse” when he threatens his wife with death lest anyone find out about her encounter with Aurelius – an act which Greenberg interprets as an “exertion of ‘maistrie’ over her”. See Nina Manasan Greenberg, “Dorigen as Enigma: The Production of Meaning and the *Franklin's Tale*”, *Chaucer Review*, 33 (1999), pp.334-41. On the other hand, David Raybin, who has similarly pointed to “the patriarchal assumptions that underlie the behavior of both of the men”, detects in Dorigen's public display of despair as she walks to the garden an overt violation of the order given by her husband, arguing that she intends to expose the potential abuse she may be forced to endure, “requiring that Aurelius (and Arveragus) consider her not simply as an available object, but as an agent of personal choice.” See Raybin, pp.76-78.

to each other – a sort of competition in *gentillesse*, which the clerk summarizes in the following terms:

Everich of yow dide gentilly til oother.
Thou art a squier, and he is a knyght;
But God forbede, for his blisful myght,
But if a clerk koude doon a gentil dede
As wel as any of yow, it is no drede! (1608-12)

It is true that in the clerk's reply to Aurelius there is no mention of Dorigen, and his act of generosity is conceived as a reflection of the other two male characters' gentle deeds; this may lead the reader to exclude Dorigen from the characters whose generosity the Franklin asks the pilgrims to judge. However, Aurelius explicitly mentions Dorigen's visible despair at the fulfilment of her promise as a major determinant of his compassion – along with Arveragus's unconditional sense of respect for *trouthe* – not only as he releases Dorigen from her promise, but also when he recounts to the clerk how he eventually renounced what he had coveted for so long:

He seide, “Arveragus, of gentillesse,
Hadde levere dye in sorwe and in distresse
Than that his wyf were of hir trouthe fals.”
The sorwe of Dorigen he tolde hym als;
How looth hire was to been a wikked wyf,
And that she levere had lost that day hir lyf,
And that hir trouthe she swoor thurgh innocence,
She nevere erst hadde speke of apparence.
“That made me han of hire so greet pitee;
And right as frely as he sente hire me,
As frely sente I hire to hym ageyn.
This al and som; ther is namoore to seyn.” (1595-1606)

Significantly, the narrator interrupts Aurelius's words to recount Aurelius's reaction to Dorigen's state of mind; this makes Aurelius's account to the clerk of Dorigen's distress seem much longer than what the narrator actually reports – as he does not quote his exact words, but simply provides the gist of what he said – and may be symptomatic of the essential role played by Dorigen's emotionalism in his final renunciation. The fact that in this account we understand that Dorigen told Aurelius that she had made her rash promise in all innocence – a detail which brings again to the reader's attention the first part of the *Tale*, that is, Dorigen's grief at her husband's departure, her complaint about the black rocks and her promise in the garden –

provides a better explanation of Aurelius's unexpected generosity: in depicting herself as a victim, Dorigen may have significantly contributed to Aurelius's realisation of how unfair it would be for him to take her promise seriously at this point, taking advantage of her ingenuousness. Consideration for Dorigen's character is, therefore, missing in the clerk, but not in Aurelius, nor probably in the Franklin; moreover, though the series of gentle deeds on the part of the male characters could have been put into action without Dorigen's emotional involvement – indeed the clerk does not mention her in his reply to Aurelius, as if he were indifferent to her – the fact that Aurelius and the Franklin insist on attributing the positive resolution of the dilemma to Arveragus's *gentillesse* and Dorigen's distress may be due to the fact that Chaucer may have wanted Dorigen to remain important as a character up to the end of the Franklin's speech.

In *The Franklin's Tale* we are presented with a story which, on the one hand, seems to be conceived as an illustration of the value of reciprocal generosity – and the ending fully satisfies this need – but which, on the other hand, because of the narrator's indulgence in the characterization of Dorigen, generates questions in the reader which the male *gentillesse* at the end does not answer. In effect, the *Tale's* structure consists of two lines of events – the story of Arveragus and Dorigen's marital relationship, and a subplot dealing with the magician's involvement in the fulfilment of the promise – which are interwoven through the character of Aurelius, who takes active part in both: he becomes the other focus of the *Tale* after his introduction in the story of Dorigen in the scene of the garden, and one may argue that, through his act of generosity at the end, his growth as a character is put at the centre of the stage. Therefore, one may feel tempted to ask why the narrator does not focus his story solely on the character of Aurelius, but has to have first a discussion on the need for reciprocal forbearance in marriage and a praise of the virtue of patience, and then a story of conjugal life which may be read as the application of these two principles to a concrete case, but which is focused on the character who most evidently lacks endurance. Kathryn Jacobs, who has underscored the centrality that the marriage contract and conjugal life have in the *Tale*, argues that the Franklin,

with his final question to his audience, wants the reader not to admire one specific character above the others, but to reflect on the ideal of “mutual submission and self-denial in all human relations” which his tale is supposed to illustrate.²⁵² I agree with Jacobs that Dorigen and Arveragus’s marriage lives up to this ideal, as do Aurelius and the clerk, despite their all too human flaws. However, the importance that the character of Dorigen is given in the story seems to go beyond the portrayal of a happy marriage.

The choice of giving particular attention to her point of view seems, in fact, to further complicate the implications of the story: if we are to believe the Franklin’s observation that man should learn, willy-nilly, to be patient “For in this world, certein, ther no wight is / That he ne dooth or seith somtyme amys” (779-80), we may argue that the most patient and submissive character in the story is Arveragus: when confronted with Dorigen’s confession – that is, when an outburst of anger on his part would have been entirely understandable – Dorigen’s husband has a surprisingly calm reaction, and maintains, to a certain extent, a confident attitude about the future development of events, in spite of his awareness of the potential destruction which his wife’s promise to Aurelius may cause to their marital relationship. Therefore, the ample space Dorigen is granted in the text to put her anxieties into words may have been due to an interest that goes beyond, if not against, the problems that are intrinsic to the plot, that is, the various displays of generosity on the part of its male protagonists. In this sense, the question asked by the Franklin to the pilgrims appears unanswerable, and is left, not by chance, unanswered.²⁵³ It seems also unjustified by the intention of presenting a marriage of reciprocal love and forbearance. As a result, the treatment of Dorigen may have been motivated by an interest in the exploration of a character’s inner world as such, and in the great originality that the choice of that particular focus may have brought to the story.

²⁵² Kathryn Jacobs, “The Marriage Contract of the *Franklin’s Tale*: The Remaking of Society”, *Chaucer Review*, 20 (1985), p.134.

²⁵³ The male competition in *gentillesse* has become irrelevant even to the narrator of the *Tale*, as Anne Thompson Lee has argued: “the Franklin is too little interested in this question to answer it; the generous actions of the three men pale beside the generous and loving integrity of Dorigen.” See Lee, p.177.

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