

“Rokkes Blake’: Metonymy, Metaphor and Metaphysics in ‘The Franklin’s Tale’”

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Two of the main currents in criticism regarding *The Franklin’s Tale* have been the metaphor of the “rokkes blake” and the allusions to Boethius’ *Consolation of Philosophy*. What has not been thought through is how these two elements of the tale intersect and how this intersection is at the heart of the narrative. This paper will argue that the metaphoric connotations of the “rokkes blake” are the means by which the Boethian morality play is central to the dénouement of *The Franklin’s Tale*. Equally, I will argue that a very nuanced form of literary representation is what makes this possible and is the reason why critics have sometimes overlooked it. In what follows I will outline how this metaphor is established, inscribed with multiple layers of meaning, and ultimately becomes central to the tale’s conclusion. Also, I will draw some conclusions about use of metaphor and why it continues to draw critical interest.

As Dorigen is brooding about her husband and looking out over the coast, the narrator repeats the image of the “black rocks” she is gazing at. On a literal level the rocky coastline represents one particular danger for Arveragus – it could cause a shipwreck for a returning vessel. The black rocks are at first only an image of the coast which then becomes a metonymy for the foreboding presence of the sea. The “rokkes blake” ultimately gain significance beyond the literal and the metonymic – they become metaphoric on a number of different levels. This is supported by the way in which the literal meaning of the rocks is inconsequential to the plot of the tale. Dorigen does not really worry about her husband’s ship coming into danger from these rocks and when he does return no mention is made of them posing any physical danger to his journey. As V.A. Kolve writes: “It is the absence of a certain ship, not danger to all ships, that comes to obsess her – and with that narrowing of emotional focus comes the first notice of the ‘grisly feendly rokkes blake’ . . . Their meaning is more attributed than intrinsic – as other details will soon make clear” (174). The rocks quickly become a metaphor which represents the actual separation of the couple and this metaphor is further displaced as the rocks begin to symbolize Dorigen’s desperation and longing. Ultimately, Dorigen’s physical sickness over her husband’s absence becomes a synecdoche for a generalized concept of evil in the world. The rocks then become the symbol of an abstract notion of evil which is, at the same time, a necessary element of divine providence understood in a Boethian sense. This metaphor is important because it is ahead of its time. There is a larger gap between the signifier (“the rokkes blake”) and the signified (Dorigen’s brooding, or, better, evil in a wholly good creator’s universe) than is usually found in Chaucer’s work or in medieval literature in general.[1]

What makes the metaphor particularly powerful is that it is not really allegorical insofar as it is parallel with the literal meaning the rocks have. In other words, the rocks represent a danger posed to Arveragus’ ship, the physical separation between the couple, Dorigen’s emotional state, and an abstract concept of evil, but the more tangible meanings are, in turn, instances of abstract evil. So, it is not a matter of reading an allegory – if the rocks are taken literally or metaphorically they still refer to the same thing (Dorigen’s distress). Through this metaphor Dorigen’s sickness is conveyed on both abstract and particular levels. The literal, metaphoric, and abstract metaphysical strains of the tale are unified in this single image. Through all these layers of displacement, the “rokkes blake” become packed with an unusual layering of signification which ties the tale together in both narrative and theme, vehicle and tenor.

The “rokkes blake” first mentioned by the narrator and are soon echoed by Dorigen. The narrator says:

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. (859-62)

Immediately the “rokkes” are given dramatic emotional importance for Dorigen. The narrator depicts the rocks from Dorigen’s perspective and they are associated with her emotional state. They are clearly not just some rocks off the coast, but “grisly rokkes blake” that make her “herte quake.” Even before

this, Chaucer makes a reference to stones which could be read as self-reflexive and foreshadowing. The narrator says: "Men may so longe graven in a stoon / Til som figure therinne emprented be" (830-1). This passage refers to the way in which Dorigen's friends are trying to "imprint" their consolation on her. It also calls to mind how things are inscribed with meaning over time and it can read as a meta-textual meditation on literary representation and foreshadows the "rokkes blake." This metaphor is established methodically and is exactly how Dorigen herself 'inscribes' the rocks. The scene is set up before the rocks are mentioned – Dorigen "often" walks with her friends along the banks of the coast. Then "Another tyme wolde she sitte and thynke / And caste hir eyen downward fro the brynke" (857-58). These repetitive images make it clear that Chaucer is deliberately establishing this metaphor and "imprinting" the rocks with significations which go further than a simple metonymy for the sea. When Dorigen speaks she transfers her situation onto these rocks. Owing to the fact that Chaucer characterizes Dorigen as a contemplative, intelligent character, her meditations become inscribed in the rocks. She universalizes what she thinks about her suffering and draws larger conclusions about her situation which are continuously inscribed in the "rokkes blake."

These conclusions get played out in a theological debate which draws largely from Boethius and the "rokkes blake" pick up this metaphysical layer of meaning. As a response to her situation, Dorigen is contemplating how a wholly good "God" can allow misfortune to exist. She then uses the metaphor of the rocks in that sense. She says:

Eterne God, that thurgh thy purveiaunce
 Ledest the world by certain governaunce,
 In ydel, as men seyn, ye nothyng make.
 But, Lord, thise grisly, feendly rokkes blake
 That semen rather a foul confusioun
 Of werk than any fair creacion –
 Of swich a parfit, wys God and a stable
 Why han ye wroght this werk unresonable? (865-72)

In this passage the rocks are given a completely new layer of meaning – they are "feendly" or evil and at the same time part of God's "fair creacion." The prescience, omnipotence and omniscience of a "parfit, wys God" are juxtaposed with these rocks which seem a "foul confusioun" and "werk unresonable." She is essentially questioning why "Eterne God" created the "feendly rokkes blake," or evil incarnate. The rocks are symbolic for whatever appears to be evil, confusing, and unreasonable but is equally a part of God's "fair creation." Friedman notes:

[T]his questioning of God's ordering of the universe is deeply indebted to Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy* . . . it is appropriate that the philosophical issues it raises are set in a classicizing and even pagan past. The rocks seem the antithesis of God, and, in a Manichaeian sense, the representative of Satan and evil aimed against God's most favored project. (134)

Nevertheless there is one distinction that needs to be drawn about the sense of evil the rocks represent. The rocks are symbolic for evil in the world, but a divinely ordained evil which is a part of the creator's providence and hence not evil in the sense of Manichaeian duality. Her complaint, it should be stressed, is not simply about evil, but the fact that the evil the rocks represent is the "werk" of "Eterne God." Ultimately, Dorigen's rejection of them is a rejection of faith in divine providence. In this way, the rocks are associated with divine providence. Through them, Dorigen will come to understand why evil is a part of the "perfect creation" when the rocks are removed and she has to uphold her rash promise.

The "but" of line 868 challenges the orthodox views of a good Christian that Dorigen outlines in the preceding three lines. Because of "purveiaunce," or divine providence, the whole creation is "parfit" in that it is comprehended by God if not humanity, evil included. Divine providence in a Boethian sense transcends the good/evil binary through which humanity understands the world. Dorigen challenges the transcendental nature of divine providence and explicitly rejects the notion that evil can be a part of a "perfect creation." In her invective against evil for a moment it seems as if the symbol of the rocks will

be abandoned in favor of the theological debate it inspires. But, the “rokkes” are recalled and again inscribed with significance, only now clearly on the level of this theological problem. She says:

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 thane may it bee
 That ye swiche meenes make it to destroyen –
 Whiche meenes do no good but evere anoyen?
 I woot wel clerkes wol seyn as hem leste
 By argumentz that al is for the beste,
 Though I kan the causes nat yknowe.
 But thilke God that make wynde to blowe,
 As kepe my lord! This is my conclusioun. (877-889)

The “rokkes” now have theological significance, but they can still be read simply in the context of Dorigen and Arveragus. When Dorigen says the “rookes” have “slayn” a “hundred thousand bodyes of mankynde” she is referring to something beyond these particular rocks, namely evil in the world. But, because they can still be read in this particular context where they represent literal rocks which cause shipwrecks and the sea that separates the couple, the rocks work on multiple layers of meaning simultaneously – this is the novelty of the metaphor. It is clear that Dorigen’s monologue is becoming a polemical debate about the justice of an omnipotent God who allows evil to exist in the world; she is entrenching herself on the side which is opposed to the orthodox Christian stance and, moreover, God himself. There is a sense that she is speaking directly to God while the reader is overhearing her metaphysical argument. She accepts the other side of the debate – the “clerkes” – but gives her diatribe the stamp of finality when she says “this is my conclusion.” She is taking a stand in this debate and her rejection of the rocks, and their ultimate “removal,” are clearly meant to be read in this context.

Critics have questioned how Dorigen’s complaint is portrayed by the narrator and received by the reader. Susanna Fein writes:

Hearing mockery in the way Dorigen’s grief is made silly . . . some commentators think that Dorigen represents merely weak and weak-minded womanhood, and they feel assured in their knowledge that her complaint against the rocks rings with obvious blasphemy to anyone versed in elementary Boethian philosophy . . . Taking these arguments too far cuts against the narrative grain, however, for much meaning lies in the space given to complaint. Indeed, as Morton Bloomfield noted, we are posed quite an interpretive challenge when the grand metaphysical question of evil in the world, raised by Dorigen at the cliffs, is introduced only to carry little overt consequence later in the tale. 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. (201)

Fein is right to say that Dorigen’s complaint must have more significance than a “silly” woman’s blasphemy. It is fairly clear that this metaphysical question is presented in very sober terms. It is not so much that she is being portrayed as weak or blasphemous as it is that her particular situation is an example of this theological problem manifesting itself in praxis. The way in which she alludes to the “clerkes” is proof that she is aware of the correct philosophical stance in the debate. Dorigen’s problem is not ignorance, it is immediacy – she has to deal with very tangible evil in her personal life which is a world away from understanding the debate on purely rhetorical terms. The way in which she then makes her personal suffering a universal concept and laments suffering generally speaks more to her ability to think abstractly than it does to her ignorance of theology. The fact that “a Boethian viewpoint embraces both divine omniscience and human blindness” could allow us to read Dorigen as an exemplum of Boethius’ thinking. She is learning this metaphysical lesson in the school of hard knocks, as

it were. She berates God because she does believe in omniscience, but does not have enough faith to get past her “human blindness” and accept evil as a manifestation of divine providence.

Instead of rhetorically celebrating Boethius, what Chaucer is interested in is showing this metaphysical problem in action. One point where Fein’s reading might be lacking is in the contention that this idea is not carried over into the rest of the tale. The “rokkes blake” have obviously been inscribed with the significance of “evil” in the context of this metaphysical question. Even though the rocks might not be explicitly qualified in this way as the story continues, we can and should continue to read them in this light because of the insistence on the metaphor earlier in the tale. The theological debate is then resolved in the way in which the narrative plays out. We see the results of Dorigen’s contention when her wish is fulfilled and the rocks are, literally and metaphorically, “removed.” The tragedy that almost happens is what would happen if evil was not a part of creation.

This begins to play out in the narrative when Dorigen tells Aurelius that he can win her love by removing all the rocks from the coast of Brittany. She says:

Looke what day that endelong Britayne
 Ye remoeve alle the rokkes, stoon by stoon,
 That they ne lette shipe 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. (992-7)

First, it is impossible to miss that the image of rocks is insisted on emphatically which triggers all the connotations the “rokkes blake” have accrued in the opening scenes. Metaphorically, what Dorigen is essentially telling Aurelius is that she will love him best if he is her husband. Because the rocks represent the separation of the couple, their removal would signify the reunion of the couple and the end of Dorigen’s distress. This is supported by the way the narrator qualifies how these lines are spoken. She tells Aurelius: “I wol been his to whom that I am knyght. / Taak this for fynal answeere as of me” (986-7), and then the narrator says “But after that in pley thus seyde she” (988) which introduces the notion that her promise in lines 12-17 is rash. The tone in which these lines are spoken supports this reading, where the rejection of Aurelius is meant in earnest and the rash promise is “play” that mocks him. At this point the actual removal of the rocks is a whimsical fantasy about the immediate return of Arveragus – Dorigen does not foresee that clearing the rocks is literally possible. After she has made the rash promise, she says “wel I woot that it shal never bityde / Lat swiche folies out of youre herte sylde!” (1001-2). Dorigen’s promise is not so much an offer to Aurelius as it is a wish that her husband would return because she is speaking metaphorically.[2] As Susanna Fein notes: “In turning to Aurelius, unburdening the pain in her heart, Dorigen ventures towards a metaphorical betrayal of her marriage vow” (208). She *does* mean that she will love Aurelius best if he removes the rocks because, metaphorically speaking, the removal of the rocks is equivalent to Dorigen’s reunion with Arveragus. It might be questionable whether or not Dorigen is “turning to” Aurelius, but it is sure that her rash promise is facilitated by this metaphor. Although in a medieval romance we might expect a suitor to gain a lady’s favor, this tale clearly does not contain this motif – if there is a “romance” in the tale, it is Dorigen’s absolute and idealized fidelity to her husband, which we might consider belongs to a fairytale setting. Dorigen’s horror at Aurelius success in his impossible task, and her suicidal reaction to the predicament his success produces, make Fein’s reading that Dorigen is “turning to” Aurelius hard to follow.

Ultimately, the “rokkes blake” symbolize the imperative suffering of human existence, that, paradoxically, people are better off with than without. Dorigen’s rash promise tries to remove, and, tragically, does remove this element of existence. Gerhard Joseph observes in the conclusion of his reading of the tale as a theodicy: “the black rocks and the blind promise they engender are necessary preparations . . . for the enlightened moral abstentions that close the narrative, [and] the *Franklin’s Tale* may be read as Chaucer’s subtle and delightful parable justifying the ways of God to men” (32). Joseph sees the theological debate continued to the conclusion of the narrative, but what needs to be

fleshed out is how this is achieved. The cumulative metaphor of the black rocks is the centerpiece of the narrative, which develops a Christian ethos and, moreover, is how the theodicy is both a subtext and a moral of the tale. When Arveragus returns, the rocks are removed and the abstract notion of evil is removed from “fair creation.” When evil is removed, it would logically follow that everyone is happy. Dorigen can have her husband and Aurelius can be Dorigen’s husband. It is Chaucer’s black humor that, logically, this is set up to work out. Arveragus does return, the rocks are removed, and Aurelius gets Dorigen. The problem is that this of course makes things impossible – Aurelius cannot become Arveragus and no one can be happy. The conflation of Aurelius and Arveragus that was the inspiration for the rash promise is, in reality, inoperable. Both wishful thinkers seem to get what they wanted when the “rokkes” are removed, but the situation quickly becomes tragic for all the characters. Arveragus has to decide between giving his wife to another man and having her honor stained. Dorigen has to choose between being an unfaithful wife and suicide, and Aurelius has to decide between coercing Dorigen with her rash promise and being love sick and penniless.

This develops an economy of fate. The rocks serve as the currency of this realm – their removal ostensibly gives the two wishers what they wanted, but at the expense of everyone. As Kolve writes, “the rocks, in short, genuinely matter to the moral economy of the tale. Though they do not literally injure anyone or anything, the poem would be something very different without them” (195). The reason why the poem would not be the same without them, as this paper has tried to outline, is that they condense all the issues at hand into a single symbol which becomes not only a polyvalent metaphor but the driving force behind the narrative as well. This symbol mediates among these characters and brings their “fates” together. The “rokkes blake” are the coin of this “moral economy” where evil and suffering are an inalienable part of existence.

After the wishes of Dorigen and Aurelius are granted they are faced with the fact that their own satisfaction comes at the cost of someone else, namely Arveragus. The story concludes happily because Arveragus displays Christian self-sacrifice and forgiveness which then become infectious and undo the harm done by this rejection of divine providence. The tone of the story echoes a sermon from Matthew 6:12 where Christian forgiveness is outlined in the prayer “forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.” As Steele Nowlin contends, “Arveragus offers an option not available to the women of pagan antiquity: forgiveness” (55). The way Dorigen is surprised that Arveragus might forgive her introduces a binary between Christian and pagan. There is a long passage in which she broods over the only two options she can conceive of – death or dishonor. In his article on this passage, Warren S. Smith notes that it is based on St. Jerome’s *Against Jovinian*, but “focuses on the pagan exempla of the later chapters, in accordance with the occasional pagan or pre-Christian assumptions of the tale” (376). Like her tirade against evil, this passage aligns Dorigen with paganism on the one hand, while strangely using very Christian rhetoric, on the other.

She decides on the option of death, after referencing a slew of literary precedents. As Nowlin’s article outlines, in contrast to Arveragus, Dorigen has a very pagan frame of mind which is clearly contrasted with the Christian ethos which predominates the happy conclusion of the tale. Most obviously, suicide is not a moral problem for her at all.[3] So, wrapped up in this debate between the rejection and acceptance of evil in the world and divine providence is a binary between pagan and Christian. It goes without saying that the pagan will be parallel with a rejection of divine providence, while the Christian will be parallel with humble acceptance. Lee considers *The Franklin’s Tale* to be the climax of the fifth fragment which “develops as a considered progress from pagan ethics to Christian morality” (47). Dorigen’s rejection of evil sets the stage for this morality play. When she rejects the “rokkes” and evil-in-a-wholly-good-God’s-creation in a decidedly un-Christian way, she explicitly introduces paganism into the story.[4]

Many critics have noted the pagan setting of the tale and its importance to problems the tale brings into question. Although Dorigen is anachronistically familiar with Christian theology, there is a sense that she is in the process of learning what it is to be a good Christian. So, instead of portraying blasphemous Christians who are learning their lesson, Chaucer is creating pagan characters who are sympathetic

because we are watching them discover a correct Christian ethos. Nowlin argues: “The tale articulates this change in the environment through textual impositions by the narrator that work to render the pagan world of Brittany potentially – though not actually – Christian” (59). The setting becomes multilayered and makes the *dénouement* possible. On the one hand, the tale is told in decidedly Christian times by the Franklin, on the other, it takes place in pagan times *which are in the process of being christened*. So, it makes perfect sense that there is a Christian morality play happening in this pagan world which is not explicitly stated as such. The setting and narration, like the metaphor of the black rocks, make the story work on both the literal and metaphorical levels simultaneously. Because the story takes place in antiquity, it is about characters who are actually learning a correct Christian ethos and it is not allegorical. But, because it is told in medieval England by the Franklin, it can equally be read as an allegory.

Poetically what makes this tale so complex is the fact that the symbol of the “rokkes blake” allow for this tale to be a pretty unabashed morality play without becoming tautology. The “rokkes” are a metaphor which makes this ethos a subtext at the same time that it is the central theme. Chaucer conflates the literal and metaphoric in the “rokkes blake” which is one of the reasons why some critics have missed some of the metaphysical connotations of the tale carried out in the conclusion. The rocks are not only a multilayered metaphor, but one which becomes so intricately interwoven into the narrative on a literal level that it becomes almost transparent or imperceptible. For today’s readers, the theological concerns of *The Franklin’s Tale* might seem trite and be of small interest. But, the multivalency of the “rokkes blake” as both symbol and narrative device, and the palimpsest of literal and figural in this image, is a form of literary representation which is extremely ahead of its time and, I would argue, carries weight in the 21st century. This mode of representation which seems out of place in medieval literature calls attention to the fact that poetic language is not static. Chaucer’s use of both conceit and extended metaphor in the image of the black rocks are, one could argue, tropes which are not commonly found in the literature of his times. This use of language demonstrates not only how Chaucer extends the use of metaphor to extremes, but also the fact that, in the historical period Chaucer is writing in, a different, less extensive conception of metaphor was the norm.

The “rokkes blake” illustrate a metaphorical trope which is forward thinking, but also a host of other more mundane rhetorical figures. Pedagogically, these varying connotations of the black rocks could be used to teach a number of different tropes and theories of metaphor.[5] As the story progresses, the use of metaphor is heightened and the gap between signifier and signified is widened. First the rocks represent a synecdoche for the dangers of the sea (one of which they are), then the sea represents the separation of the couple and the rocks pick up this signification. The rocks then represent Dorigen’s subjective emotional state through a kind of metaphor which is common in Romantic landscape poetry. Dorigen’s suffering is abstracted into a concept of evil and this notion is then transferred into a Christian theological debate about evil in a wholly good creator’s universe. Finally, the “rokkes” as a conceit represent the acceptance of Divine Providence and there is a huge gap between signifier and signified. Instead of a simple synecdoche, this signification is clearly catachresis. Through this kind of broadening of figurative language methodically throughout the poem, it seems that Chaucer is meditating on metaphor and drawing out the furthest possible conclusions of literary representation. At the beginning of the story the rocks are very literally an image of the ominous sea, by the end they represent the entirely abstract nuances of a metaphysical truism. In teaching the poem, this wide array of figurative language expressed through a single image could be useful in introducing a number of literary tropes and the theory of metaphor. Also, the conflation of the literal and metaphoric, although achieved very deliberately in Chaucer, is relevant when considering postmodern representation and the “free floating signifier.” Even though this trope is not present in *The Franklin’s Tale*, the migrating significations of the “rokkes blake” leave this possibility open. If some black rocks off the coast of Brittany can represent an acceptance of Divine Providence and a metaphysical understanding of the universe, what would prevent the “rokkes” from picking up any and every signification?

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Notes

[1] It goes without saying that the "rokkes blake" have been studied extensively, but there has not been a study which takes into account the complexity of this metaphor and how this is central to the narrative of *The Franklin's Tale*. John B. Friedman writes: "A number of psychological explanations for these rocks have been offered by various critics, nearly all of whom, however, taking the rocks simply as a metaphor, have not considered their actual existence and what they might have signified to a medieval audience" (133). Of course the rocks are "simply a metaphor" on one level, but what Friedman is not considering is exactly how multilayered a metaphor they ultimately become. In this vein, Gillian Rudd prefaces an ecocritical reading of *The Franklin's Tale* and *The Knight's Tale* by noting that the landscape is "too easily read in simple, if not actually simplistic, metaphorical terms" (117). The fact that the "rokkes blake" will ultimately represent something which is definitively beyond human control lends *The Franklin's Tale* to an ecocritical reading. The rocks are a metaphor for something beyond human power and cultural metaphors for that which is beyond human control change over time. In the Middle Ages the prevalent metaphor was divine providence while today our metaphor could be thought of as the natural world. As Rudd writes, "nature itself is a social construct that changes over time" (117). In this

way, the theological significations attributed to the black rocks can be seen as parallel to this ecocritical reading.

[2] One consequence of this is that it creates an uncanny correspondence between Aurelius and Arveragus. On the one hand, the two are very much conceptual opposites, but on the other, we could read Aurelius as the double of Arveragus because he seems to be *exactly* his binary opposite. Ginsberg mentions the way that in Boccaccio's *Filocolo* the two characters who are antecedents to Aurelius and Arveragus become strangely conflated as well. He writes about the Aurelius character in Boccaccio: "unless Tarolfo, who has already subjugated himself to the terms of her promise, forgoes executing it, he will become, at the moment of its execution, not the knight who has vanquished her husband in love but his doppelgänger" (394). The fact that the removal of the rocks is ostensibly impossible is what makes Dorigen's offer a rash promise instead of an invitation to Aurelius. Furthermore, it is the metaphor of the "rokkes blake" that makes this conflation possible for Chaucer. If Aurelius removes the rocks "stone by stone," metaphorically it will facilitate Dorigen's reunion with her husband. This is the foundation of her "rash promise" – she is thinking wishfully and makes a promise that is not literal but instead further plays on this metaphor.

[3] As B.S. Lee points out: "unlike Hamlet she seems unaware that the Everlasting has fixed his cannon 'gainst self-slaughter" (60).

[4] The pagan ethos that is inherent in Dorigen's rejection of the rocks is then transferred over to Aurelius, as the removal of the rocks becomes his major project. Not only is Aurelius described in terms which are extremely pagan, he will represent the pagan ethic in dealing with evil by trying to do away with it through invocation and magic. When he is introduced into the story he is immediately qualified as "servant to Venus" (937). He is then compared to a Fury and the story of Echo and Narcissus is used to describe his situation. These references could be seen as coincidental, but they are prominent here because there has been no mention of classic mythology in the tale until this point and this whole scene is prefaced by the Christian theological debate that is going on in Dorigen's mind. Finally, Aurelius prays to Apollo to remove the rocks and in the process invokes a whole scene of classic mythology, which will be ineffectual in granting his wishes. Ultimately, he will try to remove evil through magic which will be characterized in a very negative light. This "magyk natureel" (1125) will be insistently disparaged by the narrator because it is, as Dorigen herself says, "agayns the proces of nature" (1345). Magic will not only become exposed as mere superstitious illusion, it will also be portrayed as a means to gain "mastery" over another person, as opposed to the Christian sense of forgiveness which will ultimately be the story's moral. Even as the narrative progresses in this way, the "rokkes blake" do not lose their metaphorical significance. The rocks still symbolize evil on the particular and universal levels which is very much crucial to the conclusion of the narrative. Once Dorigen makes her rash promise, they also represent Aurelius's love sickness and suffering insofar as they are keeping him from having Dorigen. The rocks, still retaining all these connotations, will continue their odyssey as the object of pagan magic.

[5] I am particularly thinking of Derrida's essay "White Mythology: Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy" which tracks conceptions of metaphor from classical rhetoric and Aristotle (where metaphor is a kind of glorified simile) to more contemporary poetics such as Bachelard (where catachrestic metaphor is essential for introducing "new concepts" into not only literature but also scientific and philosophical discourse). Derrida asks "what more urgent task for epistemology and the critical history of the sciences could there be than distinguishing between the word, the metaphorical vehicle, the thing, and the concept?" (63). He argues that the study of metaphor is relevant far beyond the specialization of literary studies. Besides demonstrating many rhetorical tropes in action, *The Franklin's Tale* explicitly uses catachrestic metaphor to illuminate a philosophical concept. Chaucer "justifies the ways of God to men" through this metaphor, and the multiple layers and intricacies of the "rokkes blake" are what give the tale a sense of immediacy rather than tautology.

George Lyman Kittredge,
an excerpt from "Chaucer's Discussion of Marriage"

There is no psychology about the Squire's Tale, -- no moral or social or matrimonial theorizing. It is pure romance, in the mediaeval sense. The Host understood the charm of variety. He did not mean to let the discussion drain itself to the dregs.

But Chaucer's plan in this Act is not yet finished. There is still something lacking to a full discussion of the relations between husband and wife. We have had the wife who dominates her husband; the husband who dominates his wife; the young wife who befools her dotard January; the chaste wife who is a scold and stirs up strife. Each of these illustrates a different kind of marriage, -- but there is left untouched, so far, the ideal relation, that in which love continues and neither party to the contract strives for the mastery. Let this be set forth, and the series of views of wedded life begun by the Wife of Bath will be rounded off; the Marriage Act of the Human Comedy will be concluded. The Pilgrims may not be thinking of this; but there is at least *one* of them (as the sequel shows) who has the idea in his head. And who is he? The only pilgrims who have not yet already told their tales are the yeoman, two priests, the five tradesmen (haberdasher, carpenter, weaver, dyer, and tapicer), the parson, the plowman, the manciple, and the franklin. Of all these there is but one to whom a tale illustrating the ideal would not be inappropriate -- the Franklin. To him, then, must Chaucer assign it, or leave the debate unfinished.

At this point, the dramatic action and interplay of characters are beyond all praise. The Franklin is not brought forward in formal fashion to address the company. His summons is incidental to the dialogue. No sooner has the Squire ended his chivalric romance, than the Franklin begins to compliment him:

**‘In feyth, squier, thou hast thee well yquit
And gentily . . .**

‘You have acquitted yourself well and like a gentleman!’ *Gentilesse*, then, is what has most impressed the Franklin in the tale that he has just heard. And the reason for his enthusiasm soon appears. He is, as we know, a rich freeholder, often sheriff in his county. Socially, he is not quite within the pale of the gentry, but he is the kind of man that may hope to found a family, the kind of man from whose ranks the English nobility has been constantly recruited. And that such is his ambition comes out naively and with a certain pathos in what he goes on to say: ‘I wish my son were like you.’ It is the contrast between the Squire and his own son, in whom his hopes are centered, that has led the Franklin's thoughts to gentilesse, a subject which is ever in his mind.

But the Host interrupts him rudely: ‘Straw for your gentilesse! It is your turn to entertain the company!’

‘Telle on thy tale withouten wordes mo!’

The Franklin is, of course, very polite in his reply to this rough and unexpected command. Like the others, he is on his guard against opposing the Host and incurring the forfeit.

Here, then, as in the case of the Merchant, the Host has taken advantage of a spontaneous remark on some Pilgrim's part to demand a story. Yet the details of the action are quite different. On the previous occasion, the Merchant is requested to go on with an account of his marriage, since he has already begun to talk about it; and, though he declines to speak further of his own troubles, he does continue to discuss and illustrate wedlock from his own point of view. In the present instance, on the contrary, the Host repudiates the topic of *gentilesse*, about which the Franklin is discoursing to the Squire. He bids him drop the subject and tell a story. The Franklin pretends to be compliant, but after all, he has his own way. Indeed, he takes delicate vengeance on the Host by telling a tale which thrice exemplifies *gentilesse* -- on the part of a knight, a squire, and a clerk. Thus he finishes his interrupted compliment to the Squire, and incidentally honors two other Pilgrims who have seemed to him to possess the quality that he values so highly. He proves, too, both that *gentilesse* is an entertaining topic and that it is not (as the Host has roughly intimated) a theme which he, the Franklin, is ill-equipped to handle.

For the Franklin's Tale is a gentleman's story, and he tells it like a gentleman. It is derived, he tells us, from ‘thise olde gentil Britons.’ Dorigen lauds Averagus' gentilesse toward her in refusing to insist on soveraynetee in marriage. Aurelius is deeply impressed by the knight's gentilesse in allowing the lady to keep her word, and emulates it by releasing her. And finally, the clerk releases Aurelius, from the same motive of generous emulation.

Thus it appears that the dramatic impulse to the telling of the Franklin's Tale is to be found in the relations among the Pilgrims and in the effect that they have upon each other, -- in other words, in the circumstances, the situation, and the interplay of character.

It has sometimes been thought that the story, either in subject or in style, is too fine for the Franklin to tell. But this objection Chaucer foresaw and forestalled. The question is not whether this tale, thus told, would be appropriate to a typical or 'average' fourteenth-century franklin. The question is whether it is appropriate to this particular Franklin, under these particular circumstances, and at this particular juncture. And to this question there can be but one answer. Chaucer's Franklin is an individual, not a mere type-specimen. He is rich, ambitious socially, and profoundly interested in the matter of *gentilesse* for personal and family reasons. He is trying to bring up his son as a gentleman, and his position as 'St. Julian in his country' has brought him into intimate association with first-rate models. He has, under the special circumstances, every motive to tell a gentleman's story and tell it like a gentleman. He is speaking under the immediate influence of his admiration for the Squire and of his sense of the inferiority of his own son. If we choose to conceive the Franklin as a mediaeval Squire Western and then to allege that he could not possibly have told such a story, we are making the difficulty for ourselves. We are considering -- not Chaucer's Franklin (whose character is to be inferred not merely from the description in the General Prologue but from all the other evidence that the poet provides) -- not Chaucer's Franklin, but somebody quite different, somebody for whom Chaucer has no kind of responsibility.

In considering the immediate occasion of the Franklin's Tale, we have lost sight for a moment of the Wife of Bath. But she was not absent from the mind of the Franklin. The proper subject of his tale, as we have seen, is *gentilesse*. Now that (as well as marriage) was a subject on which the Wife of Bath had descanted at some length. Her views are contained in the famous harangue delivered by the lady to her husband on the wedding night: 'But for ye speken of swich gentilesse,' etc. Many readers have perceived that this portentous curtain-lecture clogs the story, and some have perhaps wished it away, good as it is in itself. For it certainly seems to be out of place on the lips of the *f  e*. But its insertion is (as usual in such cases) exquisitely appropriate to the teller of the tale, the Wife of Bath, who cannot help dilating on subjects which interest her, and who has had the advantage of learned society in the person of her fifth husband. Perhaps no *f  e* would have talked thus to her knightly bridegroom on such an occasion; but it is quite in character for the Wife of Bath to use the *f  e* (or anybody else) as a mouthpiece for her own ideas, as the Merchant had used Proserpine to point his satire. Thus the references to Dante, Valerius, Seneca, Boethius, and Juvenal -- so deliciously absurd on the lips of a *f  e* of King Arthur's time -- are perfectly in place when we remember who it is that is reporting the monologue. The Wife was a citer of authorities -- she makes the *f  e* cite authorities. How comical this is the Wife did not know, but Chaucer knew, and if we think he did not, it is our own fault for not observing how dramatic in spirit is the *Canterbury Tales*.

A considerable passage in the curtain-lecture is given to the proposition that 'swich gentilesse as is descended out of old noblesse' is of no value: 'Swich arrogance is not worth an hen.' These sentiments the Franklin echoes:

**'Fy on possessioun
But if a man be vertuous withall'**

But, whether or not the Wife's digression on *gentilesse* is lingering in the Franklin's mind (as I am sure it is), one thing is perfectly clear: the Franklin's utterances on marriage are spoken under the influence of the discussion which the Wife has precipitated. In other words, though everybody else imagines that the subject has been finally dismissed by the Host when he calls on the Squire for a tale of love, it has no more been dismissed in fact than when the Friar attempted to dismiss it at the beginning of his tale. For the Franklin has views, and he means to set them forth. He possesses, as he thinks, the true solution of the whole difficult problem. And that solution he embodies in his tale of *gentilesse*.

The introductory part of the Franklin's Tale sets forth a theory of the marriage relation quite different from anything that has so far emerged in the debate. And this theory the Franklin arrives at by taking into consideration both *love* (which, as we remember, was the subject that the Host had bidden the Squire treat of) and *gentilesse* (which is to be the subject of his own story).

Averagus had of course been obedient to his lady during the period of courtship, for obedience was well understood to be the duty of a lover. Finally, she consented to marry him --

**To take him for hir housbonde and hir lord,
Of swich lordships as men han over her wyves.**

Marriage, then, according to the orthodox doctrine (as held by Walter and Griselda) was to change Averagus from the lady's servant to her master. But Averagus was an enlightened and chivalric gentleman, and he promised the lady he would never assert his marital authority, but would content himself with the mere name of sovereignty, continuing to be her servant and lover as before. This he did because he thought it would ensure the happiness of their wedded life.

But, just as Averagus was no disciple of the Marquis Walter, so Dorigen was not a member of the sect of the Wife of Bath. She promised her husband obedience and fidelity in return for his *gentilesse* in renouncing his sovereign rights. This, then, is the Franklin's solution of the whole puzzle of matrimony, and it is a solution that depends upon love and *gentilesse* on both sides. But he is not content to leave the matter in this purely objective condition. He is determined that there shall be no misapprehension in the mind of any Pilgrim as to his purpose. He wishes to make it perfectly clear that he is definitely and formally offering this theory as

the only satisfactory basis of happy married life. And he accordingly comments on the relations between the married lovers with fulness, and with manifest reference to certain things that the previous debaters have said.

The arrangement, he tells the Pilgrims, resulted in 'quiet and rest' for both Arveragus and Dorigen. And, he adds, it is the only arrangement which will ever enable two persons to live together in love and amity. Friends must 'obey each other if they wish to hold company long.' Hence it was that this wise knight promised his wife 'suffraunce' and that she promised him never to abuse his goodness. The result, the Franklin adds, was all that could be desired. The knight lived 'in blisse and in solas.' And then the Franklin adds an encomium on the happiness of true marriage:

**'Who coude telle, but he had wedded be,
The ioye, the ese, and the prosperitee
That is bitwixe an housbonde and his wyf?'**

This encomium echoes the language of the Merchant:

**'A wyf! a Seinte Marie! benedict!
How mighte a man han any adversitee
That hath a wyf? Certes, I can nat seye!
The blisse which that is bitwixe hem tweeye
Ther may no tonge telle or hereto thinke.'**

The Franklin's praise of marriage is sincere; the Merchant's had been savagely ironical. The Franklin, we observe, is answering the merchant, and he answers him in the most effective way — by repeating his very words.

And just as in the Merchant's Tale we noted that the Merchant has enormously expanded the simple *fabliau* that he had to tell, inserting all manner of observations on marriage which are found in no other version of the Pear-Tree story, so also we find that the Franklin's exposition of the ideal marriage relation (including the pact between Arveragus and Dorigen) is all his own, occurring in none of the versions that precede Chaucer. These facts are of the very last significance. No argument is necessary to enforce their meaning.

It is hardly worth while to indicate the close connection between this and that detail of the Franklin's exposition and certain points that have come out in the discussion as conducted by his predecessors in the debate. His repudiation of the Wife of Bath's doctrine that men should be governed by their wives is express, as well as his rejection of the opposite theory. Neither party should lose his liberty; neither the husband nor the wife should be a thrall. Patience (which clerks celebrate as a high virtue) should be mutual, not, as in the Clerk's Tale, all on one side. The husband is to be both servant and lord — servant in love and lord in marriage. Such servitude is true lordship. Here there is a manifest allusion to the words of Walter's subjects in the Clerk's Tale:

**That blisful yok
Of sovereynetee, noght of servyse;**

as well as to Walter's rejoinder:

**'I me reioysed of my libertee,
That selde tyme is founde in mariage;
Ther I was free, I moot been in servage.'**

It was the regular theory of the Middle Ages that the highest type of chivalric love was incompatible with marriage, since marriage brings in mastery, and mastery and love cannot abide together. This view the Franklin boldly challenges. Love *can* be consistent with marriage, he declares. Indeed, without love (and perfect gentle love) marriage is sure to be a failure. The difficulty about mastery vanishes when mutual love and forbearance are made the guiding principles of the relation between husband and wife.

The soundness of the Franklin's theory, he declares, is proved by his tale. For the marriage of Arveragus and Dorigen was a brilliant success. Thus the whole debate has been brought to a satisfactory conclusion, and the Marriage Act of the Human Comedy ends with the conclusion of the Franklin's Tale.

Those readers who are eager to know what Chaucer thought about marriage may feel reasonably content with the inference that may be drawn from his procedure. The Marriage Group of Tales begins with the Wife of Bath's Prologue and ends with the Franklin's Tale. There is no connection between the Wife's Prologue and the group of stories that precedes: there is no connection between the Franklin's Tale and the group that follows. Within the Marriage Group, on the contrary, there is close connection throughout. That act is a finished act. It begins and ends an elaborate debate. We need not hesitate, therefore, to accept the solution

which the Franklin offers as that which Geoffrey Chaucer the man accepted for his own part. Certainly it is a solution that does him infinite credit. A better has never been devised or imagined.

CHAUCERIAN THEMES AND STYLE IN
THE *FRANKLIN'S TALE*

JILL MANN

The *Franklin's Tale* is not only one of the most popular of Chaucer's tales, it is also one whose emotional and moral concerns lie at the centre of Chaucer's thinking and imaginative activity. It is usually thought of as a tale about 'trouthe' – or perhaps about 'gentillesse' – but it is equally concerned with the ideal of patience and the problems of time and change, which are subjects of fundamental importance not in this tale alone but in the *Canterbury Tales* as a whole. What follows is intended to be not only a close discussion of the Franklin's Tale, but also an attempt to indicate how a proper reading of it can help with a proper reading of the rest of the Tales – and indeed, of Chaucer's work in general.

The Franklin's *Tale* begins by introducing a knight who has, in best storybook fashion, proved his excellence through 'many a labour, many a greet **emprise**^a' and thus finally won his lady who, likewise in best storybook fashion, is 'oon the faireste under sonne'. 'And they lived happily ever after' is what we might expect to follow. And so far from trying to dispel the reader's sense of the familiar in this situation, Chaucer takes pains to increase it. He 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'). Only after eighty lines are the knight and the lady given the names of Arveragus and Dorigen. This generality cannot be accidental, for Chaucer's apparently casual comments are designed precisely to emphasize that this individual situation takes its place in a plural context:

But atte laste she, for his worthynesse,
And namely for his meke obeisaunce,

^a exploit.

Hath such a **pitree** caught of his **penaunce**^a
 That **prively**^b she **fil** of his **acord**
 To take **him** for **hir** husband and **hir** lorde,
 Of swich lordshipe as **men han over hir wives**.
 (738-43; my italics)

What is more, they stress this plural context even in describing the feature of the situation which seems to make it an unusual one: the knight's promise to his lady that he

Ne **sholde** upon him take no **maistrye**^c
 Again **hir wil, ne kithe**^d hire jalousyr,
 But hire obeye, and **folwe** **hir wil** in al,
 As any **lovere to his lady shal**.
 (747-p; my italics)

And after the lady's delighted promise of her own faithfulness and humility, we have a warm outburst of praise which again consistently sets this mutual understanding in the context of a whole multiplicity of such relationships,

For o thing, sires, **saufly**^e dar I **seye**,
 That freendes **everich oother moot** obeye,
 If they **wollonge holden** compaignye.
 Love **wol nat** been constrained by **maistrye**^f.
 Whan **maistrye comth**, the God of Love anon
Beteth his winges, and **farewel**, he is gon!
 Love is a thing as any spirit free.
 Wommen, of kinde^h, **desiren libertee**,
 And nat to been constrained as a thral;
 And so **doon** mm, if I sooth seyen **shal**.
 (761-70)

'Love . maistrye freendes wommen.. men' – the terms are abstract, plural, general. They relate general human experience to this situation, and this situation to general human experience, with no sense of conflict or discontinuity between the two.

I stress the importance of the general here for two reasons. The first is that this interest in the *common* features of human experience is characteristic of Chaucer. The parenthetical comments which transform the singular of the story into the plural of everyday experience

^a suffering, ^b inwardly, ^c dominance, ^d show, ^e confidently, ^f must, ^g power. ^h b y nature.

are not confined to this passage or this tale alone; on the contrary, they are so ubiquitous in Chaucer that we may take them for granted and fail to question their significance. The second reason is that the unusualness of the relationship between Arveragus and Dorigen has often been taken as a sign that it is aberrant – that it represents an attempt to break away from the normal pattern of marital relationships which inevitably invites problems to follow.' Against this view we should note that however unusual the *degree* of generosity and humility in this relationship, Chaucer very firmly roots it in the normal desires and instincts of men and women.

Nor is there any reason given for supposing that these desires and instincts are merely human weaknesses. Chaucer's own comments, some of which have been quoted, constitute an unhesitating endorsement of the wisdom of this situation and of the participants in it. The relationship between the knight and his lady is called 'an humble wys accord', and the knight himself 'this wise, worthy knight'. It would not affect this point were anyone to argue that the comments are the Franklin's, not Chaucer's, For in either case any reader who wishes to dissociate him- or herself from the warm approval in these lines will face the same difficulty-and that is the difficulty of finding a location in the tale for true wisdom and worthiness, if both characters and narrator offer only false images of these qualities. The only way out of this difficulty would be to claim that the reader already knows what true wisdom and worthiness are, and brings this knowledge to bear on the tale, in criticism of its values. But this idea assumes that it is possible for his or her knowledge to remain detached from the tale in a way that the passage we are considering simply refuses to allow. For if the reader is a woman, to *refuse to* acknowledge the truth of what is said about her sex is, ipso *facto*, to accept the legitimacy of her own 'thraldom':

Wommen, of kinde, **desiren libertee**,
 And nat to been constrained as a thral

It, on the other hand, the reader is a man, and feels inclined to respond to these lines with a knowing smile at the ungovernable nature of women, then the following line –

And so **doon** men, if I sooth seyen **shal**

— immediately challenges him in turn to measure the reasonableness of the female desire for liberty by matching it against his own. The result is that both men and women readers are made aware of the need for the liberty of the opposite sex through the recognition that it is a need of their own. The use of the plural, the appeal to the general, is indeed an invitation to readers to bring their own experience and feelings to bear, but it invites them to an identification with the narrative, not to a critical dissociation from it.

Chaucer's use of the plural is thus intimately connected with his use of the second person, an equally pervasive and significant feature of his style. His appeals to the reader as judge have often been discussed — 'Who hath the worse, Arcite or Palamon?' (Knight's Tale); 'Which was the moost fre, as thinketh yow?' (*Franklin's Tale*). But to emphasize these formal appeals alone is to imply, again, that the reader, in the role of **judge**, remains detached from and superior to the narrative. If, on the other hand, we look at the whole series of addresses to the audience in Chaucer, we shall see that the situation is more complicated. Certainly it is true that the narrative is subordinate to the reader, in the sense that it acknowledges that it relies on a particular experience of the reader for its life and depth; the appeal for judgement on the situations of Arcite and Palamon, for example, is specifically addressed to 'Yow loveres'. The opening of *Troilus and Criseyde* similarly invites 'ye loveres' to read the narrative in the light of their own experience. This call for 'supplementation' of the narrative from one's own experience is often implicitly, as well as explicitly, made. Such an appeal can, for example, be felt in the rhetorical question that concludes the praise of the marriage in the *Franklin's Tale*:

Who koude telle, but" he had wedded be,
The joye, the ese, and the prosperitee
That is betwixe an housbonde and his wif?
(803-5)

The rhetorical question here makes a space for the reader's own experience to give full meaning to the description, just as it makes space for a very different kind of experience to give a very different kind of meaning to the apparently similar question in the *Merchant's*

a unless.

Tale (1337-41). But if the story needs the reader, it can also make claims on the reader. Precisely because the narrative is based on 'common knowledge', on experiences and feelings shared by the narrator, the readers, and the characters in the story, it is possible for its third-person generalizations to issue into second-person imperatives. Thus, when Troilus falls in love, the generalizations about Love's all-conquering power ('This was, and is, and yet men shal it see') issue naturally into a command:

Refuseth nat to Love for to ben bonde,
"Syn, as himselven list, he may yow binde.
(1, 255-6)

We can thus see that in the narrator's comments on the marriage of Arveragus and Dorigen, the apparently casual insertion of 'sires' in the first line is a deliberate preparation for the intensification of the narrative's claims on the reader — claims which make themselves known not only as commands but also as threats.

Looke who that is moost pacient in love,
He is at his advantage al above.
Pacience is an heigh vertu, certeyn,
For it venquisseth, as this clerkes seyn,
Things that rigour sholde never atteyne.
For every word men may nat chide or pleyne.
Lerneth to suffre, or elles, ^bso moot I goon,
Ye shul it lerne, whersof ye wole or noon;
For in this world, certein, ther no wight is
That he ne dooth or seith somtime armis.
(771-80)

The command 'Lerneth to suffre' does not stand alone; if we disobey it, we face a threat, an 'or elles'. If we search for the authority on which we can be thus threatened, we find it, I think, in the appeal to *common* human experience that I have been describing, in the generalizations from which the imperative issues and into which it returns. And because the experience is common, the speaker himself is not exempt from it; it is perhaps possible to detect in the parenthetical 'so moot I goon' a rueful admission that he has learned the truth of his statement the hard way. At any rate, the phrase stands

a since, as he pleases, *b* as I live, *c* whether.

as an indication that the speaker offers his own individual experience as a guarantee of the truth of the generalizations.

It is because Chaucer wishes to appeal to the general that he so often uses proverbs as the crystallizations of episodes or whole narratives. The proverb which underlies the description of the marriage in the *Franklin's Tale* is perhaps the most important one of all to him; the attempt to understand the paradoxical truth 'Patience conquers' is at the heart of the *Canterbury Tales* and much of Chaucer's other work besides. It animates the stories of Constance and Griselda; it is celebrated in Chaucer's own tale of Melibee. It undergoes, as we shall see, a comic-realistic metamorphosis in the *Wife of Bath's Prologue*, and it also stimulates Chaucer's exploration of the qualities that represent a rejection of patience - 'ire', 'grucching', 'wilfulness'. It is tinged with a melancholy irony in *Troilus and Criseyde*, where Criseyde quotes another version of the proverb - 'the suffrant overcomith' - in the course of persuading Troilus of the wisdom of letting her go to the Greeks. This latter instance shows us that an understanding of the truth to be found in such proverbs does not give us clues to the instrumental manipulation of life - quite the reverse, in fact. The parallel truism that Criseyde also quotes - 'a Whoso wol han lief, he lief moot lete' - does not become the less true because in this case Troilus fails to keep possession of his happiness even though he follows her advice. It is precisely the knowledge that proverbs carry with them the memory of human miseries as well as human triumphs and joys that gives depth and emotional power to the apparently worn phrases.

But of course it is also the story, the new setting which will give fresh meaning, that gives new depth and emotional power to the old words, and we should therefore look to the rest of the *Franklin's Tale* to see how much it can help us to understand the nature of patience and 'suffrance'. The first thing that the story shows us is the link between patience and change. In the first place, it is because human beings are inevitably and constantly subject to change, not just from day to day but from moment to moment, that the quality of patience is needed. In his list of the influences that disturb human stability, Chaucer makes clear that they come both from within and from without the person.

^a whoever is willing to possess, ^{must} be willing to give up.

Ire, siknesse, or constellacioun^a,
Win, wo, or chaunge of complexioun^b
Causeth ful oft to doon amis or speken.
On every wrong a man may nat be wreken^c.
After^d the time moste be temperance^e
To every wight that kan on governance.

(781-6)

All these things disturb the stability of a relationship by altering the mood or feelings or behaviour of an individual. Thus, the only way that the stability and harmony of a relationship can be preserved is through constant adaptation, a responsiveness by one partner to changes in the other. The natural consequence of this is that patience is not merely a response to change; it embodies change in itself. And this is at first rather surprising to us, since we tend to think of patience as an essentially static quality, a matter of gritting one's teeth and holding on, a matter of eliminating responses rather than cultivating them. But it is the responsive changeability of patience which is emphasized in Chaucer's final lines of praise for the marriage of Arveragus and Dorigen.

Heere may men seen a humble, wys accord:
Thus hath she take hire servant and hir lord -
Servant in love, and lord in mariage.
Thanne was he bothe in lordshipe and sewage.
Sewage? nay, but in lordshipe above,
Sith he hath bothe his lady and his love;
His lady. certes, and his wif also,
The which that lawe of love acordeth to.

(791-8)

It is often said that this passage illustrates Chaucer's belief in an ideal of equality in marriage. But the patterning of the language does not give us a picture of equality; it gives us a picture of alternation. The constant shifts in the vocabulary suggest constant shifts in the role played by each partner: 'servant . lord.. . servant, .. lord.. lordshipe . servage **servage** lordshipe . . lady.. . love.. lady.. . wif'. The marriage is not founded on equality, but on alternation in the exercise of power and the surrender of power. The image it suggests is not that of a couple standing immutably on the same level

^a planetary influence, ^b the physiological balance of the body, ^c revenged, ^d according to, ^e adjustment, ^f is skilled in.

and side-by-side, or marching in step, but rather of something like the man and woman in a weather-house, one going in as the other comes out. Except of course that this image gives a falsely mechanical idea of what is, as Chaucer describes it, a matter of a living organic responsiveness, and that it is also incapable of expressing an important aspect of the relationship — that the ceaseless workings of change lead to an unchanging harmony, and to the creation of a larger situation in which each partner simultaneously enjoys 'lordshipe' and 'servage', as the passage itself stresses. The result of these constant shifts could be called equality (though I should prefer to call it harmony), but the term equality is too suggestive of stasis to be an accurate description of the workings of the ideal involved here. The ideal of patience better befits the way human beings are, because the simplest and most fundamental truth about people, for Chaucer, is that they change. 'Newefanglnesse', the love of novelty, is part of their very nature ('propre kinde'; *Squire's Tale*).

Human beings are not only subject to change in themselves; they also live in a changing world. The opening of the *Franklin's Tale* might seem at first to belie this, since it reads more like an ending than a beginning, so that the story seems, with the long pause for the eulogy of the marriage, to have reached a full stop before it has begun. What prevents a sense of total stagnation is that the unusualness of the situation — of Arveragus' surrender of absolute control — creates a powerful expectation that something is going to happen. This is not just a stratagem for holding our interest; on the contrary, Chaucer uses narrative expectation as a way of indicating the persistence of change even when events have apparently reached a standstill, of making us feel the potentiality for change within the most apparently calm and closed of situations. Thus, as Chaucer allows himself his leisurely commentary on the 'humble, wys accord', we find ourselves asking not 'Is this a good thing?', but 'How will this turn out?' We await the completion which the development of events will bring to our understanding and evaluation, and we are thus taught to expect development, the breaking of stasis, as natural.

The stasis is first broken in a very simple way: Arveragus departs for England, and Dorigen's contentment changes into a passionate grief. This grief is described in a long passage (815-46) which takes us from her first agonies, through her friends' attempts at comfort, to

her final subsidence into a kind of resignation which creates a new, if provisional, stasis. Two features of this passage are important: the first is that Dorigen's experience is, once again, placed in a general context.

For his absence wepeth she and siketh",
As doon thise noble wives whan hem liketh^b.
 (817-18; my italics)

Secondly, her experience is not only generalized, it is also abbreviated:

She moorneth, waketh, waileth, fasteth, pleyneþ^f.
 (819)

Dorigen experiences her grief intensely and at length, but it is described summarily and — *ipso facto* — with a sort of detachment. This does not mean, however, that we need to qualify what was said earlier about the identification established between character, writer and reader; the detachment here is not due to lack of sympathy or to criticism, but to a difference of position in time. Dorigen moves slowly through a 'process' which is for her personally felt and unique; the image of the slow process of engraving on a stone emphasizes its gradualness, its almost imperceptible development. The teller of the story (and the reader of it), on the other hand, can from the outset see Dorigen's experience in a general context of human suffering, and from a knowledge of the general human experience which is embodied in the formulae of traditional wisdom — 'Time heals', 'It will pass' — can appreciate not only what is pitiable about Dorigen's misery but also the inevitability of its alleviation, and thus, what is slightly comic about it. The amusement denotes no lack of sympathy, no sense that Dorigen's grief is melodramatic or insincere; it is the kind of amusement which might well be felt by Dorigen herself, looking back on her former agonies six months after her husband's safe return. As time goes on, and Dorigen succumbs to the natural 'proces' of adjustment, she herself comes nearer to this view, so that the passage ends with a rapprochement between her position and that of the storyteller and the reader, and the calmer wisdom of 'wel she saugh that it was for the beste' is shared by all three.

^asighs, ^bit pleases them. ^claments.

The celebrated Chaucerian 'ambiguity of tone', of which this passage might well be taken as an example, is often regarded as an equivocation between praise and blame, a confusion in our impulse to approve or disapprove. Complex the tone may be, but it does not lead to confusion if we read it **aright**. The complexity is often due, as it is in this case, to Chaucer's habit of fusing with the narrative account of an event or situation the differing emotional responses it would provoke — and with complete propriety — at different points in time. Different contexts of place and time allow and even demand quite different emotional and intellectual responses. In common experience we take this for granted; we find it entirely proper and natural that a widow should be consumed with grief at her husband's death and equally proper and natural that several years later she should have found equanimity. Time thus affects not only decorum, but also morality; were the widow to show at the time of her husband's death the reactions of a widow several years later, we should find her **behaviour-unfeeling** and wrong. Chaucer's complexity arises from the fact that he encourages us **to** bring to bear our knowledge of both points in the process at the same time. He is helped in this by the fact that a story always abbreviates experience; the protracted time-scale of experience is condensed in the time-scale of the narrative, so that we can more easily and more swiftly achieve those shifts of perspective which are in life so laboriously accomplished. This is, of course, even more true in short narrative, because in such a narrative the disparity between the time-span of the occurrences and the time-span of the relation of them is most striking. Chaucer's interest in short narrative, the beginnings of which can be seen in the Legend of Good Women, and which finally achieved success in the *Canterbury Tales*, seems to me, therefore, to be a natural consequence of what he sees as interesting in human experience. The short narrative is a powerful way of provoking reflection on the process of change and of vitalizing our *sense* of the moral and emotional complications created by change, by our existence in the 'proces' of time. And a multiplicity of short narratives can suggest the multiple individual forms in which a common experience manifests itself, and the constitution of common experience out of a multiplicity of variant instances.

The processes of time and change are not ail, however, a matter

of the development of inner feeling; change, as we have already observed, can equally originate in the outer world — in its most dramatic form, in the kind of sudden chance or accident for which Chaucer uses the Middle English word 'aventure'. This is a word that can be used with deceptive casualness to refer to the most mundane and minimal sort of occurrence, but also, more emphatically, to refer to the strange and marvellous. The other words which Chaucer uses to mark the operations of chance are 'hap', 'cas' and 'grace', the last of these being usually reserved for good luck unless accompanied by an adjective like 'evil' or 'sory'. Chaucer's concern with the problems of chance, with human helplessness before it, and with the difficulties it opposes to any belief in the workings of a co-ordinating providence, is something that can be observed throughout his literary work. The operations of 'aventure' are often examined, (as they are in the *Franklin's Tale*) in the sphere of love, and for good reason. The disruptive, involuntary, unforeseeable and unavoidable force of love is perhaps the most powerful reminder of the power of chance over human lives. What is more, it increases human vulnerability to other chances, as Dorigen, in her persistent fears for her husband's possible shipwreck on the 'grisly rokkes **blakke**', is only too well aware. What she at first fails to perceive is her possible vulnerability to an 'aventure' which is closer at hand: the 'aventure' of Aurelius' love for her.

This lusty" squier, servant to Venus,
Which that **ycleped**^b was Aurelius,
Hadde loved hire best of any creature
Two **yeer** and **moore**, as was his **aventure**.
(937-40)

Chaucer's description of the wearing away of Dorigen's grief means that we can dimly see several possible patterns into which the coalescence of inner 'proces' and outer 'aventure' might fall. Were **Arveragus'** **ship** in fact, to be wrecked, we could visualize not only Dorigen's passionate grief but also its susceptibility to slow assuagement, so that when healing processes of time have done their work, Aurelius *might* hope at last to win his lady (as Palamon does). Or Arveragus might

a gallant. b called.

simply be forced to stay away so long that by the same process of imperceptible adaptation, Dorigen finds Aurelius a more vivid and powerful presence to her thoughts and feelings than her husband, and changes her initial rejection into acceptance — in which case the story would come closer to the pattern of *Troilus and Criseyde*. The openness of Chaucer's stories to other possible developments makes us aware that they are not fixed into inevitable patterns; like life itself they are full of unrealized possibilities. In this case, the menace symbolized in the black rocks is not realized, and the other possibilities thus evaporate. 'Adventure' does not take the form of shipwreck and Arveragus returns. But that there is no other kind of disaster is due also to the power of patience, of the ability to 'suffer' the shocks of 'aventure'.

In order to understand this conception of 'suffering' more fully, I should like to make some comparisons with another example of the genre to which the Franklin's *Tale* belongs, the Breton lay, a comparison which will have the incidental advantage of suggesting why Chaucer assigns the tale to this genre, even though his source was probably a tale of Boccaccio.² The Franklin's *Prologue* suggests that the Breton lays are centrally concerned with 'aventures':

These olde gentil Britouns in hir dayes
Of diverse aventures maden layes

(709-10)

The notion that this is the proper subject of the lays can be traced back to one of their earliest composers, the late twelfth-century writer Marie de France, who says that each lay was written to commemorate some 'aventure'.³ There is no direct evidence that Chaucer knew Marie's work,⁴ but a brief comparison with some aspects of the lay of *Guigemar* will help to illustrate the literary tradition which lies behind Chaucer's thinking on 'aventure', and also to understand the imaginative core of the Franklin's *Tale*, the underlying pattern of experience which it shares with a lay like *Guigemar*. Like the Franklin's *Tale*, *Guigemar* deals with 'aventure' in relation to love; it is interested both in the way that love is challenged by 'aventure', by the shocks of chance, and equally in the way that love itself is an 'aventure', a force which is sudden and overwhelming in its demands, and to

which the only fitting response is surrender or commitment of the self. What we also find in Marie's lays is the idea that such a surrender acts as a release of power. It is this pattern — surrender to 'aventure' followed by release of power — which can be linked with the 'Patience conquers' of the Frankin's Tale.

The hero of the lay, *Guigemar*, is a young man endowed with every good quality, but strangely resistant to love. One day while out hunting he shoots a white deer; the arrow rebounds and wounds him in the thigh, and the dying deer speaks to him, telling him that he will only be cured of this wound by a woman who will suffer for love of him greater pain and grief than any woman ever suffered, and that he will suffer equally for love of her. *Guigemar's* actions indicate an immediate and unquestioning acceptance of the doom laid on him by the deer. He invents an excuse for dismissing his squire, and rides off alone through the wood, not following any predetermined direction, but led by the path. That is, he follows not the dictates of his own wishes, but the dictates of chance. Eventually he comes to the sea, and finds a very rich and beautiful ship, entirely empty of people. Having boarded the ship, *Guigemar* finds in the middle of it a bed, sumptuously and luxuriously arrayed. The bed is an emblem of an invitation to rest, to relax, to surrender control — or rather to surrender it still further, since he in fact lost control at the moment when he shot the white deer. He climbs into the bed and falls asleep; the boat moves off of its own accord, taking him to the lady who is to be his love, and who is kept imprisoned by her jealous husband in a castle surrounded by a high walled garden, open only to the sea. The castle and the sea, and their relation to each other, are images that the tale endows with symbolic meaning. The sea (as often in medieval literature) is an image of flux or chance, of something vast and unpredictable which can carry one with the force of a tide or a current to strange harbours. The image of the imprisoning castle which is nonetheless open to the sea suggests the openness of even the most restrictive marriage relationship to the threat of 'aventure'. The jealous husband cannot shut out the power of chance; his marriage — and equally the generous marriage of the Franklin's *Tale* — must remain vulnerable to the assaults of chance.

Guigemar, in contrast, surrenders to the dictates of chance. When

he wakes from his sleep on the boat, he finds himself in mid-ocean. Marie's comment on this situation brings a new extension to our notion of 'suffering'; she says

Suffrir li estut l'aventure.

Both the infinitive 'suffrir' and the noun 'aventure' seem to call for a double translation here. 'Aventure' simply means, in the first place, 'What was happening'; but the word also emphasizes the strangeness and arbitrariness of the event, its lack of background in a chain of causes. 'Suffrir' seems to ask to be translated not only as 'suffer, endure', but also as 'allow', a usage now familiar to us only in archaic biblical quotations such as 'Suffer the little children to come unto me'. So that the line cannot be confined to a single interpretation: 'He had to endure / allow / what was happening / chance'. Guigemar prays to God for protection, and goes back to sleep, another acknowledgment that control is not in his hands. So it is in the surrender or abandon of sleep that he arrives at the lady's castle, is found by her, and becomes the object of her love.

Guigemar's 'suffering' can help with the understanding of the 'suffering' urged in the Franklin's Tale:

Lerneth to suffre, or elles, so moot I goon,
Ye shul it leme, wherso ye wole or noon.

This sort of 'suffering' is not simply a matter of enduring pain or vexation; it is a matter of 'allowing', of standing back to make room for, the operations of 'aventure', and thus of contributing to the creation of something new by allowing the natural process of change to work. It is the generous in spirit who do this, in both Marie's work and Chaucer's, and it is the mean-spirited, such as the lady's jealous husband, who vainly try to close off possibilities for change, to wall up what they have and to preserve it in a state of fixity.

It is a later moment in the lay, however, that provides the most powerful image of a surrender of the self which miraculously releases power. After Guigemar and the lady have enjoyed each other's love for some time, his presence is discovered by the lady's husband, and he is put back on to the magic ship (which has miraculously reappeared) and sent back to his own country. After his departure, the lady suffers intensely, and finally she cries out with passion that if only

she can get out of the tower in which she is imprisoned, she will drown herself at the spot where Guigemar was put out to sea. As if in a trance, she rises, and goes to the door, where, amazingly, she finds neither key nor bolt, so that she can exit freely. The phrase that Marie uses is another that seems to call for a double translation:

Fors s'en eissi par aventure.

'Par aventure' is a casual, everyday phrase, meaning simply 'by chance, as it happened'; thus on one level, all this line means is 'By chance she got out'. But the miraculous nature of the event, and the way that the phrase recalls the other miraculous 'aventure' of the ship, suggest something like 'By the power of "aventure", she got out'. The intensity of the lady's surrender to her grief, which is imaged in her wish to drown herself, to 'immerse' herself in her love and sorrow, magically transforms external reality. 'Aventure', which had earlier been a force that impinged on people and acted on them, here becomes something which is itself acted on by emotion, which miraculously responds to its pressure. When the lady goes down to the harbour she finds that the magic ship is once again there, so that instead of drowning herself, she boards it, and is carried away to an eventual reunion with Guigemar. Her readiness to 'suffer', the depth of her surrender, magically transforms her external situation and releases the power for a new departure. A surrender paradoxically creates power.

The surrender that leads to the release of power is also at the heart of the narrative in the Franklin's Tale. It can be seen, first of all, in Arveragus' surrender of 'maistrye', which wins in return Dorigen's promise of truth and humility. Neither of them knows what their promises are committing them to, and it is precisely such ignorance that makes the commitments generous ones. But the underlying principle can operate in far less noble and generous situations, as Chaucer shows us by repeating such a pattern of reciprocal surrender in varying forms, through the rest of the *Canterbury Tales*. The most comic and 'realistic' version is to be found at the end of the *Wife of Bath's* Prologue, in the quarrel provoked by the Wife's fifth husband, who insists on reading to her his 'book of wikked wives'. The Wife, in fury, tears three leaves from his book, and he knocks her down. With instinctive shrewdness, the Wife exploits the

moral advantage that this gives her, and adopts a tone of suffering meekness.

'O! hastow slain me, false theef?' I seyde,
'And for my land thus hastow mordred me?
Er^a I be deed, yet wol I kisse thee'.

(800-802)

Such a display of submissiveness elicits a matching submissiveness from the aghast **Jankin**, and he asks for forgiveness. The quarrel ends with the establishment of a relationship that follows, in its own more robust way, the pattern of that between Arveragus and Dorigen: the husband's surrender of 'governance' is met by unailing truth and kindness on the part of his wife. The description of this reconciliation stays within the sphere of comic realism, however, not least because every gesture of surrender carries with it an accompanying gesture — albeit softened and muted-of self-assertiveness: the 'false thief' of the Wife's first speech; **Jankin's** excusing of himself for striking the blow by insisting that she provoked him; the Wife's final tap on his cheek to settle the score and make their kind of equality. The generosity here is a matter of letting these last little pieces of self-assertiveness pass, of 'allowing' them to be submerged in the larger movements of self-abasement which are being enacted. Such a comic-realistic version of the notion that surrendering power gives one back power enables us to see that although its operations may be 'magical' in the sense that they are not easy to rationalize, the roots of this principle lie in the everyday world of instinctive interaction between human beings. The fairyland world where wishes come true is not an alternative to this everyday experience, but a powerful image of its more mysterious aspects.

Such an image is offered us, of course, by the end of the Wife's tale, in the account of the working out of the relationship between the knight and the ugly old lady he has been forced to marry. After lecturing the knight on the value of age, ugliness and poverty, the old lady offers him a surprising choice: whether he will have her 'foul and old', but a 'trewe, humble wif', or whether he will have her 'yong and fair', and take the chance ('take the aventure') that others will compete to win her favours away from him. The knight's response is

a before.

to make the choice over to her, to put himself in her 'wise **governance**', and the miraculous result of this is that the ugly old lady is transformed into a beautiful young one, who promises to be faithful in addition. As in the lay of **Guigemar**, a mental surrender has magical effects on physical reality. But the magical transformation in physical reality is the manifestation of an equally magical inward transformation which accompanies and causes it: the knight who began the tale with a particularly brutal assertion of masculine 'maistrye', the rape of a young girl, is transformed into a husband who humbly relinquishes control to his wife. What is more, he must accept that possession can never be complete in the sphere of human relations; to accept happiness is to accept the possibility of its loss, and to take a beautiful wife is to incur the risk of unhappiness at losing her ('**Whoso wol han lief, he lief moot lete**', as Criseyde puts it).

In the **Franklin's Tale**, the magic has rather a different role to play. The magic does not bring about the denouement of the tale: on the contrary, it creates the problem. The clerk from Orleans uses it to remove all the rocks from the coast of Brittany so that Aurelius may fulfil the, apparently impossible condition for winning Dorigen's love. As Dorigen herself says of their removal: 'It is **against** the **proces** of nature'. The magic is used to create an '**aventure**' — a sudden, disruptive **happening** that interrupts the gradual rhythms of natural change. It is as an 'aventure' that the situation created by the removal of the rocks presents itself to Arveragus; he says to Dorigen, 'To no wight **telle** thou of this aventure.' But he has also told her, 'It may be wel, paraventure, yet today.' There is the same kind of 'hidden pun' in the qualifying 'paraventure' here as there is in Marie de France's use of the phrase. On the face of it, it simply means 'perhaps'. But it also suggests a deeper appeal to the power of chance — the power of 'aventure' which has created the problem and which has, therefore, also the power to resolve it *if* it is allowed to operate. Arveragus allows it; he stands back, as it were, to make room for it, subduing his own claims and wishes. The test of his relinquishment of 'maistrye' is that he must submit himself to his wife's independently-made promise so far that he is forced to order her to keep it; the test of Dorigen's promise to be a 'humble trewe wyf' is that she must obey her husband's command that she fulfil her independent promise to be unfaithful. The structure of their relationship at this point, therefore,

is a poignant illustration of the simultaneity of 'lordship' and 'servage' which had earlier been described; each of the marriage-partners is following the will of the other and yet also acting out an assertion of self. And just as this moment in the tale provides an illustration of the fusion of 'lordship' and 'servage', so it provides an illustration of what is meant by the command 'Lerneth to suffre'. Arveragus 'suffers' in the double sense of enduring pain and 'allowing'; in bidding his wife to keep her promise, he provides a compelling example of patience in Chaucer's sense of the word, of adaptation to 'aventure', of allowing events to take their course. And he shows us very clearly that such an adaptation is not, as we might idly suppose, a matter of lethargy or inertia, of simply letting things drift. The easy course here would be to forbid Dorigen to go; Chaucer makes clear the agonizing effort that is required to achieve this adaptation.

'Trouthe is the hieste thing that man may kepe.'
Hut with that word he brast^a anon to wepe.

(1479-80)

In this tale, as in *Guigemar*, a surrender to 'aventure' is met by a response of 'aventure'. In this case, it takes the form of the meeting between Dorigen and Aurelius, as she sets out to keep her promise. Chaucer emphasizes the chance nature of this meeting: Aurelius 'Of aventure happed hire to meete', he says, and a few lines later, 'thus they mette, of aventure or grace'. Yet nothing is more natural, since we are told that Aurelius was watching and waiting for Dorigen's departure. These comments point, therefore, not so much to the fact that this meeting is an amazing coincidence, as to the operation of 'aventure' within it. The intensity of Dorigen's surrender to the situation in which she has been trapped, perceptible in her anguished cry 'half as she were mad',

'Unto the gardin, as min housbonde bad,
My trouthe for to holde, allas! allas!'

(1512-13)

has a dramatic effect on Aurelius; it mediates to him Arveragus's surrender to 'aventure' and stimulates him to match that surrender with his own. He releases Dorigen from her promise and sends her back to her husband. He accepts the chance by which he has come

^a burst (into).

too late, by which his love for Dorigen post-dates her marriage — one of the arbitrary cruelties of time — and having perceived the inner reality of the marriage, the firmness with which each is linked in obedience to the other in the very act of consenting to Dorigen's 'infidelity', Aurelius 'allows' that relationship its own being, undisturbed; he too exercises patience and 'suffers' it.

But what if he had not? What if he had insisted on the fulfilment of the promise? For if Chaucer is pointing to the power of chance in human lives, he is bound to acknowledge that chance might well have had it so. One critic who correctly observes the perilous ease with which either development could realize itself at this point has written a conclusion to the episode in which Aurelius does just *that*.⁵ The freedom and openness of events in the Chaucerian world means that romance is always open to turn into fabliau — or into tragedy. But I think that in this tale the nature of such a tragedy would be qualified by our sense that Aurelius would have 'enjoyed' Dorigen in only a very limited sense; his possession of her would have been as much a matter of 'illusion' and 'appearance' as the removal of the rocks that made it possible. The magic, in this tale, suggests the illusory, forced quality of Aurelius's power over Dorigen (in contrast to the natural power won by Arveragus, spontaneously springing into life at the end of the long process of his courtship). That is why the magic removal of the rocks is presented as a laborious, technologically complex operation, rather than the wave of a sorcerer's wand.⁶ The real magic in this tale is Aurelius's change of heart, which is as miraculous as that of the knight in the *Wife of Bath's Tale*. The magic removal of the rocks is merely a means by which we can measure the immensity of this 'human magic'; we can gauge as it were, the size of the problem it is able to solve. And this 'human magic' is nothing other than the human power to change. What the development of the tale brings to our notion of the human tendency to change is that it is not just an everyday, humdrum matter of our moods fluctuating with the passage of time, but that it is a source of power; its role can be creative.

As I have already suggested, Chaucer is well aware of the tragic aspects of the human propensity to change, as his constant preoccupation with the theme of betrayal shows. He is also aware of the saving power of human resilience, a sort of comic version of patience,

which can nullify the tragic aspects of 'aventure'; thus beside the serious transformation of the rapist knight in the *Wife of Bath's* Tale we can set the figure of Pluto in the *Merchant's Tale*, the ravisher who has clearly been worn down by feminine rhetoric so that he presents the ludicrous picture of a henpecked rapist. Romances such as the tales of the Knight and Franklin, however, offer us a serious celebration of patience, of the creative power of change. 'Pitee' may be the quality that leads Criseyde's emotions away from Troilus to Diomedes, or it may be ironically appealed to as the cause of May's amazing readiness to respond to Damian's advances (*Merchant's Tale*), but it is also the quality that enables Theseus to adapt himself to each new claim that chance events impose on him (Knight's Tale), or that leads Dorigen to accept Arveragus' suit, and it is 'routhe' (another word for pity) that leads Aurelius to release Dorigen. Moreover, as the passage on patience makes clear, the responsiveness implied in the ideals of patience and 'pitee' must be exercised continually; the balance and poise achieved at the end of the Franklin's Tale is reached by a 'proces', a chain of ceaseless adjustment in which the magician-clerk, as well as the other three figures, must play his part.' Ceaseless adjustment is, as we saw, something that characterizes the marriage, with its endless alternation of 'lordshipe' and 'servage', and it is for that reason that it can survive 'aventure'; it is founded on it. Only through ceaseless change can there be stability. Only through a perpetual readiness to adapt, to change, in each of the actors in the tale, can the status quo be preserved. Or, in Chaucerian language, 'trouthe' is the product of patience.

Chaucer's strength is that he gives us a creative sense of order; he makes us aware that static formulae, of whatever nature — the husband's sovereignty, equality in marriage — are inappropriate to human beings, since they are subject to change from within and chance from without. What is needed instead is an ideal such as the ideal of patience, which is founded on change, on the perpetual readiness to meet, to accept and to transform the endless and fluctuating succession of 'aventures' that life offers.

NOTES

1. See, for example, D. W. Robertson, A Preface to *Chaucer* (Princeton, New Jersey, 1962) 470-72.
- a. Boccaccio tells the story in the *Filocolo* (IV, 4) and the *Decameron* (X, 5). See the section on the Franklin's Tale in W. F. Bryan and G. Dempster, *Sources and Analogues of Chaucer's Canterbury Tales*. (New York, 1941).
3. Marie's *Lais* are edited by A. Ewert (Oxford, 1944). There is an English translation by Eugene Mason, *Lays of Marie de France and Others* (London, 1911). For Marie's statement about the *lais* and *aventures*, see her Prologue, 35-36.
4. Although her *lais* achieved a high degree of popularity; see Ewert's Introduction, xviii. For a full discussion of the fortunes of the lay in England, see John B. Beeston, 'How Much was Known of the Breton Lai in Fourteenth-Century England?', *The Learned and the Lewed: Studies in Chaucer and Medieval Literature*, ed. L. D. Benson (Cambridge, Mass., 1974), 319-36.
5. Ian Robinson, *Chaucer and the English Tradition* (Cambridge, 1972), 195-6.
6. The magic in the *Filocolo* story is of a much more traditional kind, involving the concoction of a magic potion from exotic herbs, roots, stones, etc.
7. Even this has its comic version, in the Shipman's Tale. where a chain of unshaken selfishness creates the same sort of final balance and poise.