

## Sleeping dogs and stasis in the *Franklin's Tale*

Richard North

Sleeping beneath the surface of the *Franklin's Tale* (c. 1394) is a danger nowhere greater than when the Franklin's two Breton protagonists, Dorigen and Arveragus, find their marriage on the brink of failure. The husband, in town for two days while Dorigen ponders suicide, comes home to find his wife weeping alone. When he asks why, Dorigen tells him everything. What we already know is that more than two years earlier, while he was away in England, she rid herself of a besotted squire named Aurelius by promising to love him only if he made all the tidal rocks of Brittany disappear. Now Aurelius, employing for £1,000 an astronomer from Orleans, has done just that and expects Dorigen to carry out her promise. Arveragus responds as follows:

This housbonde, with glad chiere, in freendly wyse

Answerde and seyde as I shal yow devyse:

“Is ther oght elles, Dorigen, but this?”

“Nay, nay,” quod she, “God helpe me so as wys!

This is to mucche, and it were Goddes wille.”

“Ye, wyf,” quod he, “lat slepen that is stille.

It may be wel, paraventure, yet to day.

Ye shul youre trouthe holden, by my fay!” (V.1467-74)<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> *The Riverside Chaucer*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition [based on *The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer edited by F. N. Robinson*], ed. Larry D. Benson (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1987), pp. 178-89 (p. 187). My thanks to Mary Wellesley for her comments on an earlier draft.

An admiration for the man seems clear in the way the Franklin prepares us for the calm of his response. Arveragus does not show the rage his wife seems to expect. Outwardly cheerful, he asks a question which most of us would take to mean ‘Is it nothing more than that?’, in keeping with his smiling demeanour. But his question is not nonchalant; Dorigen takes it literally. Answering words which mean ‘Is there anything more than this?’ twice with ‘nay’, she reassures him that she is not hiding something worse, and that what has happened is bad enough. About the last part Arveragus seems to agree with her. If his ‘ye’ does not mean ‘you’ in the words ‘Ye, wyf’, he means ‘yes’, it is too much. By telling her to let sleeping dogs lie,<sup>2</sup> he advises her not to break the stasis which his calm has imposed. This he maintains by appearing to yield to destiny. Saying that ‘paraventure’ the business may turn out well, even now, he means either just ‘perhaps’; or ‘by the power of “adventure”’, by which he surrenders himself and Dorigen to providence;<sup>3</sup> or ‘by some miracle’, in which case it is with a more guarded show of optimism that Arveragus tells her to keep her promise. Whichever it is, he sends his wife away to have sex with a stranger while endeavouring to keep himself composed. This essay will explore why stasis matters to Arveragus and also to the teller of this tale.

### **Arveragus à la Boccaccio**

Arveragus’ pressure on Dorigen may be measured against the conduct of his counterpart in the tale of Menedon from *Il Filocolo* (‘the love-struck’) of Giovanni Boccaccio (c. 1336-8), which (possibly in the form of a manuscript excerpt from Book IV) was Chaucer’s primary

---

<sup>2</sup> *Geoffrey Chaucer: The Canterbury Tales*, ed. and commentary by Jill Mann (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2005), p. 960 (n. 1472).

<sup>3</sup> Jill Mann, ‘Chaucerian Themes and Style in the *Franklin's Tale*’, in *New Pelican Guide to English Literature*. Vol. 1, Part 1. *Medieval Literature: Chaucer and the Alliterative Tradition*, edited by Boris Ford (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1982–1988), 133–153 (p. 147).

source.<sup>4</sup> Although Boccaccio rewrote this tale for Day 10, Tale 5, of the *Decameron* (from c. 1350), in which the husband is similar, it is less clear that Chaucer knew this version too.<sup>5</sup> In the *Franklin's Tale*, Arveragus puts pressure on his wife to keep her word. Scholars have interpreted this in several ways. On one hand, Arveragus' pressure may be read negatively, because it appears to violate a promise which he made to her before marriage, that he would thereafter 'take no maystrie / Agayn hir wyl' (V.747-8). On the other, it has been read positively: either as his means of preserving Dorigen's integrity;<sup>6</sup> or as his 'refusal to forbid her to keep her promise', in order to prevent her from claiming one day that he forced her to break her word;<sup>7</sup> or, more ascetically, as his 'allowing the physical violation of his wife at the expense of injustice to himself in order to spare her the moral violation entailed in the breaking of a promise'.<sup>8</sup> These knotty defensive readings are founded on an axiom that Chaucer wrote the *Franklin's Tale* in order to settle the quarrels of the 'Marriage Group' (the *Wife of Bath's*, *Clerk's* and *Merchant's Tales*) with a story about *maistrie* ideally balanced.<sup>9</sup> This may be true as far as the Franklin is concerned. However, it is less certain that Chaucer saw this marriage as ideal, or that it can be used to guide enlightened readers in our times.

---

<sup>4</sup> Text taken from *Tutte le Opere di Giovanni Boccaccio*, ed. Vittore Branca, rev. A. D. Quaglio, 12 vols. (Milan: Arnoldo Mondadori, 1967) I, 396-410 (IV.31-4). Also, with translation, in *Sources and Analogues of 'The Canterbury Tales'*, Volume I, ed. Robert M. Correale and Mary Hamel (Woodbridge: D.S. Brewer, 2002), pp. 220-32 (cf. p. 213). My translation adapted from N. R. Havely, *Chaucer's Boccaccio: Sources for 'Troilus' and 'The Knight's' and 'Franklin's Tale': Translations from the 'Filostrato', 'Teseida' and 'Filocolo'*, Chaucer Studies 5 (Woodbridge: D.S. Brewer, 1980 [repr. 1992]), 154-61.

<sup>5</sup> *Opere di Boccaccio*, ed. Branca, IV, 877-82. *Sources and Analogues*, ed. Correale and Hamel, pp. 240-44. On Chaucer's relationship with *Decameron* 10.5 (as read in Italy, with no copy of his own), see Helen Cooper, 'The Frame', in *Sources and Analogues*, ed. Correale and Hamel, pp. 1-22 (p. 6); and Robert R. Edwards, 'The Franklin's Tale', in *ibid.*, pp. 211-65 (p. 214). N. S. Thompson, *Chaucer, Boccaccio, and the Debate of Love: A Comparative Study of 'The Decameron' and 'The Canterbury Tales'* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), pp. 1-4.

<sup>6</sup> Mary J. Carruthers, 'The Gentilesse of Chaucer's Franklin', *Criticism* 23 (1981), 283-300 (p. 295).

<sup>7</sup> Jill Mann, *Feminizing Chaucer*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition [first published 1991] (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2002), pp. 88-95 (p. 92).

<sup>8</sup> Gerald Morgan, 'Boccaccio's *Filocolo* and the Moral Argument of *The Franklin's Tale*', *The Chaucer Review* 20.4 (1986), 285-306 (p. 305).

<sup>9</sup> George L. Kittredge, 'Chaucer's Discussion of Marriage', *Modern Philology* 9 (1911-1912), 435-67. For a summary of critical responses, see Helen Cooper, *The Canterbury Tales* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), p. 153.

The text shows that Arveragus begins to lose his composure as soon as he justifies himself. As sure as God will forgive him, he says, for the ‘verray love’ he has for her, he would rather be run through

“But if ye sholde youre trouthe kepe and save.

Trouthe is the hyeste thyng than man may kepe – ”

But with that word he brast anon to wepe (V.1478-80)

Now Arveragus, like his wife, is weeping. But is it for the same reason? His words’ enigmatic surface has caused much debate on the degree or nature of his love for her. ME *trouthe* (‘(pledge of) faith towards another person’, ‘one’s word’), the cue for his tears, plays a major role. By their earlier agreement, both spouses have reason to understand that Dorigen’s word to Aurelius, given as her ‘trouthe’ to him on line 998, must replace the ‘trouthe’ which she made with the same words to Arveragus as his wife to be (V.759). Plainly he loves her honour at least as much as he loves her.

However, Arveragus’ love for Dorigen is also contingent on her not telling others of her pact with Aurelius. Perhaps, below the surface, his tears even reflect a thought that he has lost her to him, but Chaucer appears to close this down as a possible reading in the following lines:

And seyde, “I yow forbede, up peyne of deeth,

That nevere, whil thee lasteth lyf ne breeth,

To no wight telle thou of this aventure –

As I may best, I wol my wo endure –

Ne make no contenance of hevynesse,

That folk of yow may demen harm or gesse.” (V.1481-86)

The threat brings his ‘love’ out of hiding into public view. Arveragus is afraid of being publicly dishonoured. He seems to fear that Aurelius will ‘shame hir atte leeste’ if Dorigen breaks her word; after all, the squire’s brother considers this on line 1164. It has been noted that this part of Arveragus’ speech to Dorigen, in lines 1482-5, is the only time we hear him addressing her with the intimate *thou*, rather than with the formal pronoun *ye*.<sup>10</sup> Suddenly being familiar, rather than courteous, with Dorigen, Arveragus may reveal that he loves her privately, or it may as well be hatred. Whatever it is, he wants them looking cheerful together in public. On one hand he confesses what appears to be truth, that her transgression will hurt him for ever more and isolate each from the other. On the other, his parting words to Dorigen tell her to keep up a front. This instruction Arveragus promptly puts to the test by calling for ‘a squier and a mayde’ (V.1487) to take her where she needs to go.

Before we see the agreement on which this dialogue depends, let us compare the scene with its counterpart in *Il Filocolo*.<sup>11</sup> In this work, which is a prose reworking of the romance of *Floire and Blanchefleur*, the central character Florio, a Spanish Muslim, is on a quest to find Biancafiore, his Christian love, who is held captive in a harem in Egypt. On his way there, he stops at the court in Naples. There is a garden interlude in which thirteen *quistioni di amore* (‘questions of love’) are debated in the form of stories. In the fourth, Menedon, one of Florio’s companions, poses a question of ‘liberalità’ (‘generosity’) with a tale of a rich Spanish ‘cavaliere’ (‘knight’) named Tarolfo. Vainly pursuing a happily married lady, after much persistence Tarolfo is rewarded with a ‘sottile malizia’ (‘cunning trick’) whereby she promises love to him only if he give her a garden in bloom in the bleak month of January.

---

<sup>10</sup> Colin Wilcockson, ‘Thou and Tears: The Advice of Arveragus to Dorigen in Chaucer’s *Franklin’s Tale*’, *The Review of English Studies* 54.215 (2003), 308-12 (p. 310): ‘His tender feelings towards her have broken through’.

<sup>11</sup> Thompson, *A Comparative Study*, pp. 262-9.

Tarolfo, setting off to find the means for this impossible request, finds an impoverished wizard in Thessaly by the name of Tebano, who agrees to do it for half of Tarolfo's castles and goods. Menedon's centrepiece consists of Tebano's Medea-like magic in finding and concocting the ingredients to bring the garden into bloom. When it is done, and when Tarolfo on his second attempt succeeds in bringing the lady to the garden, she consents but puts him off on the pretext of finding a day when the husband is out. Pondering all means of escape from her promise, she finds none and becomes sadder still. Her husband, also a 'cavaliere', presses until she can hold out no longer. Then she tells him everything:

La qual cosa udendo il cavaliere lungamente pensò, e conoscendo nel pensiero la purità della donna, così le disse: "Va, e copertamente serva il tuo giuramento, e a Tarolfo ciò che tu promettesti liberamente attieni: egli l'ha ragionevolmente e con grande affanno guadagnato." (IV.31)

Which matter having heard, the knight thought for a long while, and knowing in his mind the purity of the lady, spoke to her thus: "Go and covertly perform your oath, and to Tarolfo freely grant what you promised him: he has earned it with justice and great trouble."

This knight does not weep and the intimacy of his *tu* ('thou') is unforced. There is realism in the way that he believes his wife's version because he has forced it out of her. Though he ponders before replying, his command for her to honour her oath is immediate and only lightly concerned with his honour, which he acknowledges by asking her to do this 'copertamente' ('covertly'). Judging this question later, Queen Fiammetta awards the prize for the greatest generosity to the husband, 'che il suo onore concedea' ('who gave away his

honour', IV.34). Unlike Arveragus, this husband names the lover, in recognition that he has entered their lives, courteously adding that Tarolfo has earned this role. Only now 'cominciò la donna a piangere' ('the lady began to weep', IV. 31), appealing to 'gl'iddii' ('the gods') to keep her from such a 'fallo' ('sin'), and saying that she will kill herself before dishonouring her husband in this way:

A cui il cavaliere disse: "Donna, già per questo io non voglio che tu te n'uccida, né ancora che una sola malinconia tu te ne dia: niuno dispiacere m'è, va e fa quello che tu impromettesti, ch'io non te ne avrò di meno cara; ma questo fornito, un'altra volta ti guarderai di sì fatte impromesse, non tanto ti paia il domandato dono impossibile ad avere." (IV.31)

To which the knight said: "Lady, certainly I will not have you kill yourself for this, nor even that you give yourself a single moment of melancholy: it displeases me not at all. Go and do what you promised, for which I will not hold you any the less dear; but this being provided, another time you will keep yourself from making such promises, even if the gift you ask for may seem impossible to obtain."

When she is sure that he means it, the wife heads out for Tarolfo with a servant escort, 'ornatasi e fattasi bella' ('having adorned herself and made herself beautiful'). Chaucer, though he puts the wife's threat of suicide into Dorigen's long plaint before her husband returns, keeps it back for Arveragus as a preliminary to his death-threat if she dishonours him publicly. From what Fiammetta says later, it appears that the understanding 'cavaliere', far from offering to kill his spouse, and even before he speaks, is reconciled to the prospect of losing his honour. Whereas Arveragus claims to have 'verray love' for his wife now, the

Spanish husband promises the same after her sin in the future, ending with advice which assumes that his wife will be pestered again. The narrator has called this a marriage ‘di perfettissimo amore’ (‘with a most perfect love’, IV.31). There is a level of knowledge and communication between these spouses which is hard to find between their counterparts in the *Franklin’s Tale*. Chaucer scales back the dialogue of Boccaccio’s scene into postures about honour. Arveragus, by the force of his agreement, can only promise Dorigen a public stability at the cost of private estrangement.

### **Arveragus’ prenuptial offer**

The happy ending of the *Franklin’s Tale*, as is well known, begins with Aurelius’ decision to forgo his use of Dorigen in recognition of two things: Arveragus’ ‘gentillesse’ in sending her to him, and (only) secondly Dorigen’s distress. The Franklin says that Aurelius, thinking of Arveragus, would rather stay his lust ‘Than doon so heigh a cherlissh wrecchednesse / Against franchise and alle gentillesse’ (V.1523-4).<sup>12</sup> The Clerk of Orleans, finding out the truth when Aurelius asks for more time to pay the second half, waives the whole sum in recognition of his ‘gentillesse’ in releasing Dorigen, while claiming in return the same status for himself. The Franklin ends by asking his pilgrim ‘lordynges’ who was ‘the mooste fre’ (V.1622).

This ending is faithful to that in Menedon’s tale, where Tarolfo is at first surprised to see the lady enter his house with her servants, having expected to be calling on her while her husband was out. Hearing that, as he suspected, she was sent, he is so struck by ‘la gran liberalità del marito’ (‘the husband’s great generosity’) that he declares her oath fulfilled, begging her spouse through her intercession to excuse him ‘della follia che per adietro ho usato’ (‘for the folly which I have committed up to now’). Hearing this outcome, Tebano

---

<sup>12</sup> Much as the lover (Ansaldo) in *Decameron* 10.5: see Thompson, *A Comparative Study*, p. 266.



expects Tarolfo to renege, but when the knight insists on paying him (money is not an issue), he cancels the debt with the unctious words ‘Unque agl’iddii non piaccia che io, là dove il cavaliere ti fu della sua donna liberale, e tu a lui non fosti villano, che io sia meno che cortese’ (‘May the gods then not accept that I, whereas this knight was generous to you with his lady, and you were not churlish to him, should be less than courteous myself’ (IV.31). He varies the social terms in this way, whereas the Franklin levels his knight, squire and clerk with ‘gentillesse’. In either case, however, it appears that the woman ends up excluded from an all-male comparison.<sup>13</sup>

Where Chaucer most departs from Boccaccio is at the start of the tale, in beginning with a prenuptial agreement between Arveragus and Dorigen.<sup>14</sup> Menedon briefly starts his Spanish story with his two principals’ marriage but then moves on. The Franklin, however, starts with a courtship in which the Breton knight ‘dide his payne / To serve a lady in his beste wise’ (V.730-1). He performs many labours before she is won, for she is beautiful and ‘eek therto comen of so heigh kynrede’ (V.735) that he hardly dares tell her his woe. At last, however, she rewards his worthiness, ‘meke obeysaunce’ (V.739) and penance with such pity

That pryvely she fil of his accord  
To take hym for hir housbonde and hir lord,  
Of swich lordshipe as men han over hir wyves. (V.741-3)

Arveragus thus frames a private offer which he puts to Dorigen, who agrees to it when she acknowledges his public authority. The same husbandly power is presumed in *Il Filocolo*, in which Boccaccio’s queen argues against Menedon’s choice of Tebano for the most ‘liberale’

---

<sup>13</sup> Mary R. Bowman, “‘Half as She were Mad’”: Dorigen in the Male World of the *Franklin’s Tale*, *The Chaucer Review* 27 (1993), 239-51 (pp. 245-7).

<sup>14</sup> John Finlayson, ‘Invention and Disjunction: Chaucer’s Rewriting of Boccaccio in *The Franklin’s Tale*’, *English Studies* 89.4 (2008), 385-402 (p. 388).

(‘generous’) on the grounds that the wife’s oath to her husband would outweigh any she made subsequently, to Tarolfo included; consequently the husband ‘oltre al suo piacere non si dovea commettere a Tarolfo’ (‘was not obliged to commit her to Tarolfo against his own pleasure’, IV.34). Fiammetta’s presumption of male marital authority underpins her judgement of this tale, which, despite Menedon’s inclination towards Tebano, seems contrived by Boccaccio to agree with her.

Does the Franklin expect us to give the same prize to Arveragus? Within the context of the Marriage Group in Fragments III-V of the Canterbury Tales, Arveragus’ offer is in dialogue with the Wife of Bath, whose Prologue claimed the *maistrie* for herself and all wives, which her Tale then exemplified with a knight giving up the *maistrie* to a low-born female (III.1236-48).<sup>15</sup> Through Arveragus, the Franklin is taken to respond to the Wife with a normative tale of marriage contracted upon mutual obedience.<sup>16</sup> To start with, Arveragus makes his offer as follows:

Of his free wyl he swoor hire as a knyght  
That nevere in al his life he, day ne nyght,  
Ne sholde upon hym take no maistrie  
Agayn hir wyl, ne kithe hire jalousie,  
But hire obeye, and folwe hir wyl in al,  
As any lovere to his lady shal,  
Save that the name of soveraynetee,  
That wolde he have for shame of his degree. (V.745-52)

---

<sup>15</sup> *Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Benson, pp. 119-22 (p. 121).

<sup>16</sup> Kathryn Jacobs, ‘The Marriage Contract of the *Franklin’s Tale*: the Remaking of Society’, *The Chaucer Review* 20.2 (1985), 132-43.

Until the last two lines of this passage it appears that Dorigen gets it all. Not only will her suitor be subject to her will but she may also expect him to refrain from making accusations and to obey her as he did before. Arveragus thus offers to continue his state of amatory subjection into marriage. However, there is also the matter of their public appearances for which, in the last part, he requires this subjection from her.

Most readers take the ‘shame of his degree’ to mean that Arveragus holds on to a husband’s title of sovereignty in order to preserve the honour of his rank.<sup>17</sup> But there are stronger semantic grounds for supposing that he asks her for this because he is ashamed that his class is lower than hers. Dorigen is a trophy wife. His fear of her ‘heigh kynrede’ (V.735), when he meets her, confirms this; as might his two-year pursuit of military honours in England (V.809-12), a year or so after marriage.<sup>18</sup> If his offer to remain servant to her in private is an inducement to Dorigen to marry him beneath her station, the liberality of his offer makes sense internally. It also appears to acknowledge the knight’s surrender to his wife in the *Wife of Bath’s Tale*. In practice, however, Arveragus’ offer is not liberal at all. There is nothing in its wording which prohibits violence or even death if Dorigen brings shame on her husband’s name.

### **Expectations of Dorigen**

The more the Franklin dwells on this agreement, the more proactive about Dorigen it becomes. Dorigen, praying to avoid strife with her husband in the future, ‘thanked hym’ (V.753); that is, acknowledges his concession, offering him humbly faithful wifeness in exchange for his proffer of so free a rein. She seals it with the words (‘Have heer my trouthe’, V.759) with which she later cancels her marital oath for the benefit of Aurelius (V.998),

---

<sup>17</sup> *Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Benson, p. 178: ‘in order not to bring shame on his status’. *Canterbury Tales*, ed. Mann, p. 409.

<sup>18</sup> Russell A. Peck, ‘Sovereignty and the Two Worlds of the *Franklin’s Tale*’, *The Chaucer Review* 1.4 (1967), 253-71 (p. 260). John Fyler, ‘Love and Degree in the *Franklin’s Tale*’, *The Chaucer Review* 21 (1987), 321-37 (pp. 323-7).

breaking the Christian sacraments of marriage.<sup>19</sup> This oath was important, but since the Franklin later reveals that people were pagan in those days (V.1293), there seems little point in applying Fiammetta's argument to Dorigen, that her oath to the husband makes her promise to the lover invalid.<sup>20</sup> So long as it stays private, according to Arveragus' offer, Dorigen may 'folwe hir wil in al' (V.749), even if this means being untrue.

That an expectation of Dorigen's infidelity is not long in coming after Arveragus' offer, may be seen in the Franklin's rhapsody on patience, which takes up the next 26 lines (V.761-86). Borrowing from *Le Roman de la Rose* –

Amor ne peut durer ne vivre,

S'el n'est en queur franc et delivre. ([LII] 9,411-12)<sup>21</sup>

Love cannot endure living

If it is not free and lively in the heart.

– the Franklin says that love, taking flight 'whan maystrie comth' (V.765), is a free spirit, and that it is in women's nature to desire liberty and not to feel enslaved. 'And so doon men, if I sooth seyen shal' (V.770), he adds. This last line has been praised as a rejoinder to men in the audience 'to measure the reasonableness of female desire for liberty against their own desire for it'.<sup>22</sup> Less charitably, however, it justifies the knight in his freedom a year or so later,

---

<sup>19</sup> *Geoffrey Chaucer: The Franklin's Tale from The Canterbury Tales*, ed. Gerald Morgan (London, 1980), pp. 17-20. *Ibid.*, 'Moral Argument of *The Franklin's Tale*', 292-4. Angela M. Lucas and Peter J. Lucas, 'The Presentation of Marriage and Love in Chaucer's *Franklin's Tale*', *English Studies* 72.6 (1991), 501-12 (p. 508).

<sup>20</sup> Kathryn L. Hume, 'Why Chaucer calls the *Franklin's Tale* a Breton Lai', *Philological Quarterly* 51 (1972), 365-79 (p. 377). Alastair J. Minnis, 'From Medieval to Renaissance? Chaucer's Position on Past Gentility', *Proceedings of the British Academy* 72 (1986), 205-46 (p. 219). Michael J. Wright, 'Isolation and Individuality in the *Franklin's Tale*', *Studia Neophilologica* 70 (1998), 181-6 (pp. 181-2).

<sup>21</sup> Text from *Sources and Analogues*, ed. Correale and Hamel, pp. 250-1. See also *Le Rommant de la Rose par Guillaume de Lorris et Jean de Meung*, ed. and trans. Pierre Marteau [Jules Croissandeau], 4 vols. (Paris, 1878-9) II (1878), 346-7 [as lines 9,779-80].

<sup>22</sup> Mann, *Feminizing Chaucer*, p. 89.

when he leaves his wife alone on the western end of Brittany for as many as two years. The Franklin shows what patience is required from Dorigen then.

At this point, however, he begins to lay the bigger burden of patience on Dorigen's husband. Celebrating the power of this desired virtue to vanquish what domestic 'rigour' would never attain (V.775), he deepens patience into sufferance. 'Lerneth to sufre' (V.777), he advises, meaning that we should all suffer spouses to do what they will before we are forced to. When he says that there is nobody in the world who does not do amiss from time to time, whether from anger, illness or planetary influence, wine, woe or humours, the Franklin means the husband's sufferance, not the wife's:

On every wrong a man may nat be wreken.  
After the tyme moste be temperaunce  
To every wight that kan on governaunce.  
And therefore hath this wise, worthy knyght,  
To lyve in ese, suffraunce hire bihight,  
And she to hym ful wisly gan to swere  
That nevere sholde ther be defaute in here. (V.784-90)

Here Mann reads a flexible active patience between the spouses which preserves harmony 'through constant adaptation, as each partner responds to change in the other'.<sup>23</sup> However, the meaning of ME *temperaunce* does not encompass active 'adaptation' here, so much as an action which achieves a compromise between extreme resorts; the primary denotation is 'restraint, forbearance, moderation'.<sup>24</sup> Arveragus promises sufferance to Dorigen because he thinks of her as his servant. He knows that 'every wight that kan on governaunce' must

---

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 90.

<sup>24</sup> *Middle English Dictionary: T*, ed. Robert E. Lewis (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1993), p. 180 (sv. 'temperaunce', 1 (a-b); cf. 2(a)).

reserve punishment until he knows the circumstances. In its context this prescription, a lord's if there ever was one, presumes only that Dorigen will offend her husband. The Franklin's closing comment on her, 'she was to hym trewe for evere moore' (V.1555), implies that he thinks she was untrue.

The Franklin drafts no clause on fidelity for Arveragus here, but lays the burden of this expectation on Dorigen. An offence by her in the future is what she herself presumes when she swears never to have 'defaute' (V.790). We might recall the wife's admission of 'cotal fallo' ('such a sin') in Menedon's Tale, after she has locked herself into an infidelity with Tarolfo.<sup>25</sup> This source may be disregarded in order to read *defaute* here as 'lack', as in 'lack [of sufferance]': compare 'defaute of slep' in *The Book of the Duchess* (line 5).<sup>26</sup> However, a more vindictive meaning is borne out by the Pardoner, when he claims that his holy water will cure a husband's 'jalousye':

And nevere shal he moore his wyf mystriste,  
Though he the soothe of hir defaute wiste,  
Al hadde she taken prestes two or thre. (VI. 369-71)<sup>27</sup>

'Jalousie' is what Arveragus promises not to show his lady just after he renounces private 'maystrie / Agayn hir wyl' (V.747-8). Less charitably read, the Franklin's above words expect adultery from Dorigen two hundred lines before the narrative question of this has arisen. The burden of responsibility is hers in the 'humble, wys accord' (V.791), which the Franklin, having flaunted, then distils as follows:

Thus hath she take hir servaunt and hir lord –

---

<sup>25</sup> *Opere di Boccaccio*, ed. Branca, I, 404.

<sup>26</sup> *Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Benson, p. 330.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 195. *Canterbury Tales*, ed. Mann, p. 452: 'sin' (l. 370).

Servant in love, and love in marriage.

Thanne was he bothe in lordshipe and servage. (V.792-4)

With the man being slave and master simultaneously rather than consecutively, this prenuptial agreement presents a paradox which Jill Mann explains as ‘a ceaseless alternation’ in which husband and wife constantly switch the roles of power. Arveragus’ opening proviso, however, that he keep the ‘name of soveraynetee’ while surrendering his ‘maystrie’, should have told us that the real alternation is different. Rather, as we have seen, it takes place not simultaneously but at different times, on the basis of whether the couple appears in private or in public.<sup>28</sup>

But then the Franklin retreats from his vision of balance:

Servage? Nay, but in lordshipe above,

Sith he hath bothe his lady and his love;

His lady certes, and his wyf also,

The which that lawe of love acordeth to. (V.795-8)

The adverb ‘above’ is the key to the meaning of this passage, in which public face is placed higher than the privacy of what lies beneath. Although the term ‘love’ stands between ‘lady’ and ‘wyf’ on the level of conjugal parity, these concluding lines from the Franklin admit that from now on he will show Arveragus as Dorigen’s lord. Even if Arveragus remains her servant behind closed doors, the force of the simple ‘he hath’ in the first subordinate clause is that publicly he owns her. The narrator says moreover that this public-private balance is in keeping with the (pagan) law of love. As far as he is concerned, Arveragus’ agreement to

---

<sup>28</sup> Finlayson, ‘Invention and Disjunction’, 393.

love Dorigen as he did before their marriage will now be honoured according to how much privacy with her he wants to retain.

The Franklin's brief on his hero's prenuptial legislation is in part adapted from *Le Roman de la Rose*, particularly in twelve lines which immediately follow the couplet we have seen earlier, on the death of unfree love:

Por ce revoit l'en ensement  
De touz ceus qui prumierement  
Par amours amer s'entreseulent  
Quant puis espouser s'entreveulent,  
Enviz peut entr'eus avenir  
Que ja s'il puisse amors tenir:  
Car cil, quant par amours amoit,  
Serjant a celi se clamout  
Qui sa mestresse soloit estre:  
Or se claime seigneur et mestre  
Seur li, que sa dame ot clamee  
Quant ele iert par amours amee. ([LII] 9,413-24)<sup>29</sup>

And so we see in this way  
For all those who first used  
To love each other as lovers, that  
When they mutually desire to marry afterwards,  
Such strife can come between them

---

<sup>29</sup> *Sources and Analogues*, ed. Corrae and Hamel, pp. 250-1. *Le Rommant de la Rose*, ed. Marteau, II, 342-3 [as lines 9,781-94].



That love can't hold them together:  
For he who, when he loved as a lover,  
Called himself a servant to her  
Who used to be his master,  
Why now, he calls himself lord and master  
Over her whom he had called his lady  
When she was loved as a lover.

The point of this part of Jeun de Meun's late thirteenth century continuation of the c. 1237 dream allegory of Guillaume de Lorris is that it is hard to keep a lady when she becomes a wife and loses power: the husband must avoid jealousy in order to keep the peace. Ami, the dreamer's friend, reproves the jealous husband for violent treatment of his wife. Ami describes how the man pulls his wife by the hair, she shrieks to the skies and he fears her vengeance in bed, by poison or knife. Unlike the Wife with Jankyn at the end of her Prologue, the Franklin leaves this *Roman*-based vision of disharmony out. Instead, he favours stasis, the appearance of marital harmony. His solution, however, still presupposes the context of the *Roman*, that the wife is a possession to be properly handled. This is nothing new. Rather, it is a traditional view of marriage, which Dorigen confirms as hers also when she responds to Arveragus' offer by praying never 'as in my gilt' to cause 'outher werre or stryf' between them (V.757).

### **A marriage in stasis**

Arveragus' departure after more than a year of marriage 'in quiete and in reste' (V.760) breaks the stasis in Chaucer's adaptation of Boccaccio's tale in *Il Filocolo*.<sup>30</sup> These words

---

<sup>30</sup> Mann, 'Chaucerian Themes and Style', p. 140.

may be ominous, implying tension. And yet what results in the *Franklin's Tale* is no interaction between characters, but an equally static configuration of human islands for which Menedon's sociable aristocracy affords no parallel. There the husband stays happily domiciled, while Tarolfo bombards the wife with gifts and messages which she keeps from him in order to avoid a vendetta; Tarolfo sets out to find help immediately, forthcoming within six months; the husband, hearing about the compact from his wife, takes it for granted that Tarolfo will bother her again; Tarolfo apologizes to him through her by promising that he will not. In contrast, the Franklin's knight goes abroad, writing home but stretching his stay to two years; his lady complains in solitude by the cliffs, does the same in the garden while her friends there dance without her, and more dreadfully again, after Aurelius' pompous blackmail, for two days while Arveragus is away. The Franklin's squire, when we meet him drawing nearer to Dorigen, has hidden his love for more than two years, only to declare it in one shot; he prays at length to Apollo and Lucina without answer, before taking to his bed for over two years more. Not Aurelius himself but his brother comes up with the idea of seeking help. Aurelius' demand to Dorigen upon completion is made in the private confines of a temple and couched in the language of legalistic menace (V.1311-38). Arveragus makes no reference to Aurelius when Dorigen tells him, nor does Aurelius refer either to Arveragus or to making any further attempts.

Perhaps because of this endless decorum between characters, the scene in which Dorigen spurns her would-be lover appears in most manuscripts, including Ellesmere and Hengwrt, to have been copied with an eye to producing a rivalry between husband and would-be lover. According to the conventionally followed text, which is in all but ten witnesses, Dorigen promises to sleep with Aurelius if he makes all the rocks disappear, Aurelius asks if there is no other grace she will give him and she continues by explaining that there is no such grace in her, for the condition is impossible; asking him, finally, what pleasure would a man take in

loving a married woman whose body is frequently used by her husband? Here Aurelius sighs for a while (V.1006), as if overcome by the thought of Dorigen in bed with Arveragus.

Aurelius' name and general reaction are repeated tautologously in the following line (V.1007) before he complains that 'this were an impossible' (V.1009). By this he means that the task is, not that it is impossible for Arveragus to enjoy his lady (albeit he is then abroad), or for Aurelius continue loving her even so. Clearly the sequence is wrong and lines 999-1000 are out of place. These lines divide Dorigen's mocking offer from the condition which cancels out its value – as if Dorigen did have something for Aurelius.

There again, if we set out the passage according to the text in only ten manuscripts, any notion of male rivalry disappears.<sup>31</sup> In this case we find Dorigen subjecting her condition to ridicule in the same breath as making it: her 'pley' makes sense in these terms (V.988). We see her reminding the squire that she sleeps with her husband; then, after he sighs at the task and asks for less Herculean duty, rephrasing his invocation ('by God that this world made', V.967) with a resounding one of her own ('by that Lord (...) that maked me', V.1000), in order to refuse him finally.

At first thus she sets the impossible task, with its equally impossible outcome:

“Thanne wol I love yow best of any man;  
Have heer my trouthe, in al that evere I kan,                    998  
For wel I woot that it shal nevere bityde.                    1001  
Lat swiche folies out of youre herte slyde.  
What deyntee sholde a man han in his lyf  
For to go love another mannes wyf,

---

<sup>31</sup> *Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Benson, p. 1129 (n. 1. 999-1000): Caxton's text (Cx); Oxford, New College 314; University Library, Glasgow, Hunterian Museum U.1.1 (197); British Library, Harley 7333 and 7335; Princeton University Library MS 100 (formerly Tollemache MS, Helmingham Hall, Suffolk); Holkham Hall, MS 667; Cambridge University Library, Ii.iii.26; Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Fonds Anglais 39; Oxford, Bodleian, MS Rawlinson poet. 223.

That hath hir body whan so that hym liketh?"

Aurelius ful ofte soore siketh: 1006

"Is ther noon other grace in yow?" quod he. 999

"No, by that Lord," quod she, "that maked me!" 1000

Wo was Aurelie whan that he this herde, 1007

And with a sorweful herte he thus answerde:

"Madame," quod he, "this were an impossible!

Thanne moot I dye of sodeyn deeth horrible." (V.997-1010)

The problem with the standard reading, placing lines 999-1000 in the earlier position, is that it makes Dorigen unsure about rejecting Aurelius.<sup>32</sup> The sensuality of her imagery has been noted, both in her conventionally flirtatious offer to love Aurelius 'best of any man' and in her image of yielding to Arveragus in bed.<sup>33</sup> Dorigen's avowed sex-on-demand submissiveness is in complete accord with her oath to give her husband the name of sovereignty 'for shame of his degree' (V.752), but seems true of her wishes as well. Thus the Franklin, who later cites her joy in having 'thyn lusty housbonde in thyn armes' (V.1091), makes Dorigen a woman of flesh and blood, whatever he does with her mind. She has her desires, but has been brought up to constrain them, and now they are focused on her husband.

In fact Dorigen will not use the *maistrie* her husband gave her for their private domain. When the crisis comes, and the wife tells Arveragus about Aurelius, she does not assert her rights;<sup>34</sup> nor does she even defend herself as she could. Removing the rocks was no idle wonder, as the winter flower-show is in Menedon's tale, but was an unlikely means of

---

<sup>32</sup> Dorigen 'defers closure of the relationship', in Kathryn L. Lynch, 'East Meets West in Chaucer's Squire's and Franklin's Tales', in *Chaucer's Cultural Geography*, ed. *ibid.* (New York and London: Routledge, 2002), pp. 76-101 (p. 91).

<sup>33</sup> R. D. Eaton, 'Narrative Closure in Chaucer's Franklin's Tale', *Neophilologus* 84.2 (2000), 309-21 (pp. 318-20).

<sup>34</sup> *Franklin's Tale*, ed. Morgan, p. 32 (although 'with appropriate humility').

ensuring her husband's safety.<sup>35</sup> And yet she says nothing. It is clear that she told him nothing of having a suitor while he was away, nor did he want to ask questions:

No thyng list hym to been ymaginatyf,  
If any wight had spoke, whil he was oute,  
To hire of love; he hadde of it no doute.  
He nocht entendeth to no swich mateere (V.1094-7)

Arveragus' trust in Dorigen rests not on good communication, but on his disinclination to ask questions.<sup>36</sup> For the Franklin this is a healthy attitude to marriage, although some modern readers might see a streak of autism in Arveragus here. There must be lighter ways for a husband to find out his wife's new connections than to 'kithe hire jalousie', from which Arveragus in any case promised to abstain (V.748), but these lines tell us more simply, and with some pride, that he lacks the imagination.

Arveragus has the public *maistrie*, however, and here we might wonder whether he is right also privately to push his wife towards the squire. However, since his promise concerned 'maystrie / Agayn hir wyl' (V.747-8), the real question is about her will and how far it matches with his. We know that Dorigen has no will for suicide, waiting until her husband returns, although suicide is honourable for a pagan.<sup>37</sup> Is she waiting for his direction? When it comes, her will falls in with his. Unlike Boccaccio's two ladies, Dorigen does not protest. Her party heads off for the bleakly natural January garden to which Aurelius has directed her. Accidentally on purpose, because he has spied on her movements before, the squire then encounters her 'right in the quykkest strete' (V.1502). This exposure to maximum gossip

---

<sup>35</sup> Mann, *Feminizing Chaucer*, p. 91.

<sup>36</sup> 'Arveragus is caught in dysfunctional masculinity' in Wright, 'Isolation and Individuality in the *Franklin's Tale*', 183.

<sup>37</sup> Minnis, 'Chaucer's Position on Past Gentility', 230. Pace Morgan, 'Moral Argument of *The Franklin's Tale*', 298.

determines his greeting, question about destination, and probably the fictitious legality of his release.<sup>38</sup> At first, the public thoroughfare may determine Dorigen's language as well:

And she answerde, half as she were mad,  
“Unto the gardyn, as myn housbonde bad,  
My trouthe for to holde – allas, allas!” (V.1511-13)

The cause of Dorigen's half-madness is left to us to judge. However, a fear of having lost Arveragus' love here seems a plausible explanation, more so than perplexity at his reasoning. At any rate, her distraction makes it likely that her claim to have been sent, rather than to have sent herself, is not only publicly true. Arveragus rules her in private as well: Dorigen's devotion has subsumed her will into his.

### **The *Franklin's Tale* as reaction**

There is no evidence that the Franklin considers Arveragus to be anything but a perfect husband. Mostly his hero is to be seen in public. Coming home after a tour abroad, he dances and jousts and 'maketh hire good cheere' (V.1098). The narrator condescends to Dorigen's suffering ('As doon thise noble wyves whan hem liketh', V. 818) and professes to be indifferent about the wretch Aurelius ('Chese he, for me, whether he wol lyve or dye', V. 1086). However, he admires Arveragus' manly prowess and fellowship with 'othere worthy men' (V.1089). Calling him 'this worthy knyght' (V.1460) just before he reacts to Dorigen's news 'with glad chiere, in frendly wyse' (V.1467), the Franklin seems to think that a public front for a man is better than any private exhibition. He is keen to defend his hero from pilgrims who might call Arveragus 'a lewed man' for putting his wife at risk (V.1494-5),

---

<sup>38</sup> The last is noted in Alan T. Gaylord, 'The Promises in the *Franklin's Tale*', *English Literary History* 31.4 (1964), 331-65 (pp. 340, 346).

because, like him, the knight is a judge of men. Lastly, he tells us that Arveragus loves Dorigen. If there is any doubt about the authenticity of the ‘verray love’ which Arveragus claims to for her, this is dispelled by the Franklin when he announces a new era of ‘sovereyn blisse’ when Dorigen returns unblemished. There is never more ‘angre hem betwene’ (V.1552) and after this wobble Arveragus ‘cheryssheth hire as though she were a queene’ (V.1554).

This last epithet, more than it appears, is a clue to Chaucer’s other main source, in which the woman was a queen. Aside from *Il Filocolo*, Chaucer made use of the *Historia regum Britanniae* (‘history of the kings of Britain’), which was finished by Geoffrey of Monmouth in c. 1135. Chaucer refers to his Welsh-Breton namesake as ‘Englyssh Gaufride’ in the context of epic writers on Troy (*The House of Fame* III.1470).<sup>39</sup> In his *Historia*, Geoffrey tells of an Arviragus who marries the daughter of Emperor Claudius after fighting the invading Romans to a draw.<sup>40</sup> Claudius ‘mandabat igitur ei concordiam daturumque promittebat sese filiam suam’ (‘therefore offered him a truce and promised that he would give him his daughter’, ch. 67), if Arviragus becomes his vassal. The marriage with Gewissa is a success, for ‘tanto feruore amoris succendit regem ut ipsam solam cunctis rebus praeferret’ (‘the king was inflamed with such heat of love that he valued her above all things’, ch. 68). When he rebels, she helps him back to peace with her father; his final listed virtue in old age is that ‘nullus in dandis muneribus profusior’ (‘no man [was] more profuse in the giving of gifts’, ch. 69). Also worth noting is that the motif for Aurelius and his Clerk has been drawn, along with the former’s name, from Geoffrey’s tale of Stonehenge, of the wizard Merlin

---

<sup>39</sup> *Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Benson, p. 365.

<sup>40</sup> *Geoffrey of Monmouth: The History of the Kings of Britain: an Edition and Translation of De Gestis Britonum [Historia Regum Britanniae]*, ed. Michael D. Reeve and trans. Neil Wright, *Arthurian Studies* 69 (Woodbridge: D.S. Brewer, 2007), 80-87 (IV.65-70). *Sources and Analogues*, ed. Correale and Hamel, pp. 67-8.

moving dolmens from Ireland to Kaer-caradoc (Salisbury) for King Aurelius in Britain (ch. 127).<sup>41</sup> The Franklin's devices are visibly based on Geoffrey of Monmouth.

Two later analogues beg the generic question of what other historical material Chaucer may have seen. The Jersey poet Wace, who adapted Geoffrey later in the twelfth century, says in his *Roman de Brut* that Claudius offers Arviragus his daughter 'Se il vult sis huem devenir' ('If he will become his man', 5,047), whereupon 'Arviragus l'ad graanté, / Si se sunt entr'els acordé' ('granted him this, / So that they were accorded with each other', 5,059-60).<sup>42</sup> This common verb is formally comparable with the Franklin's knight's 'accord' (V.741, 791). Another formal echo, though doubtless unknown to Chaucer, is in the English *Brut*, which Layamon's reworked from Wace probably in the early thirteenth century. This shows Genuissa 'þæ quene' (4,894) advising Arviragus not to rebel because 'þine þeowes beoð gode, / þu hauest much treowscipe, treowðe staðeluæste' ('your virtues are good, / you have [shown] much faith, steadfast pledges of trust', 4,897-8); thus she reminds him of his 'quides' ('declarations', 4,902) in person to her father.<sup>43</sup> Whether or not Chaucer knew the other vernacular sources, he retains something queenly in Dorigen's initial power. Although the Franklin gives the worship of 'trouthe' to Arveragus (V.1479), not to Dorigen, his hero's prenuptial offer to submit privately seems aimed at his wife's 'heigh kynrede' (V.735) through her.

Geoffrey of Monmouth was at home in the twelfth century, like the original lays of the Bretons which the Franklin invokes at the start (V.709-14). Chaucer is true to the genre, for although, by turning Geoffrey's pre-Christian dark lord into a potential cuckold, he makes

---

<sup>41</sup> *History of the Kings of Britain*, ed. Reeve and trans. Wright, 170-74 (VIII.127-30). Chaucer, browsing, may have hit on this story by misreading a sentence in Geoffrey (*ibid.*, p. 172: *Ad uerba ipsius solutus est Aurelius in risum, dicens qualiter id fieri posset ut tanti lapides ex tam longinquo regno adueherentur ac si Britannia lapidibus careret*) thus: 'Aurelius fell about laughing at his [Merlin's] words, asking how it could be that such great rocks might be removed from a kingdom so far away as if *Brittany* were to be lacking in rocks'. *Sources and Analogues*, ed. Correale and Hamel, pp. 130-1.

<sup>42</sup> *Sources and Analogues*, ed. Correale and Hamel, pp. 246-7.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 248-9 (*þeowes* (mis)translated as 'vassals').



him eligible for a more enlightened type of romance, he keeps Arveragus firmly feudal by writing this tale without the slightest reference to his primary source, the fourth *quistione di amore* in Boccaccio's *Filocolo*. In the *Decameron*, in contrast to Chaucer's generic regression, Boccaccio makes his Neapolitan tale contemporary, recasting it as Lady Emilia's tale of generosity in Udine in a colder part of Italy.<sup>44</sup> Her story proceeds with the same rash promise, this time to 'un nobile e gran barone' ('a great baron of high family') named Ansaldo. The woman Dianora, depressed by the fruit-bearing January garden, yields to the pressure of her husband, 'un gran ricco uomo' ('a wealthy civic magnate') named Gilberto, to tell him all. Gilberto at first 'si turbò forte' ('was extremely upset'), but then 'considerata la pura intenzion della donna, con miglior consiglio cacciata via l'ira' ('considering the lady's pure intentions and driving away his wrath with better counsel'), advises her to go to Ansaldo. She was wrong to negotiate with Ansaldo, he says, but now, since the man may ask 'il nigromante' ('the necromancer') to harm them 'se tu il beffassi' ('if you make a fool of him'), she is best advised to make him absolve her without losing chastity, or failing that, to yield him her body (but not her soul) just this once. She weeps at 'cotal grazia' ('such grace') from her husband but goes all the same, without dressing up but with a 'compagnia' ('retinue') of servants. Perhaps because their arrival exposes his purpose, Ansaldo reconsiders, and 'dalla liberalità di Giliberto commosso il suo fervore in compassione cominciò a cambiare' ('moved by Gilberto's generosity, he began to change his passion into compassion'). He releases Dianora and not long after, 'di che strettissima e leale amistà' ('with what intimate and loyal friendship'), he 'congiunse' ('conjoined') with the husband, indeed as if they were about to marry. The wizard delivers the moral: generosity in honour,

---

<sup>44</sup> Robert R. Edwards, 'Rewriting Menedon's Story: *Decameron* 10.5 and *The Franklin's Tale*', in *The 'Decameron' and the 'Canterbury Tales': New Essays on an Old Question*, ed. Leonard M. Koff and Brenda D. Schildgen (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2000), pp. 226-46 (pp. 228-32). See also Thompson, *A Comparative Study*, pp. 257-62.

love and money. Menedon's dilemma becomes a *novella* about a bourgeois couple networking with the aristocracy.

Chaucer modernizes Menedon's tale differently, by making both it and its narrator look old fashioned. Breton lays were popular until the mid-thirteenth century, and until then in Plantagenet England it is also true that a woman lost all legal powers when married.<sup>45</sup> We might ask if Dorigen fares any better. The Franklin, who is said to create her, is a socially respected professional, a knight of the shire and land-owner; as a 'contour' (I. 359), it is also thought that he is a justice of the peace.<sup>46</sup> But both his genre and persona make him look reactionary. Chaucer, by calling him an unparalleled 'worthy vavasour', in his parting flourish to the Franklin's portrait in the *General Prologue* (I. 360), aligns him with older values in a deliberate way. It has been shown that *vavasour* denoted no formal rank or occupation in Chaucer's lifetime, but was rather an archetype in French-English romances, a hearty host from the gentry.<sup>47</sup>

The Franklin's chosen genre is reflected in his tale in the adulterous love, three plaints of Dorigen, clerk's magic and good fortune which attends kindness. All of these have all been identified as features of Breton lays.<sup>48</sup> On the other hand, it is worth noting how modern he seeks to make his tale, for he does what he can to bring it into the present. Though set in pagan times, like the *Knight's Tale*, and like the *Squire's Tale* just before his, the *Franklin's Tale* differs from the latter in being amplified by Neo-Platonist reflections from Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy* in Dorigen's first plaint; and in her third by three catalogues of

---

<sup>45</sup> Judith M. Bennett, 'Public Power and Authority in the Medieval Countryside', in *Women and Power in the Middle Ages*, ed. Mary Erler and Maryanne Kowaleski (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1988), pp. 18-36 (pp. 22-3).

<sup>46</sup> Peter Coss, 'The Franklin', in *Historians on Chaucer: The 'General Prologue' to the Canterbury Tales*, ed. Stephen H. Rigby with Alastair J. Minnis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 227-46 (pp. 237-9).

<sup>47</sup> Carruthers, 'Gentilesse of Chaucer's Franklin', 299-300. Hanneke Wirtjes, 'Bertilak de Hautdesert and the Literary Vavasour', *English Studies* 64 (1985), 291-301.

<sup>48</sup> Hume, 'Franklin's Tale a Breton Lai', 370-5. W. A. Davenport, *Chaucer, Complaint and Narrative*, *Chaucer Studies* 14 (Cambridge: Brewer, 1988), 191-4. Elizabeth Archibald, 'The Breton Lay in Middle English: Genre, Transmission and *The Franklin's Tale*', in *Medieval Insular Romance: Translation and Innovation*, ed. Judith Weiss, Jennifer Fellows and Morgan Dickson (Cambridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2000), pp. 55-70 (pp. 67-9).

women in St Jerome's antifeminist *Adversus Jovinianum* ('against Jovinian').<sup>49</sup> Instead of fairy magic, we have modern planetary astronomy with an admixture of 'magyk natureel' (V.1155) and some unknown 'othere observaunces' (V.1291). Aurelius is versed in the basics (V.1065-70); his brother more deeply in lunar mansions (V.1129-32 and 1154-61); the Clerk of Orleans, though a little on the dark side with a book of (Gergith's) magical astrology, has the ability to use the latest Alphonsine Tables to compute the celestial longitudinal shift of Alnath in the eighth sphere (a star which names the beginning of the first of 28 lunar mansions) from the head of Aries in the ninth (V.1273-96).<sup>50</sup> Evidently the Franklin is meant to have studied astronomy as a clerk in his own day. He knows that the calculation in store for his Master of Arts (a 'philosopre' to Aurelius, V. 1561) will be more than enough to justify the bill. What with the clerk's commercial hospitality and need for £1,000, we find ourselves outside Breton lays and on the peaks of the 'twenty pound worth lond' (V.683) which the Franklin, were it in his hand, would pay to make his son into the Squire. His greatest modernization is to insinuate parity with the Squire's father, the Knight, in his words to the Squire and in his story.<sup>51</sup> He deepens the range of gentility from highborn to professional by stressing *gentillesse* as the quality which all three of his men have or acquire by being free with their honour, love, or money. His final unanswered question makes us think of them in the same class. Above all, he does this through Arveragus.

### **'Lat slepen that is stille'**

---

<sup>49</sup> Minnis, 'Chaucer's Position on Past Gentility', 209-12. *Franklin's Tale*, ed. Morgan, pp. 41-3.

<sup>50</sup> John D. North, *Chaucer's Universe* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), pp. 153-6, 242-54 (pp. 251-2).

<sup>51</sup> Robert B. Burlin, *Chaucerian Fiction* (Princeton, NJ, 1977), pp. 197-8. R. Allen Shoaf, *Chaucer's Body: The Anxiety of Circulation in the 'Canterbury Tales'* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2001), pp. 72-82 (p. 80). The Franklin needs no material advancement: see Henrik Specht, *Chaucer's Franklin in 'The Canterbury Tales': The Social and Literary Background of a Chaucerian Character*, Publications of the Department of English, University of Copenhagen, 10 (Copenhagen: Akademisk Forlag, 1981), 118-64 (p. 145); against Robert M. Lumiansky, *Of Sondry Folk: The Dramatic Principle in the Canterbury Tales* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1955), pp. 180-93.

Arveragus is mostly chivalrous, but the sleeping dogs of which he warns Dorigen can be read as the rage of his own mounted feudalism. Through his hero's imposition of stasis the Franklin shows a nostalgia for the stagnancy of an old social order. In his tale we see a lord take nominal and then practical ownership of his lady before leaving her to fight for honours abroad. When the lady is trapped into sleeping with another man, her husband tells her to go through with it in order to keep her honour, although he warns her to expect death if she tells and thus tampers with his. His wife's frailty has long been expected, but the narrator redeems her by showing how devoted she is to her husband, even to the extent of subsuming her will into his. In this way, and contrary to what many readers believe, the *Franklin's Tale* represents the views of a man other than Chaucer, who has assumed a voice. Although it remains likely that he and the Franklin have much in common, the two of them probably differed on marriage. As well to find Chaucer's ideal of this in the *Shipman's Tale*, which also touches on adultery in northern France, and in contemporary times. The *Franklin's Tale* differs from this and from most of its thematic predecessors. It offers a reactionary ideal of marriage whose joy depends on stasis.