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THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

PATTERNS OF ILLUSION IN *THE FRANKLIN'S TALE*

by

PAMELA FARVOLDEN

A THESIS

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research, for acceptance, a thesis entitled PATTERNS OF ILLUSION IN *THE FRANKLIN'S TALE* submitted by PAMELA FARVOLDEN in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of MASTER OF ARTS.

Supervisor

Date. September 1, 1986

To my father

Of studie took he moost cure and moost heede

Abstract

In 1912, George L. Kittredge published an essay which had a profound effect on subsequent interpretations of Chaucer's The Canterbury Tales. In it, he proposed the existence of a "Marriage Group," within which the issue of sovereignty in marriage is debated by the Wife of Bath, the Clerk, the Merchant, and the Franklin, who provides the ideal solution. Since Kittredge's essay, many critics have thus read *The Franklin's Tale* as one which exemplifies true *gentilesse*, a virtue important to the Middle Ages.

But *The Franklin's Tale* seems in several ways to be what it is not. The Franklin wants us to believe that he is telling a Breton lay that exemplifies true *gentilesse*, and by doing so, he hopes to be perceived as *gentil*. What emerges, however, is a tale whose form is closer to chivalric romance than lay. Its substance is also illusory, for it illustrates what true gentility is not, the only virtue here consisting in not taking what is not deserved.

At the heart of the tale is a dichotomy between appearance and reality which applies to the tale's form as well as its characters and its narrator, the hopeful Franklin. Chaucer uses all three to illustrate the dangers inherent in choosing appearance over reality, illusion over truth.

Table of Contents

I. Introduction

In 1912, George Lyman Kittredge published an essay which had a profound effect on subsequent analyses of The Canterbury Tales. In "Chaucer's Discussion of Marriage," Kittredge proposed the existence of a "Marriage Group" (215) of tales, within which the Wife of Bath, the Clerk, the Merchant, and the Franklin engage in a debate upon the issue of sovereignty in marriage: who, the husband or the wife, should have the "maistry," the dominant role in the relationship? Church orthodoxy was clear on this issue; as the Parson says, "a man is heved of a womman."[1] In theological and philosophical circles the question was not seriously disputed, but in literature the nature of the male-female relationship was of ongoing interest. Courtly love literature, which began, according to most accounts, in France at the end of the eleventh century (Lewis, Allegory 2), placed the lady in the dominant position; but at the same time there existed a strong tradition of misogyny, perhaps best stated and refuted by the Wife of Bath, that was no doubt influenced by church orthodoxy and that in turn served to justify the actual social position of women. Thus it would be entirely appropriate that Chaucer should explore the issue in The Canterbury Tales, and Kittredge sets out to prove that this exploration takes place in the tales of the

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[1] *The Parson's Tale* 921. This and all subsequent references to The Canterbury Tales will come from The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer, 2nd ed., Ed. F. N. Robinson. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1957.

Wife of Bath, the Clerk, the Merchant, and the Franklin.[2]

The Wife of Bath embodies, in both her Prologue and Tale, a direct contradiction of both ecclesiastical and courtly tradition, gleefully revealing in her Prologue how she successfully attempted to rule her five husbands–the number itself contravening Paul's teachings on chastity–and in her Tale showing that "maistry" is what women desire most. According to Kittredge, the tale infuriates the Clerk, who, when he has the opportunity, refutes her with the tale of Griselda, a woman so patient that she endures all manner of intolerable hardship at the hands of her husband but gains her reward in the end. The Merchant responds with a bitter tale exemplifying not a wife's endurance but her boldness: the young, nubile May cuckolds her aging husband before his very eyes and emerges unscathed. Harry Bailly contributes to the "debate" with a comment about his own wife, who is chaste but also, alas, a shrew, and then, after the Squire's uncompleted Tale, the Franklin tells his own, one which, Kittredge says, sets forth "the ideal relation, that in which love continues and neither party to the contract strives for the mastery" (208).

The Franklin tells of two courtly lovers entering into a rather unusual marriage relationship. Dorigen, the wife, pledges, as she should, to be Arveragus' "humble, trewe wyf" (758), but he too vows to relinquish his rightful role as

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[2] *The Squire's Tale* may also have treated of marriage, but it is incomplete because the Franklin interrupts the Squire.

husband by promising to "folwe hir wil in al" (749) and never to exert his sovereignty. Apparently, they intend to be equals—a novel idea. Kittredge firmly agrees with the Franklin, who tells us that this is a "humble, wys accord" (791) and praises the *gentillesse* which allows the two to love each other as equals.[3]

It is this same *gentillesse* which the Franklin and Kittredge see as providing the tale with the solution to the conflict that arises after Arveragus departs from Brittany to pursue his knightly exploits. Aurelius, a young squire who has been in love with Dorigen for a long time, now seizes his opportunity to press his attentions upon her. To dissuade him, she promises to return his affections if he can remove all the dangerous black rocks along the coast of Brittany. Knowing this feat to be impossible, she firmly believes that she has indicated her resolve never to be unfaithful to her husband. But Aurelius engages the services of a clerk-magician, who seemingly fulfills Dorigen's request by rendering the rocks invisible. The suitor then approaches Dorigen with a reminder of her promise. Arveragus, having returned from abroad and having heard Dorigen's tearful explanation of her plight, sends her,

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[3] This virtue will be discussed and described fully in Chapter Three, but it may be explained briefly as consisting in an inborn nobility. One who is *gentil* need not necessarily be of noble rank, although this was the prevailing attitude. Ideally, anyone who eschews "vyce, ribaudye, and servage of sinne in word, werk, and contenance" (*Parson's Tale* 403) and who exhibits "vertu, curteisye, and clennesse" (*PT* 465) may be considered *gentil*. This, however, is an ideal which is seldom followed to the letter.

weeping, to Aurelius with the words, "Trouthe is the hyeste thyng that man may kepe" (1479). Aurelius, perceiving Arveragus' great *gentillesse* in sending away his wife, releases Dorigen to prove that "a squier [can] do a gentil dede/ As wel as kan a knyght" (1543-4). Aurelius, in turn, is set free of his bond to the magician, who wants to show that even a clerk can behave as a gentleman (1611). The Franklin concludes by asking the company of pilgrims who in their opinion has been the "mooste fre" (1622).

Kittredge sees this tale as exemplifying the perfect marriage, one which solves triumphantly the debate which has gone before. According to this reading, which has since become the traditional one,[4] the initial *gentillesse* upon which the marriage is founded multiplies as the tale unfolds and allows a happy ending for all. *Gentillesse* thus ensures the marriage's survival as one in which "mutual love and forbearance are made the guiding principle of the relation between husband and wife" (Kittredge 215).

None today would dispute that the preceding phrase is, indeed, a description of the ideal marriage, but its application to *The Franklin's Tale* has, since Kittredge, been seriously called into question by some critics. At issue are a number of inconsistencies regarding the Franklin's treatment of marriage, courtly love, and *gentillesse*, and connected with all of these elements is the

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[4]Many critics follow, in general, Kittredge's interpretation. See, for example, Donald C. Baker, Mary J. Carruthers, Phyllis Hodgson, Lindsay A. Mann, J. Burke Severs, and Gertrude M. White.

pervasive theme which contrasts the world of appearance with that of reality. Several critics, for example, have criticized the Franklin for his unorthodox treatment of marriage,[5] while others have shown the Franklin to have a limited knowledge of the courtly love and *gentillesse* of which he treats.[6] Still another group of critics has focussed on the dichotomy between appearance and reality.[7] It must be noted that these groups are by no means mutually exclusive, nor are those named the only proponents of each interpretation. Among the myriad articles on *The Franklin's Tale* one or all of these contentious issues is likely to be raised. All would agree that Kittredge's reading is unsatisfactory, but each has a different reason for so believing. As a result, a widely disparate group of interpretations exists. It seems desirable, then, to work toward a unified and coherent reading of the tale, taking all of these issues into account, but identifying the creation of illusion, particularly as it pertains to the virtue of *gentillesse*, as the foremost issue in *The Franklin's Tale*.

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[5]See, for example, Paul Edward Gray, Gerhard Joseph, Russell Peck, and D. W. Robertson, who, in general, see the problems in the tale arising from a marriage which is counter to doctrine.

[6]See, for example, Robert Burlin, Alan T. Gaylord, R. M. Lumiansky. Lumiansky and C. Hugh Holman may be taken as representative of another group who suggest that the Franklin's purpose is to combine the opposing systems of courtly love and marriage.

[7]For example, see W. Bryant Bachman, Kenneth Kee, Ronnalie Roper Howard, Effie Jean Mathewson, and Chauncey Wood.

The contrast between appearance and reality is pervasive in the tale, permeating its every level. In the tale's form and context, the behavior of and relationships between the four major characters, and the portrayal and words of the Franklin himself, illusion prevails at the expense of truth, with the result that the tale appears to be something very different from what it actually is.

To begin with, there has been much critical discussion regarding the form and context of the tale. The Franklin claims, in his Prologue, to be telling a Breton *lai*, a form which is itself problematic. Much research has been done to determine exactly what a Breton *lai* was, and of course, to discover what Chaucer himself thought the form involved. Part of Chapter Two will explore the question of genre, reaching the conclusion that the tale is more romance than *lai*. If its form is somewhat illusory, then the tale's incorporation of courtly love convention might also be suspect; to determine in what manner the Franklin is using the courtly love pairings of first Dorigen and Arveragus, and second, Dorigen and Aurelius, a description of the convention is necessary. Therefore, Chapter Two will also examine romance conventions in order both to establish a background and context for Chapters Three and Four and to illustrate how the Franklin begins his illusion from the tale's opening line.

Chapter Three will concentrate upon the world created by the Franklin in his tale, where the discrepancy between

appearance and reality is evident at almost every turn. We may take as symbolic of this contrast the black rocks of Armorick, the removal of which Dorigen stipulates as the condition of her bargain with Aurelius. That removal, which Aurelius claims to have effected with the help of the clerk, is of course, illusory; the magician has merely rendered the rocks temporarily invisible. Yet, each character behaves as though the bargain has been fulfilled, and both Aurelius and the clerk expect to claim their respective rewards. The ostensible graciousness of the two disappears when it is realized that their virtue consists only in not taking what they do not deserve in the first place. There is illusion involved, too, in the marriage of Dorigen and Arveragus, for Arveragus' insistence that Dorigen keep her promise to Aurelius- a promise which was itself a clear refusal-is a contravention of his marriage vow never to exert sovereignty. None of these characters is truly *gentil*, then; in fact, their actions illustrate what *gentilesse* is not.

The Franklin is himself a victim of the illusion he has created in his tale. Thinking that his characters are displaying such nobility of spirit, he hopes that he, too, will appear to be a gentleman. That his social status could not support such a self-image will be borne out by an investigation of the position of fourteenth-century franklins, and by his own portrait in the *General Prologue*. An examination of the Franklin's actual words will reveal that he is trying to manipulate both his characters and his

audience in order to point clearly the way in which he wishes his tale to be understood. Hoping through his tale to advance his social standing the Franklin does not realize that his very narrative undercuts his purpose, revealing his intentions and showing him to be not a gentleman, but a social climber who knows little of true *gentilesse*.

The Franklin's Tale, then, seems in many ways to be what it is not. The Franklin wants us to believe that he is telling a Breton *lay* that exemplifies true *gentilesse*, and that by doing so he, too, will be perceived as *gentil*, but what actually emerges is a tale which demonstrates what true gentility is not. Chaucer uses both the form and substance of the tale to illustrate the dangers inherent in choosing appearance over reality.

II. The Franklin's Breton Lay

One of the first things one does when describing a particular literary work and arriving at a critical judgement is to indicate its genre. Upon approaching the work, one anticipates, as John Finlayson says, that "after a few pages or a hundred lines or so, certain directions will be given us, that we should be instructed or persuaded to shut out certain areas of expectation and to open up others" (44). Thus, for example, a classification of the Iliad as epic, the Song of Roland as *chanson de geste*, or *The Miller's Tale* as fabliau will immediately indicate how the reader is to view the spirit and intent of each work. Judgement will be made, partially at least, according to the author's success in fulfilling one's expectations. As Finlayson reminds us, however, these expectations are conditioned by the social and literary milieu of the critical reader, and to categorise works far removed from one's contemporary environment is risky. In approaching medieval literature, Finlayson cautions that we must try to "carry around with us, not our contemporary cultural milieu, but some of the literary baggage of a man of the fourteenth century" (45). To immerse oneself in the literature of the time is as far as the modern critic can go; he cannot hope to duplicate the experience and attitude of the medieval mind. Yet, literary analysis requires some sort of classification system to facilitate communication and discussion, and thus attempts must be made to define and

assign works to various genres.

There is, then, a built-in problem whenever one approaches the task of assigning a given medieval work to a particular genre, and Chaucer's *The Franklin's Tale* in The Canterbury Tales aptly illustrates this difficulty. The opening lines of the Franklin's Prologue, for example, immediately arouse one's expectations of hearing a Breton lay:

> Thise olde gentil Britouns in hir dayes
> Of diverse aventures maden layes.
>
> (709-10)

At the tale's end, however, we are confronted with a *question d'amour*: "Which was the mooste fre, as thynketh yow?" (1622) that belongs more properly to the realms of medieval romance,[8] with its characteristically strong element of courtly love convention.[9] Has the Franklin switched genres in the midst of his tale?[10] Is the appellation *laye* unsuitable to what is really a romance? Or, conversely, are the trappings of romance, that is to say, courtly lovers and apparently magical occurrences inserted

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[8] John Stevens writes that this *question* is illustrative of *The Franklin's Tale* as "social romance" because "it deals with a *question d'amour*--i.e. it is an example of 'luf-talkyng'"(63).

[9] Most critics will agree that love, especially that variety known as courtly love, is an important element in medieval romance. See, for example, Dorothy Everett 3; John Finlayson 47; A.C. Gibbs 7; W. P. Ker 328; J.Burke Severs 229.

[10] Finlayson writes that medieval authors did distinguish between 'kinds' of literature, and that "by the late fourteenth century in England there seems to have been at least an implicit recognition of what a *romance* was" (46-47).

into what is really a Breton lay?[11] To answer these questions, and to arrive at a judgement regarding the tale's form and its implications, definitions of the Breton lay, medieval romance, and courtly love are necessary. Therein lies a second difficulty. All of these terms are problematic, their meanings open to a variety of critical discussion and debate regarding their origins, meaning, and usefulness.

Most of our first-hand information about the Breton lay, for example, comes from a collection of *lais* written in twelfth-century Britain by a woman named Marie de France. Little is known of her,[12] and not much more of the form in which she writes, for although her Lais are the first extant collection of the form that we have, she speaks of them in words that often give conflicting evidence regarding their source, transmission, and original form. The safest way to characterize the lays of Marie is to say that they are all short, narrative poems which treat of a single adventure having to do with love and often, but not always, having a supernatural element. Broad as it is, the definition seems to become wider as writers in subsequent years on both sides

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[11]While love and magic are both present in many lays, there is critical dispute over whether it is courtly love that is the essential characteristic in Marie's Lais (see, for example, the articles by S. Foster Damon and Emmanuel Mickel); and the presence of magic is not fundamental to attributing a work to the *Breton lay* genre, although it is often present. See Donovan 63. Of Marie's Lais half do not contain any supernatural elements. They are *Equitan, Le Fresne, Laustic, Chaitevel, Chevrefoil*, and *Milun*.

[12]A useful summary of critics' speculations may be found in Hanning's Introduction 7.

of the channel attached to their works the term *lay* regardless of content or length. To determine whether *The Franklin's Tale* can accurately be termed a *lay* is, then, difficult, but some attempt must be made because of the term's prominence at the tale's beginning.

The term *romance* is only slightly less problematic. It originated as a description of any work translated into the vernacular languages which developed from Latin, particularly French, but

> soon extended its meaning to cover works written in French. . . .Very gradually there is a further alteration of its meaning and it comes to be used for those tales of knights and their doings for which the French were first famous, without regard to the language in which they were written.
> (Everett 2-3)

Today's critics often apply the term just as widely, generally using it to describe "all narratives dealing with aristocratic *personae* and involving combat and/or love. . .if written after 1100" (Finlayson 45).[13] The definition is obviously general, and there have been many attempts to narrow it by distinguishing, on various bases, various kinds of romance. To complicate matters further, the *lay* has been described as a sub-group of the larger genre of romance,[14] and Dorothy Everett writes that it is almost "impossible to

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[13]It is not only modern critics who are interested in defining romance; Jean Bodel, in the twelfth century, divided romance into three large groups: the *matieres* "de France,et de Bretagne, et de Rome la grant" (quoted by Dieter Mehl 31).

[14]J.E. Wells classifies the *lay* as romance (133), as does Severs (235).

lay down detailed rules for differentiating the two" (22).

It seems clear enough, however, that what might be called the "courtly experience" provides a large area of common ground among Middle English romances, for in most of them the *personae* are members of, or in some way connected with the court and therefore are subject to and guided by an intricate system of courteous behaviour, or *courtoisie*.[15] Specific components of this system will be taken up in greater detail in Chapter Three; what is important to note here is that integral to the ideals of *courtoisie* is that variety of love known as courtly love, whereby the lover is both morally and socially improved by his devotion to a lady who is usually unattainable. The term was coined by Gaston Paris in 1883, who used *amour courtois* to describe the relationship between Lancelot and Guinevere in Chretien de Troyes' Conte de la Charette, a relationship that was characerized by Paris as being "of a particular kind: illicit (and therefore furtive), yet marked by an almost religious devotion of the lover to his lady" (Newman vi). Since Paris' influential essay, the term has become almost a commonplace of medieval criticism as regards the romances; as F. X. Newman goes on to say, "there has been from the beginning a kind of orthodoxy on the subject, a core of common assumptions" (vi). These assumptions are concisely set forth at the beginning of C. S. Lewis' important book, The Allegory of Love, in which he describes courtly love as

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[15] Henri Dupin examines the concept in detail in his book, Courtoisie Au Moyen Age.

consisting of "Humility, Courtesy, Adultery, and the Religion of Love" (2).

Increasingly, however, critics are taking issue with Lewis' remarks, which encapsulate traditional (that is, post-Paris) thought about courtly love. The term is subject to much critical dispute as are the Breton lay and the romance, with critics not only disagreeing about its origin,[16] but also its usefulness and very meaning.[17] One factor mitigating against acceptance of the term is the extreme contrast between the actualities of courtly medieval life and what is portrayed in the literature, for in the latter, whereas we find the lover humbled by his lady, in reality the position of women was quite the opposite. Whether married or not, women were held in low esteem, socially and morally. As Georges Duby points out, their existence was regarded both biologically and theologically as a necessary evil.[18] It was a woman, after all, who brought sin into the world, and theology combined with philosophy to portray woman as the very vessel of sin. Yet she was necessary, both to perpetuate the family name and to bring as dowry new lands and possessions to her husband. Women were objects of both suspicion and desire; they needed jealously to be watched and guarded lest their offsprings' parentage be called into question, or lest the lands passing

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[16]See Roger Boase for a comprehensive summary of theories of the origin of courtly love 62-93.
[17]See, for example, E. T. Donaldson ("Myth"); H. A. Kelly; D. W. Robertson ("Concept"); and John F. Benton .
[18]See especially 13-29; 46-48; 65-66. See also J. M. Ferrante 6-8.

through them to their husband or male children be placed in jeopardy. Moreover, since they were regarded as being sexually insatiable, their very presence potentially endangered a man's soul; to engage in "the work of Venus" for pure pleasure even within marriage was a mortal sin.[19] It is not surprising, then, that there is found a strong misogynist tradition in literature alongside that known as the courtly love tradition. One of the best-known works, Jerome's Adversus Jovinian, is, in fact, among those comically refuted by the Wife of Bath in her Prologue.

This is the basis for the common assumption that courtly love and marriage were mutually exclusive;[20] love was something that could not apply to marriage, which, as Lewis writes, "had nothing to do with love. All matches were matches of interest" (Allegory 13). Yet, as several critics have pointed out, love usually ends in marriage in the English romance.[21] The point is important to make, because of course, the Franklin's courtly lovers do marry, and early in the tale rather than, as was more common, at the conclusion.

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[19]Kelly describes the four motives, according to doctrine, for having intercourse: "1)procreation of offspring; 2)yielding the debt; 3)alleviating or preventing incontinence; 4)fulfilling one's desire for pleasure" (254-55). Kelly explains that the first two motives were sinless; the third was, however, a venial, and the fourth a mortal, sin.

[20] Although it is one of Andreas Capellanus' "rules of love," it is not necessarily applicable to English romance, for Andreas was little known there. See Lewis 13.

[21]See, for example H. A. Kelly 21; Donnell Van de Voort, throughout but especially Introduction; J. Stevens 37.

Courtly love, then, is a complex and difficult subject, but what seems clear, and what must govern the course of this discussion, is that there is a particular kind of ethos which governs the attitudes and actions of characters in romance, an idealized system of behavior of which love is a major part. Love arises from and is essential to the court experience, and its function is social and public. It is, as Stevens writes, "civilizing"; it teaches one how to behave in society: "The experience of 'falling in love' would confer on you the inestimable benefit of a 'goodly manere'"(51). Alexander Denomy concurs, and makes both a distinction and a connection between courtly love and courtliness: "[I]ndeed, he who wished to sojourn in love must be permeated through and through with courtliness, free of the vices of baseness and immoderation in speech, endowed with the virtues of largesse and goodness"(50). The concept has clear application to *The Franklin's Tale*, which has as its main thrust the concept of *gentilesse*, synonymous with *courtoisie* (Mann 11), and is thus closely connected with love and its social and "educative" (Finlayson 56) function.

All three terms: the Breton lay, romance, and courtly love, then, problematic as they are, must be defined and applied as closely as possible to *The Franklin's Tale*. Examining the first two should reveal that the tale is closer to romance than lay, its form being, in part, illusion. Illustrating the Franklin's use of courtly love conventions will prepare for an examination of *gentilesse* as

it applies in Chapter Three to the tale, in Chapter Four to the Franklin.

The Franklin opens his tale with the assertion that he intends to tell a Breton lay. But little was known of the term in fourteenth-century England. Marie de France's *Lais* had been forgotten (Foulet 701), and by Chaucer's time the term was no longer specific. It might be suggested that Chaucer could have learned something of the form from the English poems which called themselves lays, in particular the two which seem to derive from Marie's *Lanval* and *Le Fresne*. Neither, however, is as promising as first appears. *Lanval* exists in six English translations, only three of which are complete. One of these is Thomas Chestre's *Launfal Miles* (London, British Library MS Cotton Caligula A. II); dating from the late fourteenth century, it is too late to have had an influence on Chaucer.[22] The other two, *Sir Landavall* (Oxford, Bodleian MS Rawlinson C 86) and *Sir Lambewell* (London, British Library MS Additional 27897), both lack the prologue which was typical of Marie's lays, and without it, "both become simply a short romance with an Arthurian setting. In their own day they were never called a lay" (Donovan 146).

Le Fresne and its translations seem, at first, to be more promising. The English *Lay le Fraine* is found in the Auchinleck Manuscript, along with *Sir Orfeo* and *Sir Degare*,

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[22] See Bliss 3-4 for further information on this and the other *Launfal* manuscripts.

both of which may have had early French originals.[23] That Chaucer may actually have seen this manuscript is set forth convincingly by L. H. Loomis, one of whose strong arguments is that the prologue of *The Franklin's Tale* could have come directly from that of *Lay le Freine*(117-121). But while the majority of the translation is reasonably faithful to its original,[24] the prologue has nothing in common with Marie's first two lines: "I shall tell you the lai of le Fresne/according to the story as I know it." Instead, the English translator has substituted a twenty-line prologue, which describes the author's conception of the Bretons and their lais:

> We redeþ oft & findeþ ywrite
> & þis clerkes wele it wite,
> layes þat ben in harping
> ben yfounde of ferli þing.
> Sum beþe of wer & sum of wo
> & sum of ioie and mirþe also
> & sum of trecherie & of gile,
> of old auentours þat fel while,
> & sum of bourdes & ribaudy
> & mani þer beþ of fairy.
> Of al þinge[s] þat men seþ
> mest of loue for soþe þai beþ.
> In Breteyne bi hold time
> þis layes were wrouȝt so seiþ þis rime,
> When kinges miȝt our yhere
> of ani meruailes þat þer were
> þai token an harp in gle & game
> & maked a lay & ȝaf it name.

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[23] Donovan remarks that two references to Orpheus and Eurydice, in *Lai de l'Epine* and *Floire and Blanceflor* mention a *Lai d'Orphey* (147). Pearsall postulates a possible lost *Lai d'Egare* as a source for *Sir Degare*(104).

[24] See Donovan for changes and alterations in the English version 133-8.

> Now of þis auentours þat weren yfalle
> ycan tel sum ac nouȝt alle.
> (Edinburgh, Advocates' Library, Auchinleck MS, quoted in Beston 326)

These lines at first appear to be a comprehensive description of the lay form and subject matter, but they are, on the contrary, vague and unspecific; as John Beston observes, this prologue is actually "less accurate and informed about lais than at first appears" (325). In lines 5-10, for example, the poet is saying merely that lays are about all kinds of things (326). Moreover, these are not specific to the French lays (Beston 327); they are equally appropriate to romance:

> sum beþe of wer and sum of wo
> sum of ioie and mirþe also
> sum of trecherie and of gile

while "bourdes and ribaudy" are certainly characteristic of the fabliau form. In short, these lines could be a description of three genres known in fourteenth-century England: lay, romance, and fabliau. As has been suggested, the boundaries between forms became less and less distinct as the term *lay* came to be applied to all manner of short narrative poems with the hope of ensuring their popularity. The anonymous French lays translated into English would certainly have given the impression that all manner of forms could be called *lay*. Indeed, three extant Middle English poems from the end of the fourteenth century, *Emare*, *The*

Erle of Toulous, and *Sir Gowther* call themselves lays but are really more properly romances.

If Chaucer knew and used the Auchinleck Manuscript, then his information for the prologue to *The Franklin's Tale* might well have come from this prologue. L. H. Loomis asserts that of the nine ideas delineated in the Franklin's Prologue, all nine are also to be found in the *Le Fraine* Prologue:

> No. 1, the lays were made by Britouns; No.2 the Britouns were gentil; No. 3, they lived in the old days; No. 4, they composed in their own language; No. 5, the lays were in rime; No. 6, the lays were sung; No. 7, they were accompanied by musical instruments; No. 8, they were written down; No. 9., they were on divers subjects. (115)

Loomis makes a convincing case for the similarity of the two prologues, but as we have seen, the Auchinleck lines are not as specific as she might like us to believe. Chaucer's information was neither very specific nor accurate. Could he have derived knowledge of the form from elsewhere? The answer seems to be a qualified "no." According to both Beston (325) and Foulet (701), Marie was forgotten, and there is no evidence that Chaucer knew any of the French lais (Beston, 324). *Sir Degare*, in the same manuscript, could have provided Chaucer with little more, for it is only an "imitation of a lai, made up of different stories" (Beston 323),[25] and it also lacks a prologue and epilogue.

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[25] See also Smithers 82-85 and Pearsall 104.

If, then, there was a confusion or blurring of distinction between genres, it would have been acceptable, by Chaucer's time, to apply the term *lay* to any short narrative poem having as its theme an *aventure* centering on or around love, and containing perhaps some element of magic. Indeed, Holmes has written that in France as early as 1200 "the use of the word lai had broadened to include a tale of any type" (192); that the same situation prevailed in England is evidenced by the *Le Fraine* prologue.

There remains today, despite the number of scholarly investigations into the form and meaning of the term *lay*, some uncertainty as regards not only its origin and development, but its distinction from romance, a term which is itself problematic. Dorothy Everett, having acknowledged the problem of differentiating between the lay and the romance, goes on, however, to suggest some points upon which a distinction might be made:

> [I]n the tale the chief concern is with the story. . .the tale is pure narrative art, at its simplest and barest, stripped of all else. . . . The plot is closely knit and clear in outline, and the whole has a simplicity and brevity (22).

The romance, on the other hand, "can be clumsy and discursive" (22). Urban Holmes agrees, delineating two other areas of difference. In addition to treatment of plot, the lay, he says, is shorter than romance, "commonly under a thousand lines," and "the poetic style is strictly subordinate to the action which speeds on towards its

climax" (133). According to these criteria, then, it seems clear that to describe *The Franklin's Tale* as a Breton lay is erroneous. While its length (916 lines) is well within the limits described by Holmes, its plot is far from being simple and bare, nor is its poetic style "subordinate to the action." Moreover, in its social orientation and treatment of love, the tale more closely resembles Middle English romance than it does Marie's lays.

As indicated earlier, arriving at a specific definition of romance is almost as difficult as defining the Breton lay. Critics have moved from W. P. Ker's well-known but rather vague description of romance as "the name for the sort of imagination that possesses the mystery and the spell of everything remote and unattainable" (321) to more specific definitions involving, for example, distinctions between types of hero (Finlayson), theme (Hibbard), style (Trounce), treatment of "properties" like setting and the supernatural (Everett), and creation of a particular kind of atmosphere (Auerbach).[26] Common to the majority of works traditionally described as romance, however, is the court experience, and in works commonly referred to as chivalric romance, whether dealing with chivalrous adventures,

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[26] Auerbach's definition is particularly interesting in connection with *The Franklin's Tale*, for it seems to take account of the dichotomy between appearance and reality which pervades the tale. He sees the essential element in courtly romance as being its "fairy-tale atmosphere. It is this which makes all the colorful and vivid pictures of contemporary reality seem. . . to have sprung from the ground: the ground of legend and fairy tale, so that. . . they are entirely without any basis in political reality"(133).

supernatural events, trial by endurance, or love gained and lost, the courtly experience is at the centre. This is not to say that all romances must deal with royalty, although many do, but in all cases, the *personae* are aristocratic, and in all, courtly love, as a concomitant of the court experience, is important, functioning not only as a convention for depicting the love relationship, but also as as a code for courteous behavior.

Most critics will agree that a major influence on the conception of courtly love was Ovid, in whose Ars Amatoria, Remedia Amoris, and Amores medieval writers found the material for a codification and systematization of the rules of love. As John J. Parry writes, the Ars Amatoria was "a sort of parody on the technical treatises of Ovid's day--a bit of fooling which should never have been taken seriously, but often was" (4) and, indeed, in Ovid are found a great many of what became the conventions of courtly love. Among them are the concepts of the impossibility of love between a husband and wife, a lover's subjection both to his lady and to Cupid, a lover's suffering from sleeplessness and illness, and the necessity of secrecy.[27] These conventions are familiar to the reader of medieval romance, and familiar, too, is the advice given in Andreas Capellanus' book, De Arte Honeste Amandi.[28] Here, the chaplain of Marie

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[27]Adapted from Parry 4-5.

[28]Andreas expands on Ovid's material, and implies another important feature of courtly love convention, that which states that only the nobly-born could experience love. In his section entitled, "The love of peasants," Andreas states bluntly that it is contrary to the nature of farmers that

de Champagne dispenses advice in his first two chapters to one Walter regarding how one may gain, keep, and perpetuate love, going so far as to include a list of the twenty-one "rules" of love. Chapter Three, however, contains a renunciation of love. Partially because of this chapter, and partially because of the tone in the first two, many critics read the book not as a serious tract, but as an imitation of Ovid's parody; it is, then, more satirical than serious.[29] Whatever its intent, the book had great influence on courtly literature in France, and was translated into Italian, Spanish, and German, as well, of course, as French, from its original Latin. Its influence, however, was indirect in England, for Andreas was unknown there, no English translations having been made. Because English literature so often imitated French, however, there has been a tendency in criticism to apply Andreas' rules to the English romance, and it is important to note that while many of the tenets of his codification may be found in English romance, one of them does not always apply. This is the first of his "rules" of love: "Marriage is no real excuse for not loving." As a number of critics show, the rule is not applicable to the majority of English romances.[30] In most, with the exception

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[28](cont'd) they experience love; if they do, however, "it is not expedient that they should be instructed in the theory of love lest while they are devoting themselves to conduct which is not natural to them the kindly farms. . .may . . prove useless to us" (Parry 149-50).

[29] See, for example, Kelly 24; D. W. Robertson 3; and B. O'Donoghue 39. C. S. Lewis, however, takes Andreas seriously (41).

[30] See note 21 above.

of Chaucer's Troilus and Criseyde, marriage is the natural outcome of love, a fact relevant to *The Franklin's Tale* where the two original courtly lovers do marry.

Guillaume de Lorris' Roman de la Rose, written about 1230, also affected the depiction of courtly love. It successfully attempted "to explore [love's] whole, inner, psychological landscape" (D.D.R.Owen, 54) by portraying allegorically the course of a love affair.[31] In doing so, it brought together "all the descriptive conventions of the twelfth century, from whatever sources, medieval or directly classical" and re-expressed them "in an allegory of man" (Pearsall and Salter 83), exercising a profound and lasting influence on western literature. The poem's subject is the experiences of the figuratively named *Amant* in the courtly garden of love. Peopled by such allegorical figures as Idleness, Courtesy, Mirth, and the God of Love with his companion Sweet Looks, the garden represents the life of the court. Here, Amant falls in love with a perfect and unopened rosebud, representative of the lady, and he describes the course of the relationship. He encounters various aspects of the lady's personality, allegorically depicted by the personages of Fair Welcome, who encourages him to come closer to the rose, and Danger, Slander, and Shame, who drive him away. Overcoming with the help of Reason the latter group, *Amant* manages to kiss the rosebud, but is

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[31] J. V. Fleming disagrees with this conventional interpretation, seeing the poem as a highly moralistic condemnation of the lover's abdication of reason. See especially Chapter Two, which deals with Lorris' work.

immediately driven off by Slander and Jealousy; the rose is then imprisoned in a high tower and guarded zealously by Danger, Shame, Fear, and Slander, the first being the lady's reluctance to acquiesce, the others being aspects of court life which no lover can afford to ignore. Here the poem breaks off, to be continued fifty years later, in an entirely different tone, by Jean de Meun.

The first part of the Roman de la Rose is fundamental to any discussion of courtly love not just for its allegorical depictions of the progress of a love affair, but also for its portrayal of the location wherein it occurs. This is the garden, the *hortus conclusus*, that appears often as an image or an actual setting in medieval love literature. Derek Pearsall and Elizabeth Salter, summarizing the development of the image, observe that between the ninth and the thirteenth centuries the image of the enclosed garden developed from the *locus amoenus* of classical literature to one which had "symbolic attributes, both spiritual and erotic" (27). It thus has extensive connotations, both biblical and sexual, as the Garden of Eden, a paradise from which man was driven because of sin; as the garden of the Canticles, representative of the parallel between Christ's love for his Church and a lover's for the beloved; and as the Garden of Love, where courtly lovers often first meet, and in which they will often thereafter hold their rendez-vous. As Pearsall and Salter write, "it was the *hortus conclusus* which early became the

dominant version of the paradisal garden of profane as well as divine love" (76). John Stevens notes that an additional reason for the importance to courtly literature of the Roman de la Rose is its presentation of guidelines for social conduct and its illustration of the close connection between courtly love and correct behavior: "In the Middle Ages the art of living approximates to an art of loving: and. . .the first great psychology of love, the Roman de la Rose, is also the source and pattern of 'curtesy' books" (52).

It seems clear that courtly love is a code of conduct embracing far more than just the relationship between the lover and the beloved; it is, as Stevens writes, "a humanizing and refining influence, a socially improving experience" (40). Clearly, *The Franklin's Tale* has this social orientation. That the Franklin is concerned with *gentilesse* is evident from his opening line, "Thise olde gentil Britouns," from which point it becomes increasingly important until the tale culminates in an "*embarras de gentilesse*" (Bur[illegible] 67), each of the male characters giving up what is ostensibly due him. The Franklin's interest in the public social milieu is also exhibited, of course, in his [illegible] courtly love conventions which are so inextricably bound together with the virtue of *gentilesse*.

The tale opens with a summary of Arveragus' and Dorigen's courtship. Short as the description is, it is enough to portray the two as typical courtly lovers.

Arveragus "many a labour, many a greet emprise/ . . .for his lady wroghte" (732-3) until Dorigen, taking pity on him "for his worthynesse/ And namely for his meke obeysaunce" (738-9), consents to marry him. As noted earlier, this marriage is not necessarily out of keeping with the English tradition--although the vows of equality the two seem to make are unusual: Arveragus swears that he will "hire obeye, and folwe hir wyl in al" (749).

Courtly love convention can be seen clearly in the depiction of Aurelius, too. The young squire who tries to woo Dorigen first approaches her in a garden, a location having amorous connotations. It is here described as a typical medieval literary garden:

> And this was on the sixte morwe of May,
> Which May hadde peynted with his softe shoures
> This gardyn ful of leves and of floures;
> And craft of mannes hand so curiously
> Arrayed hadde this gardyn, trewely,
> That nevere was ther gardyn of swich prys,
> But if it were the verray paradys.
>
> (906-912)

Like the garden in the Roman de la Rose, this "verray paradys" is full of pleasing sights, smells, and sounds:

> The odour of floures and the fresshe sighte
> Wolde han maked any herte light
> * * *
> So ful it was of beautee with plesaunce.
>
> (913-4; 917)

J. D. Burnley points out that this description partakes of both the classical *locus amoenus* and the earthly paradise

traditions (93) although, as Gerhard Joseph notes, it is a distinctly postlapsarian garden (24), arrayed as it is with the "craft of mannes hand." As in the Roman too, it is peopled with noble couples, who "dauncen, and. . .pleyen at ches and tables" (900). This garden is immediately recognizable, then, as the *hortus conclusus*, "the earthly paradise of human love" (Pearsall and Salter, 80).

The young squire Aurelius is a fitting inhabitant of this setting. He is "fressher" and "jolyer of array" (927) than the month of May,[32] and "syngeth, daunceth, passynge any man/ That is, or was, sith that the world bigan" (929-30). The superlatives do not stop here; he is "Oon of the beste farynge man on lyve;/Yong strong, right vertuous, and riche, and wys" (932-3). Having loved Dorigen "two yeer and moore" (940), and suffered greatly during that time, Aurelius feels confident, yet humble in his suit, for Arveragus is away. Approaching Dorigen obsequiously, he offers her his service and begs for mercy: "Madam, reweth upon my peynes smerte/For with a word ye may me sleen or save" (974-5). Dorigen's answer is not what Aurelius had hoped, and recognizing the impossibility of her terms, he complains to Apollo, praying in despair that the god help his distress. None forthcoming, he falls into a swoon, as courtly lovers are wont to do, and for two more years he languishes in torment. Nor is Dorigen exempt from treatment of a courtly lady; with Arveragus gone, she, too, is in

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[32] Springtime is the conventional season for love to begin. Cf. the Roman de la Rose and Troilus and Criseyde.

torment, and "moorneth, waketh, fasteth, wayleth, pleyneth" (819) as, the Franklin says, "doon thise noble wyves when hem liketh" (818). The Franklin does his best, then, to portray courtly lovers in courtly love situations, but as will be seen in Chapter Two, their nobility and *gentilesse* are only illusory; the world of appearance is far more important to these characters than that of reality.

Since *The Franklin's Tale* can properly be classified as romance, the implications of the Franklin's designation of the tale as a *lay* must be indicated. Chaucer probably knew little about the Breton lay, being unfamiliar with the works of Marie de France, and he very likely had only oral tradition and the rather vague *Le Fraine* prologue of the Auchinleck Manuscript upon which to base his knowledge.[33] L. H. Loomis has postulated that the term may have been slightly out of fashion by the late fourteenth century, and she has suggested that the Franklin's using the term characterizes him as one who lives in the past; one who is himself slightly "old-fashioned" (114).[34] The purpose of the tale is not, however, to characterize the Franklin—although his character is important—but to illustrate the dangers

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[33]Chaucer's most likely source, in fact, is Boccaccio's Filocolo (Menedon's Question). Here, however, the suitor actually fulfills the terms of the lady's demand, and, moreover, she, unlike Dorigen, verifies that this demand has been fulfilled. In addition, the story does not really end until the *demande d'amour* has been debated. The conclusion in Boccaccio is, interestingly enough, that the husband has been the most liberal because he has given up his honor, something he can never regain (see Miller 122-35). Chaucer's treatment, then, clearly places the emphasis on the discrepancy between appearance and reality.

[34]See also Burlin, ("Art" 60).

inherent in choosing appearance over reality, and specifically, of mistaking the appearance of *gentilesse* for the real thing. Chaucer's purpose in having the Franklin call his tale a lay has to do, then, with the discrepancy between illusion and reality that lies at the heart of the tale. Chaucer would have recognized that the word *lay* did not imply genre; as has been seen, by Chaucer's time any poem that had love at its centre and contained perhaps some magic could be termed a *lay*. Indeed, even those poems not fitting this already vague definition could be called lays as, for example, when in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* the minstrel narrator urges his audience to "lysten this laye bot on littel quile" (30). Moreover, the term is also used frequently in romance, and within this tale itself, to denote simply a song; Aurelius in his longing, makes "manye layes,/songes, compleintes, roundels, virelayes" (947-48). Chaucer has the Franklin, however, associate the term closely with the virtue of *gentilesse*; that is, the Franklin's terminology is connected with the way in which he wishes his tale to be understood. Magic may be associated with the word *lay* but, as will be seen, no real magic occurs in the tale. The Franklin's term is thus the first indication of the discrepancy between appearance and reality that will become wider as the tale progresses. Just as the tale at first appears to be what it is not, so, too, the characters within the tale and the Franklin himself seem to be different from what they really are. Chaucer has given

clear indication from the tale's beginning, then, that the reader must not be, as the Franklin is, taken in by illusion.

III. The Noble Lovers

The dichotomy between illusion and reality predominates in and governs the course of *The Franklin's Tale*. Finding its physical expression in the illusory disappearance of the rocks of Armorick, its thematic implications are revealed in the actions of the characters themselves. The Franklin wants to portray them as *gentil*, noble, people, whose behavior embodies true *gentillesse*, but their actions actually contradict and undercut the Franklin's intentions.

Most critics have seen *gentillesse* as forming an important component of the tale, but many, taken in by the Franklin's illusion, have focussed their attention on the way the virtue functions to bring about and maintain the ostensibly perfect marriage of Dorigen and Arveragus. That is, they see the tale as an attempted reconciliation of the opposing systems of courtly love and marriage, and while some see the reconciliation as a failure,[35] and others as one that is to be hailed for its great success,[36] few see *gentillesse* as primarily connected with the theme of appearance and reality.[37] The traditional way of reading the tale is still that of Kittredge, whose remarks have long colored interpretations of *The Franklin's Tale*:

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[35] For example, R. M. Lumiansky, Paul E. Gray.
[36] See especially G. L. Kittredge; also C. Hugh Holman, Lindsay A. Mann, Gertrude White, Phyllis Hodgson, and Mary J. Carruthers.
[37] There are a number of critics who recognize the importance of this theme; for example, Ronnalie Howard, Effie Jean Mathewson, R. Peck, and Kenneth Kee. Of these, Kee's view is the closest to that expressed here and in Chapter Four.

> [W]ithout 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.
>
> (215)

One immediate problem with this reading is that the conventional notion of love and marriage being mutually exclusive is not necessarily applicable to all English romances. C. S. Lewis encapsulates this view when he remarks that "[m]arriages had nothing to do with love" (Allegory 13). In reality, this may have been the case, but, as has been seen, the statement is not applicable to English romance in general.

But far more damaging to Kittredge's reading is that it fails to take adequate account of the contrast between appearance and reality that permeates the tale. *Gentillesse* is indeed important, but because it is part of the Franklin's illusion, not because it actually allows the tale to end satisfactorily. Indeed, there is very little true *gentillesse* in the tale. While there is much talk of the virtue, and while the Franklin clearly wants us to see it exemplified, a close examination of the actions of his characters will reveal that they display an inverse kind of *gentillity*; that is, their virtue consists in not taking what they do not deserve. A comparison, then, of the characters' actual behavior with the specific components of *gentillesse* will show that the Franklin's understanding of true *gentillity* is imperfect, for his characters' manifestations

of the virtue are as illusory as the disappearance of the rocks of Armorick.

A discussion of *gentilesse* in *The Franklin's Tale* must necessarily begin with a definition of the term itself. Henri Dupin has devoted an entire book to the study of *courtoisie*, a word that can be taken to be synonymous with *gentilesse* (Mann 11), in the Middle Ages. While one cannot sum up the entirety of the book, it is worthwhile to note that Dupin makes clear the social and moral implications of the word *courtoisie*. Discussing the opposition between the words *courtois* and *vilain*, Dupin writes that

> On comprend. . .que le mot *courtois*, tout en gardant son sens moral, se soit appliqué, pour la désigner a toute une categorie sociale, et que le mot *vilain*, qui désignait une categorie sociale, ait eu en même temps un sens moral. Il a dû se passer, pour les mots *courtois* et *vilain*, ce qui s'est passé plus tard pour les mots *noble*, *urbanité*, *paysan*, qui, en outre de leur sens propre, ont un sens moral, favorable ou péjoratif.
>
> (15)

Dupin then elucidates the outward signs of *courtoisie*, which entail the proper forms of greeting, departing, welcome, and hospitality (Chapters Three and Four). More important than these ceremonial practises, however, is the manifestation of inner virtue; there are, Dupin writes,

> un certain nombre of vertus, que le moyen âge particulierment prisées, et elle proscrit les défauts ou les vices opposés a ces vertus, et que le moyen âge a considerés commes défauts et vices de vilains.
>
> (36)

The following summary of these virtues is based on Lindsay Mann's study of *gentilesse* in *The Franklin's Tale.*[38]

The first, and perhaps most important, quality of *gentilesse* on Dupin's list consists in loyalty, faithfulness, and fidelity to one's word and to others. The word *trouthe* is synonymous with this quality. Benevolence or compassion is also an important feature, and includes shedding tears over dangers and separations, sharing joy over the past and in reunions, sympathy with joy or suffering, and forgiveness. The demonstration of humility, meekness, and mildness is a third essential part, with liberality and generosity equally indespensable. Cheerfulness and a pleasant, urbane wit, too, are essential, as is a concern over reputation, honor, and glory. Moderation, or *mesure* must temper and regulate the preceding six components of *gentilesse* and thus is of principal consequence. The final, but no less significant feature of *gentilesse* is love, both courtly and married.

The first component on Dupin's list is the necessity of keeping one's *trouthe*—for *trouthes* are of the first importance to a discussion of the tale. There are a number of promises made as the story progresses, and, in fact, they form the basis of the plot itself. If we can examine these pledges[39] and see not only to what degree they are kept but

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[38]While Mann's position differs radically from my own, his summation of Dupin is useful here. The following summary is essentially a paraphrase of Mann 12-13.

[39]I am indebted to Alan T. Gaylord for the idea of using this approach.

also whether they are worthy of being kept, we can advance towards a decision about the degree to which *gentilesse* is displayed.

The first promises are made between Arveragus and Dorigen. These pledges are extremely important, for they indicate the intent of the two lovers to base their marriage on *gentilesse*. Arveragus swears as a knight to relinquish his sovereign role as a husband in marriage, and vows that he will continue to treat Dorigen as a courtly lady:

> Of his free wyl he swoor hire as a knyght
> That nevere in al his lyf he, day ne nyght,
> [illegible] sholde upon hym take no maistrie
> [illegible]gayn hir wyl, ne kithe hire jalousie,
> but hire obeye, and folwe hir wyl in al.
>
> (745-49)

Dorigen, in return for this generosity, promises that she will become his "humble, trewe wyf" (758), and concludes her statement in the most uncompromising terms: "Have heer my trouthe, til that myn herte breste" (759). Each has made a solemn and irrevocable vow. Arveragus has sworn by his knighthood and Dorigen has pledged her *trouthe* until she dies.

The next promise is Dorigen's infamous pledge to the love-stricken Aurelius. Its content is familiar, but Dorigen's exact words are worthy of note:

> Looke what day that endelong Britayne
> Ye remoeve alle the rokkes, stoon by stoon,
> That they ne lette ship ne boot to goon,-
> I seye, whan ye han maad the coost so clene
> Of rokkes that ther nys no stoon ysene,

> Thanne wol I love yow best of any man,
> Have heer my trouthe, in al that evere I kan.
> (992-8)

Dorigen has specified that those rocks must be gone—not merely made invisible, but gone—so that they neither hinder the passage of, nor cause harm to, any ships or boats.

There are some other matters to consider with respect to this promise as well. We are told that Dorigen made her remarks "in pley" (98[illegible]); she is not at all serious. Charles Owen Jr. points out that "the rash promise is at the same time an expression of Dorigen's love for her husband" (252). That her words are meant to confirm the impossibility of an affair with Aurelius is clear when she indignantly delivers what amounts to a small lecture after she makes her "promise":

> Lat swiche folies out of youre herte slyde.
> What deyntee sholde a man han in his lyf
> For to go love another mannes wyf.
> (1002-4)

Moreover, we must keep in mind that Dorigen had made a promise before this one, with true sincerity and solemnity. This marriage vow, as Dorothy Colmer tells us, "should invalidate her later one to Aurelius" (376). We must inquire, then, about the validity of this bargain with Aurelius. Not only was it made in jest with a clear intention to discourage the young lover but it should not take precedence over her previous and more binding vow to

Arveragus.

Alan T. Gaylord shows that according to medieval ethics, the validity of the rash promise itself may be questioned. Offering evidence from a number of medieval treatises, Gaylord demonstrates quite conclusively that "counsel amounts to this: *rash promises are not to be kept*" (352; his italics). He cites Robert of Brunne, for example, who writes

> Or ȝyf þou vowe yn ȝungþe or elde
> And þou mayst nat but wykkedly ȝelde
> God wyl nat þou hold yt so
> Þat þou þy vowe yn wykkednes do;
> God haþ leuer þou þe wyþdrow
> Þan do euyl ded after foly vow.
> (Handlyng Synne 2807-12; Gaylord 352)

Ambrose, too, writes in De Officiis Ministrorum that a man "shall promise nothing that is unethical; but if he does promise, it is more tolerable not to keep the promise than to do something wicked" (Gaylord, 354). After citing a number of other references (note 28 356), Gaylord concludes that

> the moral assumptions behind the behavior of the characters in *The Franklin's Tale* diverge widely both from twentieth-century common sense and medieval ethical counsel (356).

It is almost unbelievable, then, that when Arveragus, after Dorigen comes to him weeping, utters the famous line "Trouthe is the hyeste thyng that man may kepe" (1479), he is referring to Dorigen's so-called promise to Aurelius and

not to his wife's marriage vow. Neither of them mentions their solemn pledges, nor do they consider that these vows should undeniably take precedence.

But it is not only Dorigen's marriage vow that seems to be set aside here. Arveragus' vow, too, is subverted by his insistence that Dorigen comply with her pledge to Aurelius. But "insistence" is perhaps too mild a word. Arveragus' words are not to be argued with:

> Ye shul youre trouthe holden, by my fay!
> * * *
> . . .I yow forbede, up peyne of deeth,
> That nevere, whil thee lasteth lyf ne breeth,
> To no wight telle thou of this aventure.
> (1474; 1481-3)

Arveragus, in fact, has ordered her to hold her *trouthe*, and, moreover, has threatened her with death should she speak of the matter to anyone. He is surely in violation of his previous vow never to exercise "maistrie" over his wife, for he has just commanded the weeping Dorigen not only to keep a promise made in jest, but also to violate her solemn vow to him. In doing so, he violates his solemn vow to her. Those initial marriage vows, those vows which were meant to demonstrate true *gentillesse*, have just been essentially invalidated.

The Franklin, realizing that his audience may detect these inconsistencies, recognizes that

> Paraventure an heep of yow, ywis,
> Wol holden hym a lewed man in this
> That he wol putte his wyf in jupartie.
>
> (1493-5)

He tries to forestall criticism by reassuring us that "she may have bettre fortune then yow semeth" (1497), but this better fortune will come about through further faulty applications of *gentillesse* on the part of Aurelius and the clerk-magician.

The terms of their agreement are that the clerk "remoeven alle the rokkes of Britayne" (1221), for which service Aurelius will pay one thousand pounds. Aurelius, in particular, is pleased with their arrangement:

> This bargayn is ful dryve, for we been knyt.
> Ye shal be payed trewely, by myn trouthe!
>
> (1230-1)

He has sworn by his *trouthe* to pay an astronomical sum of money to attain his heart's desire, money which, as we discover later, he does not have:

> Aurelius, that his cost hath al forlorn,
> Curseth the tyme that evere he was born:
> "Allas," quod he, "allas, that I bihighte
> Of pured gold a thousand pound of wighte
> Unto this philosophre! How shal I do?
>
> (1557-61)

Aurelius has, then already violated this bargain.

But does the "subtil clerk," in fact, deserve to be paid? He has agreed to remove the rocks, in accordance with the terms of both Dorigen and Aurelius, but he uses illusion and apparent magic to uphold his side of the agreement, waiting

> . . .a tyme of his conclusioun;
> This is to seye, to maken illusioun,
> By swich an apparence or jogelrye,—
> * * *
> That she and every wight sholde wene and seye
> That of Britaigne the rokkes were aweye,
> Or ellis they were sonken under grounde.
> (1263-5; 1267-9)

The emphasis on sheer appearance is clear in these lines. The clerk's goal is to conjure an "illusioun" so that Dorigen and everyone will imagine—"wene"—that they are actually gone. And indeed, in this effort he succeeds, for

> . . .thurgh his magik, for a wyke or tweye,
> It *semed* that alle the rokkes were aweye.
> (1294-5; italics mine)

The rocks are still very much present; they have simply been rendered invisible for a time. Clearly, the clerk has not fulfilled his bargain with Aurelius, nor, consequently, has Aurelius fulfilled the terms of Dorigen's original task. The rocks were to be completely removed, rendered harmless, and they were to be removed permanently.

Whether Aurelius knows that the rocks' disappearance is only an illusion, however, is not clear. At first, it seems that he does believe that they are gone, for he says to

Dorigen when he first approaches her, "wel I woot the rokkes been aweye" (1338). But near the tale's end, he tells the magician that Dorigen "nevere erst hadde herd speke of apparence" (1602), a statment which seems to indicate that Aurelius knew or at least suspected that the rocks' disappearance was not real.

We learn also from this conversation that even if Aurelius has believed in the clerk's illusion, he realizes that Dorigen has no knowledge of magic, and thus thought herself safe in making her "promise": "hir trouthe she swoor thurgh innocence" (1601). Thus, Aurelius had every intention of holding her to her vow, having full knowledge of her "innocence" and, probably, of the "apparence." His motivation for releasing Dorigen stems not from his recognition of her ignorance of both magic and the illusion created by it, but from a desire to outdo the *gentillesse* of Arveragus (1527).

Aurelius has demonstrated little true *gentillesse* here. Henry Hinckley concurs, writing, "In treating Dorigen's answer literally as if she were making a bargain, Aurelius forfeited all claim to be considered *gentil* or honorable" (44). Moreover, he releases her from this promise that she did not really make without having fulfilled the conditions of that so-called promise. And the magician, too, shows little *gentillesse* in forgiving Aurelius his debt of one thousand pounds, for he contrived to make it only seem that the rocks were really gone.

The *gentillesse* of these characters with regard to the component of keeping *trouthe* consists, then, only in this: that they do not take what they do not deserve. Since Dorigen's bargain with Aurelius was made in jest, Aurelius does not deserve to collect on the terms of that bargain, and since the agreement between Aurelius and the clerk was not fulfilled, the clerk does not deserve his one thousand pounds. Moreover, Arveragus clearly violates his marriage vow when he exercises "maistrie" over his distraught wife. We must ask, with Alan T. Gaylord, "is this the humble husband who earlier surrendered his claim to customary lordship?"(344). Thus, the characters' adherence to keeping their various *trouthes* is quite illusory; the appearance is there, but not the reality.

The duality between appearance and reality thus finds its behavioral expression in the characters' willingness to substitute the illusion for the actual. This tendency is made clear as regards the various *trouthes* plighted in the tale, just as it is with respect to the other components of *gentillesse* in Dupin's definition.

Benevolence and compassion, along with the closely-allied humility, are also features of *gentillesse*, and both Aurelius and Arveragus lack these desirable qualities. It was noted earlier that Aurelius' motivation for releasing Dorigen from her "promise" stemmed from his desire to outdo Arveragus' *gentillesse*. Although one might believe upon first reading that this gesture on his part is

motivated by compassion, the impression is readily dispelled when one examines his words closely.

In neither of his long speeches to Dorigen is manifested much compassion or humility. Aurelius' first speech, when he meets with Dorigen to tell her of the vanished rocks, is touched in gracious terms:

> "My righte lady," quod this woful man,
> "Whom I moost drede and love as I best kan,
> And lothest were of al this world displese,
> Nere it that I for yow have swich disese
> That I moste dyen heere at youre foot anon,
> Noght wolde I telle how me is wo bigon.
> * * *
> But of my deeth thogh that ye have no routhe,
> Avyseth yow er that ye breke youre trouthe.
> (1311-6; 1319-20)

Although Aurelius claims to be concerned only for her, it is plain that his concern is for himself. He shows no regard for Dorigen in these lines; in fact, he is pressing her to keep her so-called promise by preying on her feelings of guilt:

> Repentheth yow, for thilke God above,
> Er ye me sleen by cause that I yow love.
> For, madame, wel ye woot what ye han hight.
> (1321-3)

These words are neither compassionate nor humble. One can imagine, as Aurelius continues in this vein, Dorigen's dismay and anguish increasing with every line, her face turning paler and paler until, by the speech's end,

> . . . she astoned stood;

In al hir face nas a drope of blood.
(1339-40)

Nor are Aurelius' actual words consistent with his guise of the humble petitioner. He suggests to Dorigen that he knows what is best, and that he is simply informing her of the "rules" for her own benefit. He reminds her several times of the promise she has made him, adopting a tone which comes close to arrogance:

> Avyseth yow er that ye breke youre trouthe.
> * * *
> Ye woot right wel what ye bihighten me;
> And in myn hand youre trouthe plighten ye
> To love me best—God woot, ye seyde so,
> * * *
> Madame, I speke it for the honour of yow
> * * *
> Dooth as yow list; have youre biheste in mynde.
> (1320; 1327-9; 1331; 1335)

Many of Aurelius' terms seem gracious, but his tone is firm, and, in D. W. Robertson's judgment, full of "pious hypocrisy".[40] Aurelius is not in the least concerned with Dorigen's feelings or her honour; his aim is to fulfill his own selfish desire for her. This is far from being a humble or compassionate speech; on the contrary, it is "a bold statement . . .not to mention being ignoble" (Robertson 288).

One's impressions of Aurelius are not changed by his second speech to Dorigen in which he releases her from her

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[40] "Chaucer's Franklin" 288. Hereafter all references to Robertson will be to this essay.

bond:

> I yow relesse, madame, into youre hond
> Quyt every serement and every bond
> That ye han maad to me as heerbiforn,
> Sith thilke tyme which that ye were born.
>
> (1533-6)

There is a near-ludicrous sense to these righteous words, for it has been clear that Aurelius has had no right in the first place to demand anything of Dorigen. As it was in his first speech, Aurelius's gracious language is an attempt to mask the real issue; here, he releases her not out of compassion nor of love but because he wishes to out-do Arveragus' generosity—a real irony considering that neither one is generous at all. That the Franklin draws attention to Aurelius' "greet compassioun" (1515) for Dorigen confirms one's impression of the young squire, for as will be shown in Chapter Three, the Franklin has a vested interest in wanting us to perceive his characters in a certain way. It is clear that there has been no "compassioun" at all on Aurelius' part; the Franklin's own interpretation, then, is faulty.

Neither does Arveragus demonstrate any benevolence or compassion. When Dorigen, in great distress, comes to him weeping (as a result of Aurelius' first speech to her), he responds to her anguish with an appearance of cheer and near-indifference: "Is ther oght elles, Dorigen, but this?" (1469). To Dorigen's emotional reply, he answers soothingly, "Ye wyf. . . .lat slepen that is stille" (1471). Arveragus

shows little concern for Dorigen's grief, and even less sympathy, especially when he lets slip his nonchalant facade, and allows his true emotion to show:

> But with that word he brast anon to wepe,
> 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."
>
> (1480-6)

Not only is Dorigen to remain silent about the whole situation on pain of death should she not, but she is not to manifest her despair. Arveragus will endure his "wo" the best he can, but as Alan Gaylord notes, "about her woe there is not a word" (344). Moreover, Arveragus gives Dorigen no opportunity either to reply to or protest his order, for immediately upon issuing his stern warning, he calls a squire and a maid to escort his wife to her rendez-vous: "And forth he cleped a squier and a mayde" (1487). There is surely little of the benevolent husband or the humble lover made manifest here.

The foregoing examination of this important scene between Arveragus and Dorigen leads to a discussion of two more significant features of *gentilesse*: a concern for reputation in the seeking of honor and glory, and moderation. The two can be discussed jointly with regard to Arveragus, for his concern for his reputation, something which is consistent with the requirements of *gentilesse*, is

so much emphasised that it becomes misused, and is thus in violation of the requirement of moderation.

In the scene discussed above, Arveragus severely admonishes his wife to tell no one of her plight. Furthermore, she must be cheerful in her forced adultery while he, on the other hand, endures his woe to the best of his ability. Arveragus insists that this last stricture is for Dorigen's own good, so that people cannot guess at or attribute wrongdoing to her, but this excuse is overshadowed by his threat of death should she not comply. Arveragus' concern here is for his own, not Dorigen's reputation, for a threat of this nature surely implies a greater concern for his own reputation than for his wife's well-being. Suspicion of Dorigen would, no doubt, reflect badly on Arveragus; that he is concerned with the opinions of others is foreshadowed early in the tale.

From the beginning, the Franklin has taken pains to insure that we view Arveragus as not only a worthy lover but a worthy knight as well. As such, "many a greet emprise/He for his lady wroghte" (732-3). These exercises of knightly prowess are squarely within tradition, but after the marriage, Arveragus' regard for reputation becomes excessive and overrides another virtue, that of sincerity. He is willing to surrender his marital sovereignty in private, but not in public:

> Save that the name of soveraynetee,
> That wolde he have for shame of his degree.
>
> (751-2)

Concern for his reputation will not allow Arveragus to remain a courtly lover in public, nor will it allow him to be one in private, for he does, indeed, retain his "soveraynetee" when he sends Dorigen to Aurelius.

That Arveragus is motivated in his actions by a more excessive than moderate concern for reputation at the expense of his wife's well-being can be corroborated by one more piece of evidence. Shortly after their marriage, just over a year later, Arveragus decides that as a knight he must continue to pursue deeds of glory on the battlefield. It may be his knightly prerogative and perhaps even his duty to seek such glory before he is married, but after the marriage, as Carol F. Heffernan points out, Arveragus still

> appears eager to win fame for himself. . . . . (his) care for his wife is questionable from the point of view both of the marriage contract and of chivalry. (180)

Heffernan continues, quoting from Trevisa's translation of Bartholomaeus Anglicus' De Proprietatibus Rerum:

> For in þe contract of weddinge he þliztiþ his treuthe, and obligiþ himsilf to lede his lif wiþ his wif wiþoute departinge. . . (180)

Although it is not unusual in chivalric romance that married knights are away from their wives for long periods of time as they pursue adventure, one is nonetheless inclined to see Arveragus' departure in a less than favorable light. If the

Franklin had not taken such pains to illustrate and describe the marriage vows of Dorigen and Arveragus, and if he had not been so interested in emphasising the joy and love the two have together, one might well be persuaded that Arveragus' departure is completely acceptable. But one's reactions to Arveragus cannot help but be colored by what has gone before, and what will come later; the fact seems inescapable that this man is too much concerned with the reputation and honor that he seems to have. Derek Brewer, writing of honor in Chaucer, reminds us that the concept is "Janus-faced," looking, on one hand, "towards goodness, virtue, an inner personal quality; on the other side. . . . towards social or external reputation"(90). Of the latter kind of honor, Brewer cites Chaucer's translation of Boethius: "to be holden honorable or reverent ne cometh nat to folk of hir propre strengthe of nature, but oonly of the false opynyoun of folk (III,73)" (90). Brewer goes on to note that honor is thus "an earthly good; and like all such goods is for Boethius a real good, but also really bad. . .[these goods are] appearance rather than reality"(90).

Arveragus thus emerges as "less than noble" in his desire to "keep up appearances" (Burlin, Chaucerian Fiction 180). In all three of the instances examined, it is clear that he is too much concerned with appearances. Overly interested in preserving and enhancing his reputation, he is in distinct violation of the requirement of *gentilesse* for moderation.

Dorigen and Aurelius, too, consistently violate what Chaucer, in The Book of the Duchess, calls *mesure*. Some of these violations are acceptable within the courtly love tradition, and thus they serve also to illustrate once again the Franklin's desire to portray his characters as *gentil* and noble people. Dorigen's excessive grief at Arveragus' departure, for example, and Aurelius' distress, with his subsequent two-year illness when he hears Dorigen's reply to his proposition are illustrations of behavior that is expected within the courtly love tradition. But an examination of the prayers of each that the rocks be removed and of Dorigen's "complaint," wherein she lists a number of women who chose death rather than dishonor, will show distinct violations of moderation.

Dorigen's grief at Arveragus' absence may well be acceptable; however, this grief, as Robert Burlin suggests, comes close to hysteria ("Art" 69) when she focusses it on the rocks that seem to her to threaten her husband's safety and thus their eventual reunion. She exhibits neither moderation nor patience here when she questions God's creation and divine purveiance:

> But, Lord, thise grisly feendly rokkes blake,
> That semen rather a foul confusion
> Of werk than any fair creacion
> Of swich a parfit wys God and a stable,
> Why han ye wroght this werk unresonable?
>
> (868-72)

She also wants the natural order overturned:

> But wolde God that alle thise rokkes blake
> Were sonken into helle for his sake!
>
> (891-2)

Dorigen's outburst is clearly excessive. Not only is she discontented with God's creation, but, in wanting this natural and divine order upset, she is dangerously close to blasphemy.

Aurelius, too, in his almost identical prayer to Apollo and Lucina shows little restraint or *mesure*. He also wants the natural order of the world upset (that he is praying to pagan and Dorigen to a Christian god makes little difference, for moderation is both a Christian and Classical virtue):

> Wherfore, lord Phebus, this is my requeste—
> Do this miracle, or do myn herte breste—
> * * *
> As preieth hire so greet a flood to brynge
> That fyve fadme at the leeste it oversprynge
> The hyeste rokke in Armorik Briteyne;
> And lat this flood endure yeres tweyne.
>
> (1055-6; 1059-62)

Neither is Aurelius patient, for he has indicated a specific amount of time for the rocks to be flooded. But he goes further. For insurance, he asks that the rocks be sunk under the ground. If all of this is done, moreover, he makes the rather extravagant claim that he will walk barefoot to Delphi (1077) in his gratitude.

One might also see a lack of moderation in Aurelius' blithe disregard of the huge sum of money that he pledges to

the clerk:

> Aurelius, with blisful herte anoon,
> Answerde thus: "Fy on a thousand pound!"
> (1226-7)

As has been noted, he does not have this money. He has clearly been excessive, then, in both his prayer to Apollo and in his agreement with the clerk.

Dorigen's lack of moderation can be seen in one more example. Her response to Aurelius' demand that she fulfill her promise catalogues at length a number of unfortunate wives who chose death rather than dishonor. As Robert Burlin comments

> her high resolve becomes eroded by garrulity, as she postpones action again and again by mustering up yet another troop of exempla. As she becomes more desperate, the exempla become less detailed until she breathlessly concludes with three in one couplet: "The same thyng I seye of Bilyea/Of Rodogone, and eek Valeria!"(1455-6)
> (Fiction 199-200)

Burlin then goes on to cite Germaine Dempster's remarks on the "irrelevance" of many of these examples:

> Valeria's glory had consisted in refusing to remarry, Rhodagune's in killing her nurse, and Bilia's in never remarking on the smell of her husband's breath!
> (Dempster 20)

Dorigen seems completely carried away at this point.[41]

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[41] For critical opinions about this complaint, see note 82 below.

As examination of their conduct shows, none of the three major characters—Arveragus, Aurelius, and Dorigen—exhibits moderation. That the Franklin is unaware of this violation of *gentillesse* is clear, for at his tale's beginning he has extolled the virtues of "pacience," "temperaunce," and "governaunce," in an obvious attempt to set the tone, as it were, for the following tale:

> Pacience is an heigh vertu, certeyn,
> For it venquysseth, as thise clerkes seyn,
> Thynges that rigour sholde nevere atteyne.
> * * *
> After the tyme moste be temperauance
> To every wight that kan on governaunce.
> (773-5; 785-6)

Although the Franklin is eager to show his familiarity with these components of *gentillesse*, his faulty understanding is apparent in his failure to create characters who genuinely embody the admired virtues.

Nor is much attention paid to those other features of *gentillesse*—cheerfulness, generosity, and love. There is little of the first, for example, in the behavior of the Franklin's characters. Lindsay Mann tells us that even in lovesickness one is to remain cheerful (13), or at least attempt to present a cheerful front, but Aurelius does neither. Nor can Arveragus' initial countenance of cheer fulfill this requirement, for it is clearly only a facade, and a very temporary one at that. It has been seen, too, in what form generosity exists; each of those who seems to exhibit liberality is merely refusing to take something that

is not deserved to begin with. Generosity does not consist in giving away that which does not belong to you.

As for the final component of *gentilesse*, love, let us note what the Franklin himself says of it:

> Love wol nat been constreyned by maistrye.
> Whan maistrie comth, the God of Love anon
> Beteth his wynges, and farewel, he is gon!
> Love is a thyng as any spirit free.
>
> (764-7)

But the love between Dorigen and Arveragus is constrained by "maistrie"; Arveragus is the master in this marriage, both in name and in practise. Howard R. Patch makes a valid point when he asks, "How free is love when it is thus constrained to infidelity. . . ?" (225).

It should be clear that the *gentilesse* with which *The Franklin's Tale* is so concerned is really nonexistent. The tale's characters consistently choose appearance over reality in maintaining *trouthes* to promises that were never really made, and in forgetting or setting aside those vows which should have been remembered. Nor are benevolence, compassion, or humility manifested in the behavior of Arveragus and Aurelius towards Dorigen; both men are more concerned with their own desires and reputations than they are with her well-being. All three of these major characters are guilty of violating the requirement of moderation—Arveragus through his excessive concern for reputation, and Aurelius and Dorigen in prayers to their respective gods. Dorigen's lack of *mesure* is also

demonstrated in her excessive complaint. Generosity is exhibited as a kind of negative virtue wherby no one takes what is not deserved. The final component of *gentilesse*, love, certainly exists, but it is not the kind of *gentil* love that the Franklin thinks he is describing.

What is to be made of the characters' failure to measure up to the Franklin's ideals? What explanation can be offered to account for their consistent choices of appearance over reality? It has been seen that their behavior is inconsistent with their perceptions of themselves and with their creator's professed values. Dorigen and Arveragus make vows which indicate that neither will exert sovereignty over one another; Arveragus ignores his promise. Dorigen ignores her vow of marriage, too, when she is compelled to keep a rash promise made "in pley" (988). The Franklin himself indulges in a long disquisition on virtues connected with moderation, yet none of the characters manifests these qualities. It is not enough to explain the inconsistencies by simply agreeing with Kittredge that *The Franklin's Tale* is Chaucer's own solution to a Marriage Debate. (See Kittredge 215). To concur with this reading is to ignore obvious discrepancies. To achieve a coherent and consistent reading of *The Franklin's Tale* one must look to the character of the Franklin himself.

IV. The Storyteller and his Audience

The Franklin's interest in *gentillesse* is first revealed to us in his words to the Squire and in the opening lines of his Prologue. The Squire, whose long romance replete with courtly love and marvellous occurrences threatens to continue indefinitely, is suddenly interrupted by the Franklin:

> In feith, Squier, thow has thee wel yquit
> And gentilly.
>
> (673-4)

His very first sentence contains the term 'gentil,' and proper behavior is the burden of the remainder of his remarks to the young Squire. In the Franklin's twenty-two lines of speech (673-94), the terms *gentil* and *vertu* are sprinkled throughout: *gentilly* (674); *vertu* (680); *vertuous* (687); *vertu* (689); *gentil* (693); *gentillesse* (694). The Franklin makes no attempt at subtlety nor is his interest in the subject of *gentillesse* affected by Harry Bailly's expostulation, "Straw for youre gentillesse!"(695).[42] The opening line of his Prologue asserts the thrust of the tale: "Thise olde *gentil* Britouns" (709; my italics). *Gentillesse* figures largely, too, in the opening lines of his tale, which describe the courtly wooing and winning of Dorigen by Arveragus.

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[42]Lumiansky rightly perceives that there is stress on the "youre", as Harry Bailly is making a distinction between the Franklin's concept of *gentillesse* and that of others who know better (347).

From the tale's beginning, then, the Franklin's main interest is made clear and his intent never wavers. There are numerous instances, some of which were noted in Chapter Three (for example, 761-98; 1493-8), wherein the Franklin quite openly interpolates his own opinion or comment to point out how he wishes the tale to be read. And his concluding question, "Which was the mooste fre, as thynketh yow?" (1622), reveals his satisfaction that his tale and his comments have successfully demonstrated true *gentillesse*. He seems as much deceived as his characters, for it is clear that his tale fails to achieve its end. That it is the Franklin who is unaware of this failure, and not Chaucer, seems obvious given the examination in Chapter Three of the characters' blindness to reality but considering their faulty perception is not enough to establish Chaucer's purpose in the tale. To discover this purpose, the Franklin himself must be examined.

There are few critics since Kittredge's day who would read the Franklin's words as Chaucer's own.[43] Most recent critics see the necessity of separating the Franklin from his characters, whom he is manipulating,[44] but also of separating the Franklin from Chaucer himself.[45] Just as the Franklin creates a world in which his characters speak and

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[43] Gertrude White, however, who writes in defense of Kittredge's point of view, sees this separation as "ingenious. . . .[it does] violence to the whole thrust of the tale" (458). Unfortunately, White does not show how the separation effects this incongruity.

[44] See, for example, Burlin, "Art" 67-8; Gaylord 332.

[45] See Russell Peck 254; Effie Jean Mathewson 36; Gerhard Joseph 21; Charles Owen 251.

move, so does Chaucer create and manipulate the Franklin. One can identify a further narrative level involving the naive narrator, "Chaucer the pilgrim" (Donaldson 3) who is himself a creation of Chaucer the poet. It is not being suggested here that Chaucer had at his disposal the elaborate literary theories which critics today sometimes employ; yet it is possible to find in The Canterbury Tales techniques and effects that can fruitfully be described by the judicious application of narrative theory.

It is not difficult to see, for example, that Chaucer the poet and Chaucer the pilgrim have two different voices.[46] It is the latter who tells the Tale of *Sir Thopas*, and the former who stands behind this naive narrator. The pilgrim Chaucer is described by Harry Bailly in the Prologue to the tale as a "popet" (1891) who is "smal and fair of face" (1892), and "elvyssh" (1893). Perhaps this is an accurate portrait of Chaucer the poet, but to describe his pilgrim persona in this way is to ensure before the tale even begins a proper response from the readers or hearers. Surely, a man who looks so harmless cannot, will not, tell a serious tale. Anticipating a comic tale, one is not disappointed. The humor is effected not only by the tale's obvious parody of the tail-rhyme romances,[47] but also by its framing. The Host once again is the means for pointing the

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[46] Donaldson argues this point effectively throughout his essay, "Chaucer the Pilgrim."

[47] The tail-rhyme is given to a metrical form whereby "series of couplets [are] laced together by individual lines based on one rhyme" (Sands 202). *Sir Thopas* has this repetitive rhyme scheme.

comic; interrupting the second fit he exclaims, "Namoore of this, for Goddes dignitee....This may wel be rym dogerel" (919, 925). Chaucer the pilgrim protests--it is the "beste rym [he] kan" (928)--but we know it is certainly not the "beste rym" of Chaucer the poet. The irony here derives from the joke shared by all--pilgrims, readers, and the poet himself--at the expense of the enthusiastic narrator, Chaucer the pilgrim. As Wayne Booth points out, "the speaker is himself the butt of the joke. The author and the reader are secretly in collusion behind the speaker's back, agreeing upon the standard by which he is found wanting" (304).

Our impressions of the pilgrims as described in the *General Prologue*, too, are given us through the innocent eyes of Chaucer the pilgrim, again allowing humorous irony that could not otherwise be achieved. The portrait of the Nun, for example, clearly tells one that she is rather more worldly than is proper, but Chaucer the pilgrim thinks she is a paragon of virtue. For example, he praises her for her "conscience" (142), charity, and pity, illustrating these attitudes by describing her tender care for her animals. Her hounds always receive the finest roast meat, milk, and white bread; but of the treatment humans receive from the nun there is not a word.

Accordingly, when the pilgrims embark on their respective tales, their descriptions must be kept in mind, for their portraits guide our reading of the tales; that is, they are described from the beginning as particular kinds of

people, who are in turn expected to tell a particular kind of tale.[48] The tale often corresponds to or reveals further the personality of its teller. Thus the Miller and the Shipman, for example, tell fabliaux, reflective of their station in life and their boorish personalities, while the Parson delivers an edifying sermon, appropriate to his sober portrait.

The tale of each pilgrim must be recognized, then, as a fourth narrative level; each is a story created or retold by a pilgrim, who is in turn created by the poet and described to us through the eyes and words of Chaucer the pilgrim. If, then, the Franklin's characters are behaving inconsistently, if they are demonstrating what is manifestly not *gentilesse* but something quite the opposite, it seems logical to search for the explanation in the person of the Franklin himself. He is the tale's teller, and may have some good reasons for wanting to exhibit his knowledge of *gentilesse*.

Accordingly, the social position of franklins in Chaucer's time must first be assessed, for an interest in *gentilesse* such as the Franklin's bespeaks that of one who aspires towards, rather than has attained, a position wherein *gentilesse* would not be questioned. If the Franklin is a member of the *gentil* class, if he is properly a landed gentleman, his interest is difficult to explain. Not much is

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[48] Muscatine writes of the relationship between tale and teller: "There need not be a one-to-one relationship between teller and tale. . . .where Chaucer mediated carefully between teller and tale, he sought not an idiomatic but a tonal and attitudinal relationship" (172).

known of the fourteenth-century class of franklins, but what can be found indicates strongly that they were not considered *gentil*. Historical speculation can, however, be borne out only by a close examination of the text; thus, the Franklin's portrait in the *General Prologue* must also be examined to determine whether it is consistent with what information has been gleaned regarding franklins in general. The description of, and comments by the naive pilgrim narrator about the Franklin will show that he is being praised for his deficiencies even as the Nun was praised.

The remainder of this chapter will examine more closely the Franklin's actual words to the Squire, and to his audience of pilgrims within the body of his Prologue and tale. A study of his rhetorical method should reveal how the Franklin is as self-deceived about *gentilesse* as his characters are. This examination of the Franklin's narrative will not undertake to point out and list the number of rhetorical devices he employs—others have performed this task.[49] It is equally valuable to examine those phrases and sentences by which the Franklin intrudes into his tale; speaking directly to his audience, he reveals at once an uncertainty about his own *gentilesse* and a desire, nonetheless, to ensure that his audience will understand the tale as he wishes them to. Ultimately, he emerges as one who does not understand the implications of his own tale; he is taken in by an illusion of his own making.

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[49] See, for example, J. M. Manly and Benjamin Harrison.

There are few literary references to the medieval class of franklins in existing texts, and those that are found are so vague that they seem capable of being interpreted to suit a variety of critical views. G.H. Gerould, in an important article, gathers together a number of medieval references to franklins, and finds to his satisfaction that franklins were considered *gentil*.[50] Gerould's article is valuable for its compilation of existing references, but a number of his conclusions are questionable. A re-examination of his evidence and those conclusions should establish that, contrary to Gerould's findings, a franklin was not, in fact, considered to be a "true gentleman" (54). Gerould begins by citing the three earliest references to franklins, found in twelfth- and thirteenth-century charters.[51] Finding that because franklins were, with respect to guarding Corfe Castle and making agreements with an abbey, being mentioned "in the same phrase" as knights, Gerould declares that franklins must have been "persons of substance and consideration" (37). They may well have been, but it is a leap of logic for him then to assume that they would have been on "the same terms" (37) as knights. The same sort of logic governs Gerould's assessment of his next piece of evidence, one which contains more than a suggestion that

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[50] In "The Social Status of Chaucer's Franklin," Gerould takes issue with the definition of the word franklin as it appears in the N.E.D.: "A freeholder; in 14-15th c. the designation of a class of landowners, of free but not noble birth, and ranking next below the gentry."

[51] The first is from the Red Book of the Exchequer, ed. H. Hall, the second from the Rotuli Chartarum, ed. T. D. Hardy, quoted by Gerould 37.

franklins had little social status. When Robert of Gloucester writes disparagingly of "a simple frankelein,"[52] Gerould declares:"'Simple franklin' he is called, but, please note, in contrast to royal majesty; quite as if one should set off a member of the squirarchy against the king." This specious reasoning is found again when Gerould assesses the following verse of Robert Mannyng of Brunne:

> And gentil damysels ungyuen
> þat able to mennes companye were þryuen,—
> Squyers doughtres, and frankelayns,
> To gyve hem to knyghtes and to swayns.
> (The Story of England 6545-8, qted. in Gerould 39)

Although Gerould writes that in this reference franklins are coupled with squires (39), it seems rather that they stand in opposition here—squires' daughters will go to knights, while franklins' daughters will be wed to "swayns."

What appears to be a more telling piece of evidence regarding franklins' gentility comes from the same Robert, who in translating Pierre Langtoft's Chronicle, renders "seygnur de terrre" as "oper lorde stoute, ne fraunkelyn of toun." The phrasing may indicate that franklins were equivalent to lords; on the other hand, it could equally well indicate that Robert felt that wealthy freeholders, along with "stoute" lords, should be included as an

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[52]The lines are:

> Vor wel may a simple frankelein. in miseise him so bringe.
> Of lute lond wanne þer biuel. such cas of an kinge.
> (Metrical Chronicle 821-2, qted. in Gerould 38).

additional class who would not "tille holy kirke. . . give tenenement, rent no lond."[53]

Gerould cites the three instances where the word *franklin* appears in Piers Ploughman as good evidence that "franklins were not only freeman, but they were gentlemen" (41). An examination of these examples proves only that they were indeed free. In the first example, franklins as freemen are simply opposed to "bondmen":

> For shold no clerk be crouned. bote yf he ycome were
> Of franklins and freemen. and of folke ywedde
> Bondmen and bastardes. and beggars children,
> Thuse by-longeth to labour. . .
> (Ed. Skeat. C Text, vi 63-67, qted. in Gerould 41)

There are no grounds for Gerould's conclusion that "the whole implication. . .is that franklins are gentlefolk" (40-41). Gerould glosses over his second example, writing that "no satisfactory conclusion can be drawn. . . . It is hard to tell whether the franklin is here taken as an example of high or low" (41). On the contrary, it seems very clear that franklins are here equated unequivocally with felons:

> For thauh the fader be a frankelayne. and for a
> felon be hanged,
> The heritage that the air sholde have. ys at the
> Kynges wille.
> (Ed. Skeat. C Text xi 240-1, qted. in Gerould 41)

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[53]Nigel Saul reads the example as Gerould does, writing that "it is significant that a franklin could be considered important enough to enjoy lordship over lands"(12-13). But because someone holds land freely does not mean he is a lord in the sense of social class.

Gerould cites the third example from Piers Ploughman as "quite conclusive" to his argument. Again, however, one finds that franklins are simply identified with freemen:

> And tho that bicome Crysten. by conseille of the baptiste,
> Aren frankeleynes, fre men. thoro fullyng that thei toke,
> And gentel-men with Iesu. for Iesus was yfulled
> And uppon Caluarye on crosse. ycrouned Kynge of Iewes.
> (Ed. Skeat. B Text xix, 32-41; C Text xxii, 32-41, qted. in Gerould 41)

The thrust of this passage is clearly moral and religious; Christianity makes all men free, and *gentil* "with Iesu"; that is, their moral and spiritual status, when they turn to God, is elevated to the figurative rank of gentleman. The writer clearly wants to emphasise freedom in Christ; to draw conclusions about social status from this passage is to misread. Furthermore, "fre men" are in apposition to *frankeleynes*; the word "gentel-men" is clearly something separate. [54]

Gerould's fifteenth-century examples only continue to prove that franklins were free and often wealthy; nowhere is there evidence that they were considered noble or *gentil*. As Nigel Saul writes, "Franklin was a word applied in a [illegible]an, often rural context to the wealthy [illegible]olders—those proud of their freedoom, but inferior to the noble blood of the knights and the lords"(13). Saul goes

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[54]M. J. Carruthers (286) and Nigel Saul (13) both see this passage in the same way as Gerould.

on to examine evidence stemming from an early fifteenth century statute stating that the social status of all those in court action involving outlawry had to be stated (13). Thus the rank of plaintiff and defendent was recorded regularly. Telling evidence emerges, even though the term *franklin* appears infrequently:

> The principal ranks noted, taking them in order, are those of knight, esquire, gentleman, yeoman, and ploughman. . . . [T]he word yeoman [denotes] those who were free though not gentle. "Yeoman" appears therefore to describe those who would once have passed as franklins. Evidence that the two words were in fact identical in meaning is afforded by a Staffordshire incident in 1414 which names 'John Jurdan, fraunkelyn of Salop, alias John son of Thomas Jurdan, of Fossebrooke, alias John Jurdan of Adbaston, yoman.' If the identity of yeoman and franklin is accepted, then we must begin to doubt whether franklins could have been regarded as gentil in the xv century.
>
> (Saul 14)

Saul's examination of a franklin's income leads him to conclude that "If a franklin. . . . was a substantial figure in his own vill [sic], where he overshadowed the peasants. . . nonetheless he was unlikely to cut much of a figure outside it" (15).

That franklins as a class aspired to higher rank, as it will be argued t[illegible]r's Franklin does, is made clear by one more piece [illegible] offered by Saul. He writes that after the B[illegible]death, with population falling and the "gradual abandonment of demesne cultivation," franklins and other small landholders had the opportunity to extend their holdings and improve their social position at the same time

as their financial one. The sumptuary law of 1363 thus tried to "prevent them and the other lower orders from aping the manner of dress of their superiors"(22). That they were "on the make" (22) is further evidenced by a reference in the late fourteenth century poem, "The Marchant and his Sone," in which "a wealthy franklin's soul is subjected to the torments of Purgatory in consequence of the evil ways in which he has amassed his earthly fortune" (22). This poem and another, "Mum and the Sothsegger" which in one part describes the "fresshe new" franklin's house, come as Saul goes on to say, "from the very period when the pretensions of the upwardly mobile were attracting comment, from both moralists and parliamentary petitioners"(23).

Having marshalled literary and historical evidence which suggests not only that franklins were not considered *gentil* but also that they were interested in improving their social position, one must now test that evidence against the actual description of the Franklin in the *General Prologue*. The portrait falls into three sections. The first ten lines (331-340) function as an introduction, telling us what kind of man the Franklin is; the next and largest section of the portrait is given over to an elaborate, more specific description of his household (341-354); and the final six contain a list of his administrative offices.. A close reading of each section will reveal that the portrait is not as favorable as first appears.[55]

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[55] Many critics see the Franklin's as a favorable portrait. See, for example, Carruthers 284; Phyllis Hodgson 10-11; R.

The issue of appearance is, in fact, immediately suggested by the very first line of the portrait, which tells us that the Franklin rides in the company of the Sergeant-at-Law (that is, a lawyer). Because the two ride together as companions, one might suspect that they share certain similarities. Jill Mann suggests that the Sergeant's portrait is ambiguous (90), but Robert Burlin asserts that his character emerges as "unquestionably flawed"(59). The Sergeant's portrait does seem more flawed than ambiguous, for what on the surface seem to be positive attributes are undercut at every turn. We are told that this lawyer is "discreet" and full of "reverence"(312), but in the very next line that "He semed swich, his words weren so wise"(313). He only seems to have these virtues, and note that it is his words that are wise, not he himself. That he is wealthy and has many clients is suggested by his "fees and robes"(317); and he purchases so much land that "So greet a purchasour was nowher noon:/Al was fee symple"(317-18). But a lawyer's robes were used, as Jill Mann tells us (89), to satirize his wealth, while the Sergeant's purchasing of land on his own behalf, rather than for his clients, land moreover, of which he enjoys unrestricted possession ("fee symple") indicates his desire "to become himself a landed gentleman"(Robinson, 659). The Sergeant seems, then, to be a social climber. As if to underline the satiric nature of the description, the word

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[55](cont'd) M. Lumiansky 346; Lindsay Mann 28.

"seems" appears again: "nowher so bisy a man as he ther nas/And yet he semed bisier than he was" (321-2). Finally, the superlatives attached to the Sergeant's description should arouse suspicion; having been told that he is "full riche of excellence" (311), one might recall earlier portraits where similar phraseology is used ironically; the Monk, for example, is a "fair prelaat"(209), and the Friar is "a worthy man,"; none "so vertuous" (243,251). [56] The Sergeant-at-Law is clearly a rather shady personage, for he seems to be what he is not.

Thus questions about the Franklin's character are suggested even before one fairly begins to peruse the portrait.[57] Although the description which follows is not so damning as, for example, those of the Sumonour and the Pardoner,[58] what does emerge in its first two sections is the portrait of a man who is clearly interested in wealth, material gain, and ostentation—qualities which one would expect to be associated with a man wanting to "get ahead" in the world.

The Franklin is introduced as one who takes delight in the pleasures of worldly living:

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[56]See also the descriptions in the *General Prologue* of the Shipman, "a good felawe" (395); the Doctor of Physic, a "verray parfit praktisour" (422); the Merchant,"a worthy man with alle" (283); and the Sumonour, "a bettre felawe sholde men noght fynde"(648).

[57]D.W.Robertson (274-5, 290) and Robert Burlin ("Art" 59) both see the association as important. Hereafter all references to Burlin will be to this essay.

[58]These portraits are unquestionably meant to convey condemnation, the appearance and actions of both being clearly at odds with their supposed religious affiliations (623-714). Interestingly, they, too, ride together.

Of his complexioun he was sangwyn.
Wel loved he by the morwe a sop in wyn;
To lyven in delit was evere his wone,
For he was Epicurus owene sone,
That heeld opinioun that pleyn delit
Was verray felicitee parfit.

(333-338)

His complexion is sanguine, of the four humours the most desirable,[59] but one which is, nonetheless, associated with "lechery, pride, and gaiety" (Jill Mann 156).[60] There is no indication that the Franklin is lecherous, despite the fact that in enjoying a sop of wine he resembles January, who in The Merchant's Tale indulges in a "sop of fyn claree" (1843) on his wedding night (Robertson 278). The action is indicative of greed, however (J. Mann 155), and sensuality too is clearly indicated by the Franklin's association with Epicurus. Although Jill Mann points out that "the condemnatory attitude which the comparison with Epicurus usually implies" (157) is omitted, the figurative relationship is nonetheless suggestive; the very mention of Epicurus' name would evoke connotations of one who enjoyed sensuality and luxurious living (Robinson 659).[61]

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[59] The other three are are choleric, melancholy, and phlegmatic. All are determined, according to medieval theory, by the proportion in one's body of blood, choler, black bile, and phlegm, which are in turn combinations of the four elements. See Phyllis Hodgson for a concise explanation (71).

[60] C. S. Lewis, The Discarded Image, adds that "the sanguine man's anger is easily roused but short-lived; he is a trifle peppery, but not sullen or vindictive. . . .The sanguine man is plump, cheerful, and hopeful" (171). Chaucer's Franklin is certainly hopeful.

[61] Epicurus believed that the greatest good was the absence of pain, or peace of mind. To attain this peace, one must live modestly, "avoiding excess emotional committments. . .

The Franklin is also compared to St. Julian, the patron saint of hospitality:

> An householdere, and that a greet, was he;
> Seint Julian he was in his contree.
>
> (339-40)

There is, however, no evidence, as Robertson points out (278), that the Franklin is hospitable to the poor of "his contree"; quite the opposite is, in fact, implied. Were the Franklin truly generous, one might expect this aspect of his nature to be elaborated on; instead, what immediately follows is a specification of the material delights afforded by his household:

> His breed, his ale, was alweys after oon;
> A better envyned man was nowher noon.
> Withoute bake mete was nevere his hous
> Of fissh and flessh, and that so plentevous,
> It snewed in his hous of mete and drynke,
> Of alle deyntees that men koude thynke.
> After the sondry sesons of the yeer,
> So chaunged he his mete and his soper.
> Ful many a fat patrich hadde he in muwe,
> And many a breem and many a luce in stuwe.
> Wo was his cook but if his sauce were
> Poynaunt and sharp, and redy al his geere.
> His table dormant in his halle alway
> Stood redy covered al the longe day.
>
> (341-354)

The Franklin does, indeed, seem to be an epicure. Not only

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[61](cont'd) .Excess, passion, and power all inflicted pain" (Havelock 44). Epicurus also taught that "the only avenue to knowledge was sense perception" (Havelock 44), and perhaps it is this part of his teachings combined with that regarding the seeking of pleasure that is most often remembered of Epicurus; as Robinson writes, "the philosophy of Epicurus was associated (somewhat injustly) then as now with luxurious living" (659).

does he have the finest food and drink that is to be had, but he ensures that he has always plenty on hand. Moreover, he will not tolerate a cook who cannot prepare his sauces exactly as he wishes. Jill Mann points out that this kind of description fuses two kinds of satire—estates (the subject of her book), and gluttony. She writes of the latter that "birds and fish are especially prized by the *bons viveurs*" (153), as are "baken mete" and "spicy sauces" (154). Of both kinds of satire, she writes that "Chaucer's picture of the tyrannised cook suggests not only the description of the glutton giving detailed orders for his meals, but also estates satire on the exacting demands that masters of his class make of their servants" (155). While one might not want to go so far as to suggest that the Franklin is a glutton—there is certainly no suggestion that he ought to be condemned as guilty of one of the seven deadly sins—it is obvious that his life is defined by sensuality, and equally clear, although not explicit, that he wants to impress his guests and neighbors. His house has the best wines: "a better envyned man was nowher noon" (342); his supply of food is so plenteous that in his house it snows "of mete and drynke" (345); he has all the "deyntees that men koude thynke" (346) or wish for; and he even changes his menu according to the seasons of the year (347-8). Furthermore, his table is always positioned and ready to satisfy (353-4).

A clue regarding those for whom the table stands ready is provided by the juxtaposition of this second section's

final line with the first line of the portrait's third part:

> His table dormant in his halle alway
> Stood redy covered al the longe day.
> At sessioums *ther* was he lord and sire.
> (353-55; my italics)

One is led to the speculation that his table and its fare are prepared for those whom he perceives as his equals or superiors; as Robertson suggests, "We suspect that they were available to influential men like the Sergeant, the Franklin's friends among the gentry, the sheriff, the constable, and others who could further his material interests" (278).[62]

But surely, one might say, the impressive list of the Franklin's administrative offices indicates that he is a judicious and admirable fellow: he presides over Justices of the Peace at sessions, often he has sat in Parliament as "knyght of the shire" (356), and he has been, in addition, sheriff and "contour."[63] However, Nigel Saul, D. W. Robertson, and Jill Mann suggest that these listings may point in another direction. Mann tells us that the list of occupations "links the Franklin closely with estates satire, where similar lists of legal and administrative jobs are a conventional way of introducing satire on the corruption of

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[62] Cf. also the Friar's portrait, not a particularly complimentary one, where we are told that he was "biloved and famulier. . . .With frankleyns over al in his contree" (*General Prologue* 215-6).

[63] Robertson suggests that a "contour" is a sheriff's clerk or accountant (275); Mann thinks it means lawyer in the sense of a pleader (281); Robinson gives both definitions (660).

their officers" (158). Saul and Robertson concur, both noting that corruption in holders of local office was widespread. Saul writes that "constant complaints about corruption suggest that willingness to accept local office in the xiv century sprang less from public spirit than from the knowledge that it could be made to pay" (16), and Robertson agrees: "sheriffs were very important men in their counties but . . . they had no great reputation for integrity" (276). As a member of the Commons, the Franklin at first seems to deserve prestige, and a *gentil* if not noble, background. But Robertson disabuses us of this perception as well, reminding us that a knight of the shire was not the same as a knight of the court; that he was an M.P. "does not mean that he was of noble birth, or that he was a belted knight. . . . Where social rank was concerned, men in the counties were considered to be somewhat inferior to men of equivalent ranks at Court" (277). That one's suspicions of the Franklin's gentility are not unfounded is clinched by the use of the word "worthy" in connection with the Franklin: "was nowher such a worthy vavassour" (360). As has been seen, such hyperbole is often ironic, and, given the preceding description, one is justified in suspecting our naive narrator here too.

The term *vavasour* is problematic, but it seems to mean simply a large landholder (Robinson 660). Saul writes that it "was certainly not thought by Chaucer to have any specific meaning" (19), and Robinson concurs, saying that

the term was used loosely in England and France (960). That the term is likely used in this loose sense is borne out by a footnote to Roy J. Pearcy's interesting article, which points out that the rhyme *contour/vavasour* is common in medieval lists that survey feudal rank (note 3 54). Chaucer may thus have recalled the word as convenient for a needed rhyme.[64]

R.M. Lumiansky's assessment of the Franklin's portrait in the General Prologue is that one should take what appears to be the Franklin's "industry" (346) in his holding of public office as more important to the portrayal of his character than his epicureanism, which Lumiansky sees as "play-acting" (346). This is an interesting suggestion, but it can hardly be supported by the number of lines given over to a description of each of these aspects of the portrait. Of the thirty lines, only four describe the Franklin's public duties, which are, moreover, open to question; the rest concern themselves with his love of good living. Surely even Chaucer the pilgrim, had he wanted to praise the Franklin's industry, would have given this part of his personality more emphasis. D. W. Robertson sums up aptly when he writes, "If Chaucer had wished us to admire the Franklin, he would certainly have indicated some interest in

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[64] Gerould thinks that the word illustrates the Franklin's gentility (48-53). His reasoning is similar to that applied to franklins. For example, he explains an unfavorable reference to *vavasours* in Sir Ferumbras, by suggesting that the speaker is "talking foolishly. . . .There is nothing here to upset the notion elsewhere obtained that a vavasour was a person of social distinction" (52).

his part in justice; instead, he emphasises a consuming desire for self-indulgence of a kind that only wealth can bring" (278).

One might suggest that the Franklin's richly-laden table is indicative only of his participation in a tradition which places great emphasis on hospitality. The importance in the Middle Ages of being a good host by providing ample food and drink is well described by William Mead and Henry Harder. Mead, drawing on historical sources such as medieval cookbooks[65] and manuscripts describing actual medieval feasts, vividly presents the "conspicuous consumption" (Veblen 68ff.) that the Franklin exemplifies. Vast amounts of food would be presented at feasts celebrating, for example, coronations or installations of archbishops. Mead reproduces a partial description of the menu at the installation of Archbishop Neville in 1467:

> 300 quarters of wheat, 300 tuns of ale, 100 tuns of wine, 1 pipe of hippocras, 104 oxen, 6 wild bulls, 1,000 sheep, 304 calves, 304 'porkes,' 400 swans, 2,000 geese, 1,000 capons, 2,000 pigs, 104 peacocks, besides over 13,500 birds. . . .In addition there were stags, bucks, and roes. . . .1,500 hot pasties of venison, 608 pikes and breams, 12 porpoises and seals, besides 13,000 dishes of jelly, cold baked tarts, hot and cold custards. . . .
>
> (Mead 33).

The banquet would be served with all the ceremony appropriate, so that, as Mead remarks, "the food is almost

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[65]For example, The Forme of Cury, The Babees Book, and Two Fifteenth Century Cookbooks; these and other cookbooks are described fully in Mead 50.

lost sight of amidst the stately ceremony with which it is presented at the table" (150-1).

Such ceremony might also have symbolic significance. Henry Harder's essay on the elaborate feasts described in the Alliterative Morte Arthure illustrates the often "chivalric, political, and religious significance" (56) of banquets. Moral implications are also involved in the contrast in the Morte between Arthur's banquet at Carlisle and that later at Vertenonne; as the king declines "in the justice of his war and its conduct, so does the imitation of heavenly decorum at his banquets decline" (61).

There are clear moral implications in the Franklin's portrait which point to his being less a part of the hospitable tradition and more representative of the self-indulgent and social climbing *parvenu*. The Franklin is always ready for an elaborate feast, probably, as has been suggested, to entertain those who can help him get ahead; moreover, his tables are always up and ready for such an event. In contrast, Mead describes the everyday meals of even the nobility as very often quite simple: "The breakfasts in the royal household would not now be regarded as extravagent. . .and they make a striking contrast with the lavish display at feasts" (114). Moreover, Mead tells us, the trestle tables at the actual feasts were temporary; they were usually removed when the meal was over.

Thus the Franklin's portrait is far from ideal. While one is not led to judge him harshly, it is nonetheless clear

that the Franklin's example is not one to emulate. His portrait, in combination with what can be gleaned of his historical social position, is one of a man concerned with material goods; one who very likely hopes that his administrative ability combined with, or added to, his wealth will gain him acceptance into the ranks of the gentry. He is not a gentleman, but he aspires to be seen as such. That appearance is important to him is clear from his portrait, and from the dichotomy between appearance and reality that was observed in the world of his tale.

There is but one facet of the tale remaining to be examined, and this consists in the Franklin's own words--those which precede, and those which intrude into, his tale. Of course, the entire tale is told in the Franklin's words, but there are a number of places within it where the Franklin interrupts himself, as it were, in order to point the way in which he wishes his words to be interpreted. The audience is thus constantly aware of the Franklin as the tale's teller; and that he is manipulating their reactions will be clear with an examination of some of his comments.[66] Kenneth Kee offers an interesting and fruitful approach to this aspect of *The Franklin's Tale*, postulating that not only does the Franklin wish to manipulate the

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[66]A number of critics have noted this feature of the tale. See especially Kenneth Kee 5. See also Burlin, who writes: "The Franklin seems almost uncomfortably conscious of the way in which he is telling the tale. . . ." (61). James Sledd, too, notes that there are "constant reminders of his own presence" (45), and Robert Payne that "the manner of the telling is strangely artificial" (126).

"reaction of his fellow pilgrims to his tale of the triumph of *gentillesse*" (5), but also that he wishes to "distract audience attention at those points where serious moral questions arise from the action of the tale"(7). But the Franklin is unaware of the moral issues raised by his tale; he interjects with a comment or suggests that all will be well despite Arveragus' response to Dorigen's plight, he is trying to shape his material into a form interpretable by his audience as indicative of *gentillesse*.

The Franklin's intention is immediately obvious. Before his tale even begins, his interest in *gentillesse* is evinced by the frequency with which he refers to it and like words in his speech to the Squire. The comparison here of his own son's behavior with that of the Squire makes clear his linking of *gentillesse* with social station:

> And he hath levere talken with a page
> Than to comune with any gentil wight
> Where he myghte lerne gentillesse aright.
>
> (692-4)

His son is dissolute; he is more interested in playing at dice and spending his father's money (690-1) than he is in learning *gentil* behaviour. It is difficult to know whether the Franklin is more concerned with his son's future or with that of his own finances, for he has expressed his annoyance with his progeny's habits in highly material terms:

I hadde levere than twenty pound worth lond,
Though it right now were fallen in myn hond,
He were a man of swich discrecioun.

Although he notes immediately that *gentillesse* has nothing to do with social station, "Fy on possessioun/But if a man be vertuous withal!"(686-7);[67] his words are belied by the manner in which he has expressed his desire for his son's reform. Giving up a large amount of land, worth a great deal of money, is the greatest sacrifice the Franklin can think of, and the comparison is thus the most effective means he knows of to illustrate his hopes for his son. That Harry Bailly sees through the [illegible] been noted; and the Franklin replies graciously: "I prey yow, haveth me nat in desdayn"(700). He is not interested in quarrelling at this point, wanting nothing to mar the tale whose purpose he has been preparing for, a purpose to which he returns in his Prologue.[68]

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[67]This is a common sentiment, although not always observed. Chaucer certainly believed it to be true; cf. *The Parson's Tale* 461-75; and his poem "Gentilesse." The Wife of Bath expresses similar sentiments 1146-64.

[68]Robertson has a slightly different, and no more complimentary, interpretation: "To be virtuous (and hence *gentil*) from the Franklin's point of view is to keep and increase one's possessions"(279). Burlin, too, sees these terms as uncomplimentary: "The precision and the immediacy with which he envisions the twenty pound worth of land falling at that moment into his hand expose him as one more at ease when exchange takes the tangible form of land or currency than with the exchange of ideas or mere words, where values are more difficult to ascertain"(57).

Some scholars[69] have approached their study of *The Franklin's Tale* by pointing out the great many rhetorical devices employed in the Franklin's twenty-line prologue. They, along with others who do not always take a rhetorical approach, have correctly perceived a dichotomy between the Franklin's well-known disclaimer, "I am a burel man. . . . Have me excused of my rude speche" (716,718), and the ornate language in which the Prologue is couched. Even as the Franklin disclaims any knowledge of rhetoric, he seems to employ it, and there is thus a clear contrast between the form of his speech and its subject matter. Yet one need not turn to the rhetoric books to see clearly this distinction. J.J. Murphy[70] and Stephen Knight both warn that

> every person who turns away from the basic sentence pattern of English who attempts something more than the mere transmission of information, makes use of the complex verbal devices that the rhetoricians analyze with such skill.
>
> (Knight 15)

substantially less than what has been thought. In his Prologue, the Franklin is, indeed, turning away from plain, simple speech; even as he protests his ignorance of ornate

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[69] For example, Manly and Harrison.

[70] Murphy writes: "There are some figures which any writer will use unconsciously" ("New Look" 15). Murphy's article is a substantial and important counter to earlier articles regarding Chaucer and rhetoric; he argues that Chaucer's knowledge of rhetoric was substantially less than what has been thought. Chaucer could easily, he says, have "learnt most of them [i.e. figures of rhetoric] from the ordinary grammar texts or from his French models, without ever resorting to rhetorical treatises or the medieval manuals" (15).

words and phrases, he expresses himself in highly figurative language:

> I sleep nevere on the Mount of Pernaso,
> Ne lerned Marcus Tullius Scithero.
> Colours ne knowe I none, withouten drede,
> But swiche colours as growen in the mede,
> Or elles swiche as men dye or peynte.
> Colours of rethoryk been to me queynte;
> My spirit feeleth noght of swich mateere.
>
> (721-27)

The contrast between subject and form is clear here. The Franklin, contrary to his characterization of himself as "burel," is actually trying to demonstrate an acquaintance with rhetorical colors. By drawing attention to his ostensible ignorance, the Franklin is trying to pass himself off as modest,[71] yet learned, as one of *gentil* blood might do. One must ask, however, what the Franklin might actually have known of rhetoric. J. J. Murphy has been cited as maintaining that what we today often see as the medieval use of rhetoric is, rather, medieval grammar, and his claim is substantiated by Ernst Curtius and C. S. Baldwin. They point out that the word *grammar* had a wider range of meaning than it does now, Curtius explaining that by grammar even the classical writers meant "the art of reading and writing" (42), and Baldwin defining grammar as including "not only metric and some of the figures of speech, but a certain induction into poetry" (901).[72] Murphy concurs:

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[71]The "Modesty Prologue" was a common literary device; see Robinson 722 and Curtius 83-85.

[72]Both Curtius (42) and Murphy, in Rhetoric in the Middle Ages (138), point out, too, that grammar was regarded as the

> [Grammar] came to include a wide variety of linguistic subject matters, including not only syntax but metrics, rhythmics, modes of signification, and such "rhetorical" matters as the arrangement of parts of a discourse.
>
> (Murphy, Rhetoric 138)

Thus Priscian and Donatus, the two writers whose handbooks held sway until 1200, and those who wrote new texts in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries[73] are writers of grammatical and not rhetorical texts.

The foregoing is not meant to suggest that the Middle Ages knew nothing of classical rhetoric. They were familiar with Cicero, whose de Inventione was highly regarded, and with the ad Herennium, which for centuries was attributed to Cicero.[74] But as Robert Bolgar explains in The Classical Heritage, by the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries interest in acquiring new knowledge of the classics had declined; library catalogues, for example, ceased to show an increase in their acquisition of classical texts (261), and even the "strongholds" (222) at Orleans and Toulouse where grammar had been the main subject of study were disappearing as early as the end of the thirteenth century (222). By Chaucer's time, Bolgar goes on to say, men of letters were

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[72](cont'd) most important of the Seven Liberal Arts (Grammar, Dialectic, Rhetoric, Music, Astronomy, Geometry, and Mathematics).

[73]Matthew de Vendome (1175), Geoffrey de Vinsauf (1208-13), Gervase of Melkley (1213-16), and John of Garland (1229); See Murphy, Rhetoric 138.

[74]The Middle Ages termed Cicero's de Inventione as *rhetorica primus* or *rhetorica vetus*, the ad Herennium as *rhetorica secunda* (Murphy, Rhetoric 10,18).

"building on ancient knowledge rather than digging more deeply into classical sources" (261), and the knowledge of Cicero "passed into the general stock of knowledge familiar to educated men" ("Teaching of Rhetoric" 84). The study of rhetoric itself was now "relatively neglected, but knowledge of it reache[d] a wider public through a number of channels" ("Teaching" 85). Thus the Franklin might be expected to have a very general knowledge of rhetoric, but nothing as [redacted] as he purports to have by his use of Cicero's full n[redacted] and his specification of his "colours" as those of rhetoric. These colors might easily have been gleaned from the grammar books, as Murphy shows in his article; and that they probably were is substantiated again by Bolgar, who, writing of the "neglect of rhetoric and literature in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries" (83), asserts that

> Rhetoric was demoted to the initial stage of the school course, and in most places it was taught alongside grammar only to young boys. Such literary schools as survived. . . dragged out a shadowy half-life, producing little of note.
>
> ("Teaching" 83)

The Franklin's presentation of himself is part of the illusion of the tale. Wanting to reassure the host—perhaps mindful of Harry's scornful remark—and his audience that he is a plain-spoken man who will not overreach himself, he nonetheless wishes to associate himself with the rhetorical tradition. By making the form of his words erudite, he hopes to convey the impression that he deserves to be considered

gentil. Yet, he wants to present himself humbly, so that his real purpose will not be suspected: that is, to set himself up as one who knows all about *gentillesse*, whose tale illustrates this virtue, and who is thus fit to be considered *gentil*. Yet the difference between the substance of his words and their form betrays him; he wants to appear in one light, but we see him in quite another. Moreover, he gives himself away in his very first line; his tale will be one involving those "olde *gentil* Britouns"(709, italics mine).

The Franklin's purpose is clear, then, even before his tale begins. Equally obvious is his desire to point out, in what he thinks are subtle ways, just how well his tale illustrates true *gentillesse*. There are a number of instances wherein the Franklin's attempts to manipulate both his subject matter and his audience can be seen; in each the Franklin interjects or shapes his material to draw attention to his characters' nobility and *gentillesse*. The examples come at crucial points in the text: at its beginning, where the Franklin's disquisition on love and "pacience" (751-98) attempts to reinterpret [illegible] at the point where Dorigen makes [illegible] promise to Aurelius; near the middle, where the Orleans clerk contrives his illusion; close to the end, where Arveragus responds to the plight caused by this illusion; and at the tale's end, where Aurelius admits his knowledge of Dorigen's ignorance of magic, and the Franklin triumphantly poses his *question*

d'amour. In each of these instances, the effect of the Franklin's narrative is different from his purpose; an examination of each will illustrate his attempts and failure to infuse his tale with *gentillesse*.

The Franklin's encomium on love and *pacience*, indeed, the entire first part of the tale (to 798), is designed to permeate the tale from its beginning with the quality of *gentillesse*. By linking nobility firmly with gentility, the Franklin is, of course, contradicting his earlier sentiment-"Fy on possessioun"-and revealing his true opinion on the subject.

Dorigen and Arveragus are presented at the tale's beginning as the noblest of lovers, typifying the courtly relationships found in romance. The knight serves his lady, suffering "wo," "peyne," and "destresse" before she, taking pity on him for his "worthynesse" and "obeysaunce," agrees to have him for her husband (737-9). To this point, all has been conventional. The marriage itself, however, is not. Each, in the marriage vow, promises to relinquish the power to which he or she is entitled; the lady, sovereign in love, will obey her husband, as usually occurs in medieval marriage; but he vows to treat her as though she were still a courtly lady:

> Of his free wyl he swoor hire as a knyght
> That nevere in al his lyf he, day ne nyght,
> Ne sholde upon hym take no maistrie.
>
> (745-7).

The Franklin's primary purpose here is not to show how courtly love and marriage can be happily combined; rather, he wishes to illustrate, through the unusual arrangement between Dorigen and Arveragus, true *gentillesse*. He ensures that we see this virtue as the motivating factor in the vows the two make:

> She seyde, "Sire, sith of youre gentillesse
> Ye profre me to have so large a reyne,
> Ne wolde nevere God bitwixe us tweyne.
>
> (754-6)

Gentillesse is here applied clearly to both; we are told that the knight is *gentil*; and we infer that the lady is also, since she can so aptly recognize the quality in him. Of course, the implication of the entire description is one of *gentillesse*; Dorigen comes of "heigh kynrede" (735), while Arveragus seems the perfect knight (737-40).

Yet there are inconsistencies in and a certain vagueness about these vows which the Franklin apparently cannot see. Not the least of these inconsistencies is Arveragus' determination to maintain in public the "name of soverayntee. . .for shame of his degree" (751-52). Of course, a knight must appear to have the "maistrye"; but, if Arveragus is secure in his *gentillity*, he need not concern himself with outward appearance. After all, the Franklin has stated earlier his belief that virtue does not reside in "possessioun" nor, presumably, in appearance. Yet Arveragus is clearly interested in appearance. If, on the other hand,

we are to see his maintenance of knightly "maistrie" as admirable, how are we to judge his relinquishing of it in his marriage vows? The Franklin wants us to admire the noble pair, but he seems not to have considered all the implications of what they vow.[75]

It must also be noted that such an ostensibly equal marriage would be seen in Chaucer's day as a highly unusual one. Many critics have criticized the Franklin and/or his characters for such an arrangement,[76] and while one might not want to judge so harshly, one can question the Franklin's assertion that this kind of marriage will allow Dorigen and Arveragus to "lede the moore in blisse hir lyves"(744). Doctrine states that it is precisely to avoid conflict that men must be head of the household; not only was man created first, and woman from his side, but woman caused the Fall because of her weakness.[77] The Franklin again cannot see the implications of his words because he is determined to equate what is ostensibly the *gentilesse* of Dorigen and Arveragus with "blisse" and happiness.

To reinforce what he thinks has been an illustration of perfect gentility and nobility, the Franklin launches into a

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[75] One of the most striking inconsistencies in the tale comes as a result of these vows; Arveragus has promised not to exercise his husbandly power over Dorigen, yet he does just that when he sends her to Aurelius.

[76] Especially Robertson 281-84). See also Paul Edward Gray 216-7; Russell Peck 267; and Gerhard Joseph 22-3.

[77] Cf. *The Parson's Tale*: "A man is heved of a womman; algate by ordinaunce it sholde be so" (921); God "ne made hire nat of the heved of Adam, for she sholde nat clayme to greet lorshipe./For ther as the womman hath the maistrie, she maketh much desray"(925-6).

rather long discussion of two important components of *gentilesse*: love and patience, or moderation. Many critics have taken the discussion at face value[78] and, indeed, were it removed from its context, the words would be a fair assessment of what most today consider the ideal relationship. But while the Franklin is ostensibly speaking of love and marriage, his real purpose is to reinforce the *gentilesse* he is concerned to portray. Through the *gentilesse* of Dorigen and Arveragus, "maistrye" in their marriage appears to have been eliminated. Thus the Franklin begins:

> . . .freendes everych oother moot obeye,
> If they wol longe holden compaignye.
> Love wol nat been constreyned by maistrye.
> (762-64)

Having firmly linked equality with gentility, the Franklin moves on to treat of "pacience" and "temperaunce":

> Pacience is an heigh vertu, certeyn,
> For it venquysseth, as thise clerkes seyn,
> Thinges that rigour sholde nevere atteyne.
> * * * *
> After the tyme moste be temperaunce
> To every wight that kan on governaunce.
> And therfore hath this wise, worthy knyght,
> To lyve in ese, suffrance hire bihight,
> And she to hym ful wisly gan to swere
> That nevere sholde ther be defaute in her.
> (773-5;785-90)

It seems clear that *gentilesse* is the real subject of the

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[78]Notably Kittredge 213; For a more recent restatement of the traditional view, see Gertrude White 459.

Franklin's words here. The relationship between Dorigen and Arveragus has been dealt with in such a way as to magnify their gentility, their vows of equality having been presented as the highest form of this virtue; and the encomium following closely, both reiterates and encompasses other features of *gentillesse*. One irony, of course, is that none of the Franklin's characters will exhibit the qualities he outlines here; another is that, satisfied with his summation, he cannot see that its chances of working are slim.[79]

His self-satisfaction is further indicated by the Franklin's rather confusing summation of both his theory and its application:

> Heere may men seen an humble, wys accord;
> Thus hath she take hir servant and hir lord,-
> Servant in love, and lord in mariage.
> Thanne was he bothe in lordshipe and servage.
> 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.
>
> (791-98)

The lines, on cursory inspection, sound impressive, but a closer examination reveals them as contradictory, as if the Franklin, in trying to explain himself clearly, becomes

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[79] Robertson takes particular exception to the line "freendes everych oother moote obeye" (762), and terms the arrangement "ridiculous. . .in terms of actual practise. If Friend A desires one thing, but realizes that Friend B desires the other, what are friendly A and B to do?. . . .or [what] if A commands B to do one thing. . .and B commands A to do something else?"(281). Indeed, with Arveragus' command to Dorigen, the system does break down.

more, instead of less, confused.[80] He tries to end, for example, at l. 793, but feels compelled to explain how one can be "servant in love and lord in mariage." Love and marriage cannot be seen as mutually exclusive according to the terms set up by the Franklin at the tale's beginning, nor, then, can the words "servant" and "lord." Arveragus is both "in lordshipe and servage" we are told in the next line; but, not wanting to leave Arveragus in "servage," the Franklin must continue his explanations. The difficulties of expression are compounded until he concludes with a line that sounds impressive but which is just as ambiguous. To which "lawe of love" is he referring? That which he had called upon earlier: "Love wol not been constreyned by maistry"? If so, this law does not fit well in context with terms like "lordshipe" and "servage." If he is referring to another law, he does not specify, but one can be safe in assuming it is not God's law, for doctrine, as pointed out earlier, regulates that the husband is head of the wife. One might sum up by agreeing with Knight, who remarks of these final lines that they are "a truly Polonius-like piece of quibbling" (p.20).

The Franklin has set up the terms of his tale which he is determined will be understood as he wishes it to be. Having ostensibly presented a theory and an example of true

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[80]These lines could be seen as an example of the medieval love of paradox, yet it is nonetheless clear that the Franklin is struggling to resolve the paradoxical terms he is using. Having made much of the unusual situation he has set up, he must try to reconcile the concepts of "lorshipe" and "servage" within the context of marriage.

gentility, he proceeds to work out these terms. When Arveragus departs to pursue his knightly duties in England, Dorigen is filled with grief. Again, the Franklin ensures that we see Dorigen as entirely noble:

> For his absence wepeth she and siketh,
> As doon thise noble wyves whan hem liketh.
> She moorneth, waketh, wayleth, fasteth, pleyneth.
> (817-9)

The highly figurative style which the narrator uses to describe her behavior[81] and to formulate her two complaints[82] reflects her noble manners, which the Franklin is at pains to illustrate when she makes her rash promise to Aurelius. The Franklin is in a difficult position. He has depicted Dorigen as both a noble lady and a loving wife. When Aurelius approaches her, her response must be consistent with both facets of her portrayal. She must behave nobly and gentilly, taking pity on Aurelius,[83] but she cannot be seen to be untrue to her solemn vows of

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[81] Knight writes: "to have five verbs banked up in this way is clearly extreme; the excesses of Dorigen's grief are well-suggested" (20-21).

[82] See for rhetorical analysis the articles by Donald Baker, Germaine Dempster, Gerald Morgan, and James Sledd. The main point of contention regarding Dorigen's second complaint centres largely on its appropriateness in style to the tale and/or to the Franklin. One wonders if the Franklin would be familiar with these exempla; if so, this complaint can be seen as his attempt to reinforce Dorigen's nobility, much as he did earlier (cf. 816-9). If the Franklin is unfamiliar with the rhetorical complaint, something indicated by the discussion of rhetoric above, one must then see the passage as Chaucer's intervention, as it were, illustrating the impropriety of Dorigen's behavior at this point.

[83] Charles Owen sees Dorigen's promise as an "expression of *gentillesse* in its superficial sense" (254).

marriage that were solidified by this same gentility. Thus the Franklin has her make her promise "in pley" (988); this stratagem should solve the dilemma. After all, the promise is prefaced and followed by two strong rejections of Aurelius' suit:"Ne shal I nevere been untrewe wyf"(984); "Lat swich folies out of youre herte slyde"(1002). But again, the Franklin's effort has the wrong effect; by ensuring that Dorigen is seen to make her promise "in pley" he has raised the question of obligation: why should Dorigen be compelled to keep a promise that was obviously not meant to be taken seriously?

The Franklin is in a similar position when he is faced with the rocks' illusory disappearance. There are two points to be made regarding the Franklin's lengthy exposition of the clerk's machinations and his own denigratory words, an example of which follows:

> This is to seye, to maken illusioun,
> By swich an apparence or jogelrye—
> I ne kan no termes of astrologye—
> * * *
> So atte laste he hath his tyme yfounde
> To maken his japes and his wrecchednesse
> Of swich a supersticious cursednesse.
> His tables Tolletanes forth he brought,
> Ful wel corrected, ne ther lakked nought,
> Neither Ptis collect ne his expans yeeris,
> Ne his rootes, ne his othere geeris,
> As been his centris and his argumentz
> And his proporcioneles convenientz
> For his equacions in every thyng.
> * * *
> And knew also his othere observaunces
> For swiche illusiouns and swiche meschaunces

> As hethen folk useden in thilke dayes.
> For which no lenger maked he delayes,
> But thurgh his magik, for a wyke or tweye,
> It semed that alle the rokkes were aweye.
> (1264-6; 1270-9; 1291-6)

First, it seems clear that the Franklin himself knows the disappearance to be only an illusion, as evinced by the final line of the quotation above. Further evidence for the Franklin's knowledge comes when we hear of Aurelius' words to the clerk about Dorigen's ignorance of magic: "She nevere erst hadde herd speke of *apparence*" (1602, italics mine). For the Franklin's characters to work out their exemplifications of *gentillesse*, however, and for his audience to see the tale as he wishes, he must detail the clerk's magic, so that it will seem that he has performed his duty.[84] The Franklin seems not to recognize that he is undercutting the effectiveness of his own illusion by denigrating astrology—yet he obviously feels compelled to do so, if one is to judge by the number of instances in which he does.[85]

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[84]Thus the marvellous occurrences at the clerk's home. Anthony Luengo and L. H. Loomis ("Secular Dramatics") both suggest that the clerk may cleverly be using machinery here to create an illusion for Aurelius and his brother (see 1189-1204). If so, the theme of appearance and reality is clear in another way—this clerk is perpetrating a fraud and is thus to be condemned.

[85]Kenneth Kee makes a similar point: "The Franklin is using a verbal sleight of hand to create the illusion for the sake of the plausibility of his story that the subtle Orleans scholar really could create *his* illusion that the rocks along the coast had disappeared" (6). Kee stops short of suggesting, however, that the Franklin knows that the clerk does not fulfill his part of the bargain.

The lines in the quotation above are not the only place where the Franklin gives vent to what seem to be strong feelings about astrology. Describing the clerk's book, which Aurelius' brother remembers from his days as a student in Orleans, the Franklin says that it

> . . .spak muchel of the operaciouns
> Touchynge the eighte and twenty mansiouns
> That longen to the moone, and swich folye
> As in oure dayes is nat worth a flye,—
> For hooly chirches feith in our bileve
> Ne suffreth noon illusioun us to greve.
>
> (1129-34)

Herein lies the second point about the Franklin's treatment of this supposed magical occurrence. He seems uncomfortable about being associated with the clerk's machinations, perhaps because the status of astrology was, in the fourteenth century, uncertain. It was no longer thundered against, as it had been earlier by the Church Fathers (Wedel 66), in fact, it was accepted as a science (Wedel 65). Walter Clyde Curry describes at length how astrology was fundamental to medieval medicine (7ff.), and others show that luminaries like Roger Bacon, Boccaccio, and Thomas Aquinas accepted it as well.[86] But there were important provisos. Astrology for the purpose of divination (judicial astrology) was condemned, as it was when proponents maintained that it governed the course of human affairs—it was not to supersede the doctrine of human free will.[87]

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[86]See, for example, Chauncey Wood 38; J.S.P. Tatlock 24; and Wedel 67.

[87]See Lewis, Image 104; and Tatlock 26. For a discussion of

Furthermore, there was a strong feeling that astrological magic or necromancy (Tatlock 30) was both dangerous and heretical.[88] Roger Bacon condemned evil magic and "false mathematicians" who

> "defile their studies in regard to the heavenly bodies by circles and figures. . . .Moreover, they have recourse to fraud in their acts, perpetrated by means of collusion, darkness, fraudulent instruments, sleight of hand, in which they know there is deception..."
>
> (qted. by Luengo 3)

Moreover, the University of Paris in 1398 "denounce[d] the use of magic in all forms" (Wedel 71).

The Franklin, then, may feel defensive about astrology for two reasons. First, he knows that he himself is perpetrating a fraud--the clerk does not really make the rocks disappear, yet the Franklin must make it appear as though he succeeds. Second, he may well not wish to be associated with the art of astrology,[89] particularly this kind of astrological magic. The Franklin's sceptical and harsh comments about the art may well arise from a desire to distance himself in his audience's eyes from the art of astrology, yet his is a poor rhetorical strategy for it

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[87](cont'd) the debate on free will, predestination, and astrology, and the problems inherent in any such discussion, see Wood 21-50.

[88]See also Lewis, who explains that the church fought "against the lucrative, and politically undesirable practise of astrologically grounded predictions" and "against practises that might seem to imply or encourage the worship of planets" (Image 103).

[89]Kee makes this point: "There is something not quite genteel for someone with aspirations to gentility to possess more than a nodding acquaintance with that art" (7).

undercuts the effectiveness of the very illusion he is laboring to create.

The inconsistencies and contradictions continue throughout. Aurelius' words to the clerk have been mentioned in connection with the Franklin's awareness of the rocks' illusory disappearance; and they also work in another way to discredit the Franklin. He clearly wants us to see Aurelius as an admirable fellow, portraying him as a courteous love-stricken young squire who exhibits all the attributes of a courtly lover. For Aurelius' *gentillesse* to be genuine and for the tale to work, it is imperative that we see him as admirable. Yet, as was discussed in Chapter Three, his behavior and attitude towards Dorigen is close to despicable when we see him eager to accept her although he knows that the rocks are not really gone; he should know that he has not fulfilled the terms of the bargain.

It is with Arveragus' response to Dorigen's plight, however, that one can see the clearest illustration of the Franklin's manipulation of his material. Roy Pearcy remarks that this instance "reveals the narrator in his role as controller of the fictional world of his creation"(52). As mentioned earlier, Kee suggests that the Franklin is here attempting to deflect moral questions that the audience might well raise at this point (7), but more important is the illustration of the Franklin's determination that the tale be seen as an exhibition of *gentillesse*. After Arveragus forbids his wife "up peyne of deeth" (1481) ever to mention

"this aventure" (1483) to anyone, and sends her off to Aurelius, the Franklin interrupts:

> Paraventure an heep of yow, ywis,
> Wol holden hym a lewed man in this
> That he wol putte his wyf in jupartie.
> Herkneth the tale er ye upon hire crie.
> She may have bettre fortune than you semeth;
> And whan that ye han herd the tale, demeth.
>
> (1493-8)

Many critics see these remarks as justification for Arveragus'— action (the Franklin obviously thinks these remarks justify Arveragus); he, holding on to "trouthe," surrenders his honor for the sake of this higher value. That he will be rewarded for doing so is the assurance of these lines. But as D.W. Robertson points out, Arveragus can properly have no way of knowing that all will turn out well, and his tears—"with that word he brast anon to wepe" (1480)—are certainly no indication that he knows Dorigen will escape her plight (note 6 378). Clearly, the Franklin detects that his audience might feel uneasy at this point, not because he is concerned that the moral issue bothers them, but because he does not want them to see Arveragus as "lewed"—distinctly un-*gentil*. He must, by faulty logic, assure them that Arveragus is *gentil* because everything will work out happily. The *gentillesse* of each character, the *gentillesse* which has been so constantly emphasised throughout the tale, will now be drawn upon to allow its happy conclusion.

And thus, as has been seen, each character will give up something that is not truly his to begin with; each of them relinquishes what he does not deserve. That the Franklin is unaware of the inconsistencies and contradictions in his tale is made clear by his final lines:

> Lordynges, this question, thanne, wol I aske now,
> Which was the mooste fre, as thynketh yow?
> (1621-2)

The Franklin has been taken in by his own illusion. Because he has been so eager to appear *gentil* himself, and because he has emphasised the gentility of his characters, he has failed to take into account the ramifications of his own words. No one has behaved *gentilly* or nobly here, and the Franklin's words have served to point out, rather than to smooth over, any discrepancies. He has raised more problems than he has solved, and herein lies the final irony behind his *demande d'amour*. It appears to be a question to be taken lightly, in the spirit of the tale, yet it ignores the other, more serious, questions that have been raised. The Franklin cannot see reality any more than can his characters. His pretensions to social status and gentility are thus futile; not only is his status below that of the noble and *gentil*, but he himself is unworthy. His notions of *gentilesse* are as imperfect as the creation of which Dorigen complains, and as illusory as the disappearance of the rocks which are a part of it.

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