

Character and Circumstance in *The Franklin's Tale*

DIANE SPEED

*The Franklin's Tale*¹ tells a pleasant and optimistic story, but the meaning of the tale as a whole has proved as elusive as that of any of *The Canterbury Tales*. This paper proposes a reading of the tale based on the Franklin's statement of intention in his prologue, and makes an attempt to show that problems experienced in understanding the tale are a reflection of its problematic nature.

The Franklin's Prologue clearly falls into two sections. In the first section (709-15) the Franklin announces that he will be re-telling a Breton lay, an adventure story in a literary form favoured by noble Bretons in former times. In the second section (716-28) he apologizes in advance for his rendering of this material, saying that it will have to be plain and simple because he has never studied the art of rhetoric. These statements raise certain expectations about the tale to follow.

The first expectation is that the tale will be related in genre to the group of romances appearing in English from the early fourteenth century which explicitly claim to be derived from Breton lays. None of the old Breton lays has survived, although they are referred to quite often in medieval literature; the earliest poems which claim to be derived from them were written in the latter part of the twelfth century in French, some of them composed by Marie de France, others anonymous. On the evidence of these French and English poems, Chaucer would probably have thought of the Breton lay as a short narrative set in the remote Celtic past, usually in Brittany, possibly having a supernatural element, and possibly imbuing some topographical feature with special significance; the main characters would be nobly born, and the lay would deal with a particular episode in their lives; the main concern of the story would be love, with the focus of attention being more on the success or failure of that love than on any moral implications it might have for the characters or the audience. The prologue raises the expectation that the characters, setting, and plot of the tale will resemble those of the 'imitation' Breton lay; and the story of Arveragus, Dorigen, and Aurelius, at least on the face of it, would appear amenable to presentation in this genre.²

The identification of an actual source for the tale, it should be noted, remains uncertain. Amongst the known analogues, Boccaccio's version

in *Filocolo* ('Labour of love'), 4.31-34, is regarded as the closest to Chaucer's, although there are still numerous differences between them in both narrative detail and attitude. Chaucer may have worked from Boccaccio's tale, introducing changes which would bring it into line with the genre of the Breton lay as well as those which would further place it in the context of *The Canterbury Tales*, but it is also possible that he knew another version, now lost, which already contained more of the features of *The Franklin's Tale*.³

The second expectation raised by the prologue is that the tale will proceed in such a way that the audience will be made aware of how plain the presentation is. The very manner in which the Franklin speaks here, however, belies the surface meaning of his words. His verbal style is sophisticated and rich in rhetoric, and his statement as a whole must be seen as an instance of false modesty, itself a rhetorical figure, *diminutio*.⁴ The actual expectation raised by the latter part of the prologue, then, is that the tale will be recounted in a clever way, with the narrative manipulated in order to highlight some matters rather than others and to look at events from particular points of view. The audience should be alert to such manipulation on the part of the narrator and ready to follow the lines of thought he will lay out.⁵

The duplex message of the prologue is thus a contradiction in terms: a romantic fairytale is to be presented as an intellectual exercise. The rest of this paper explores some ways in which the challenge of this seemingly impossible literary task is taken up. The events of the tale, it will be argued, are presented as a series of problems, and these are worked out in terms of the logical and generic possibilities of the roles played by the characters at different stages and the circumstances in which they occur.

The tale opens with the introduction of Arveragus and Dorigen, and an account of the relationship formed by them. To start with, they are referred to merely as 'a knyght' (730) and 'a lady' (731); and the fact that their particular identities are not revealed until later (808 and 815, respectively) suggests that they are primarily types of character,⁶ and raises the expectation that their functions will be determined in accordance with typical patterns. Their relationship is presented in a sequence of two stages: courtship and marriage.

As the main characters of a Breton lay, these two people belong to the nobility; and courtship between two members of the nobility is normally articulated in medieval literature through the conventions

of 'courtly love'.⁷ The three main points made about the knight's courting here correspond to three such conventions: he performs noble deeds in the lady's honour, as service to her (730-33); he is humble, scarcely daring to approach her, because she seems unattainable by virtue of her great beauty and high birth (434-37); and he suffers from lovesickness as he waits (737). Eventually, the lady responds to the evidence of his 'worthyness' (738), on the one hand, and his 'meke obeysaunce' (739), on the other. Her recognition takes the form of showing 'pitee' for his 'penaunce' (740), and this religious terminology reflects yet another convention of courtly love, that the lady should be placed in the position of a god, her suitor, in the position of a suppliant.

The marriage is recounted immediately after the courtship, and the juxtaposition of the two episodes in the narrative highlights a problematic situation. If most of the action had taken place during the courtship, with the marriage coming at the end of the tale as the culmination of events, there would have been no need to comment on arrangements to be observed within the on-going marital relationship; but as it is, both the courtship and the marriage are given facts preliminary to the main action, and the rest of the tale proceeds in the context of the established relationship. It is thus necessary to define its premises at the outset. The problem is that medieval marriage, in literature as in life, presupposed the dominance of the husband and the obedience of the wife (cp. 742-43), so that the roles of the knight and the lady in marriage would presumably be the exact opposite of their roles in courtship. The challenge is thus to explain how this role reversal can occur without detracting from the 'blisse' which is, and remains, the aim of their relationship (744; cp. 802, 806, 1090, 1099, 1552).⁸

This challenge is met by accommodation from both sides. Arveragus takes the initiative with a proposal that relies on chivalric tradition. The concern with the role of the individual in society which is found in much of the romance literature of the time was often expressed in terms of a tension in the protagonist's life between public and private values and conduct.⁹ Here, Arveragus envisages himself as a divided man, his marriage as far as the world is concerned based on the expectation that he as husband will have 'the name of soveraynetee' (751), in order that he should not endure 'shame' (752), while the private reality, known only to his wife and himself, will be that he will continue to 'obeye' her (749) in the role of 'lovere' (750). Arveragus's proposed solution, to destroy the integrity of his own being, could not be tolerated in itself;¹⁰ but it constitutes the first step in a joint venture

which will, as a whole enterprise, provide that solution. Precisely because Arveragus has displayed such generosity towards her (754), Dorigen responds in kind: she will not take advantage of his offer, but will be his 'humble, trewe wyf' (758), that is, in private as well as in public. Their final agreement is thus in accord with the standard view of the church, as expressed in Ephesians 5.22-23, 'Wives, be subject to your husbands as to the Lord; for the man is the head of the woman, just as Christ also is the head of the church'; and 5.25, 'Husbands, love your wives, as Christ also loved the church and gave himself up for it'.¹¹

At the story level, therefore, the conventional disposition of roles in marriage has been restored, albeit with the proviso of voluntary acceptance of these by both parties involved. At the discourse level, however, the marriage relationship is explained from a further point of view, as resembling the relationship that any two people might enjoy as 'freendes' (762). Friendship here should be understood as a topic of argument which was well established in philosophical tradition. It is, for example, the subject of a popular treatise by Cicero, *De amicitia* ('Concerning Friendship'),¹² in the course of which it is defined as 'an accord in all things, human and divine, conjoined with mutual goodwill and affection' (*omnium divinarum humanarumque rerum cum benevolentia et caritate consensio* — 6.20), in which each party enjoys a status equal (*parem*) to that of the other (19.69). It is also discussed, in comparable terms, by two of Chaucer's favourite authors, Boethius and Jean de Meun: *De consolatione philosophiae* ('The Consolation of Philosophy'), 2.8, and *Le Roman de la rose* ('The Romance of the Rose'), 4688-4836, respectively.¹³ For the most part the topic is applied to a relationship between two men, but women are not excluded: in *De amicitia*, for example, Cicero observes that women can seek friendship (13.46). Then, at the end of his comments on marriage, the narrator observes that the two parties have the best of both worlds: Dorigen has both her 'servant' and her 'lord' (792), while Arveragus has both his 'lady' and his 'wyf' (797), further suggesting an equal balancing of roles in the marriage. Dorigen has actually agreed to take Arveragus as her lord after he has offered to be her servant, and her consent to be his wife chronologically supersedes her position as his lady, so that the narrator's comments about equality could be thought misleading; but marriage will mean a lifetime of repeatedly coming to terms with each other, and the two roles available to each party will operate in turn many times over.

The main action of the tale begins as Arveragus takes up the role of knight-errant in Britain, which was commonly regarded in medieval

literature as the home of chivalry under the aegis of King Arthur, although his court is not specifically mentioned here. This is a solo role for Arveragus, defined without reference to his wife. He is not now the lover-husband, but an individual achiever, the purpose of whose achievement is to bring honour to his name. It is thus appropriate that that name should at last be announced, and expressed according to chivalric formula: 'of Kayrrud . . . Arveragus' (808). From being fully occupied with his marital bliss, Arveragus turns 'al his lust' (812) to the new undertaking. The contrary demands of the two roles, lover-husband and knight-errant, have potential to generate a narrative tension, such as that developed in the twelfth-century romance *Erec et Enide* ('Erec and Enide'), by Chrétien de Troyes:¹⁴ in this poem it is made clear that a man's chivalric duty must have priority, but then Erec's wife accompanies him on his errantry. In *The Franklin's Tale* the implications of the contrary demands are not developed as plot, through Arveragus's actions, but the problematic nature of the situation is again established by the immediate juxtaposition of material which gives expression to a different point of view.

Arveragus's departure is related briefly, but a much longer sequence, and hence greater attention, is given to the parallel solo role of Dorigen. Thus far, her role of lady-wife has been played out in the presence of the person whose own role has enabled hers to be defined in this way. Without that presence a question is raised concerning her functional identity. In her eyes, her husband alone means 'lyf' (816), 'al this wyde world' means nothing (821), and her existence is defined in terms of his actual 'absence' (817) and longed-for 'presence' (820); but as her name is given for the first time she is simultaneously confirmed in the continuance of her existing role, as 'Dorigen his wyf' (815), and she gradually learns that her role has social as well as personal implications; she has had one special friend, but now she is provided with a group of 'freendes' as companions (822). And a reminder that Arveragus's role of knight-errant is only temporary, whereas that of lover-husband is permanent, comes in the form of letters he sends 'hoom' (838), announcing that he will 'come hastily agayn' (839).

At this point it might be expected that Arveragus's assurances would become the focus of attention: will he or will he not return? The subsequent story of their marriage surely depends on the answer. Yet the possibility of exciting suspense along these lines is waived, and attention is directed instead to Dorigen's fears and whether they should be condoned or dismissed.

These fears are articulated in a prayer in which Dorigen brings philosophical problems to bear on her own situation (865-93), as she explores the relationship between the notional Creator and the phenomenal, created world, querying the co-existence of the 'certain governaunce' of God (866) and the 'foul confusion' of part of his creation (869), here the rocks on which her husband might be shipwrecked. The speech has no effect on the narrative. It does not result in a clear divine response, or even in the therapeutic calming of Dorigen herself — it ends in circular fashion by expressing again the 'feere' which prompted it (893; cp. 860); and it is recurrent (862, 894), not contributing to the forward movement of the plot. At the discourse level, however, it invites the audience to give consideration to one of the great problems of the universe and the appropriateness of the reference in this narrative context.

The basis of the prayer as a whole is actually a debate, between Dorigen's experience and clerical authority. Many literary debates have survived from the Middle Ages.¹⁵ The form was used for both serious and parodic purposes. Typically, two parties would be represented as arguing opposing views on some subject of general interest, and the actual debate would be framed by an account of the circumstances in which it was said to take place and the figure appointed to adjudicate; a judgment might or might not be recorded. Here 'eterne God'¹⁶ is established as adjudicator at the start (865), yet at the same time it is the nature of his 'werk' (870) which is under scrutiny. It is thus inevitable that the party praising the orderliness of that work will be allowed the victory, implicitly if not explicitly. The clerks win, in fact, because Dorigen loses. Her case is dubiously based on hyperbole (868, 873-74, 876-78) and rhetorical question (872, 876, 884); and she finally concedes defeat as she abandons 'al disputison' to the clerks (890), allowing simple expressions of hope (888-89, 891-92), instead of a final step in argument, to stand as her 'conclusion' (889). Debate is the very embodiment of intellectual enquiry, and the prominence of debate procedure in a general romance context, at a lyrical moment, is a telling indication of the underlying direction of *The Franklin's Tale*.

One day in May, while Arveragus is still abroad, Dorigen's friends take her with them to a certain garden, and while she is there a young squire called Aurelius declares his feelings for her and asks her to have mercy on him. The encounter between Dorigen and Aurelius calls into being the problems which the rest of the tale is concerned to resolve.

The garden is readily recognizable as a literary garden of love.¹⁷

Like the garden in *Le Roman de la rose*, this one is man-made (909), beautiful and pleasing (917), worthy of comparison with the earthly Paradise (912), presented, at least partly, in allegorical terms (the leaves and flowers having been painted by a personified May, 907-08), with dancing a principal activity of those who go there (918, 921, 925, 929). Aurelius is not mentioned before the garden episode, even though it is subsequently said that Dorigen had known him for some time as a neighbour (961-63), and he declares his feelings to her before they leave the garden (960). At this stage he effectively exists only in terms of the garden, and is depicted only through conventions attaching to the courtly lover. His appeal to Dorigen (967-78), however, sets him in contrast to Arveragus: where Arveragus performed 'many a labour, many a greet emprise' in order to 'serve' her (731-32), before speaking to her of his lovesickness (737), Aurelius has merely suffered lovesickness for over two years, without taking any firm action (939-41), so that his claim to have done 'servyce' for her (972) rests on weak grounds. His appeal is self-defeating: it is thoroughly self-centred with its repeated references to 'I', 'me', and 'my(n)'; he begins with a long sentence which expresses in an appropriately hesitant and non straightforward manner the futile desire to change what is already past he refers to his service (such as it is) only to concede that it is 'in vayn' (972); and even now the only action he proposes to take is to die passively if Dorigen will not do as he wants (975-78). Aurelius is a 'non-achiever' at this point, and for some time to come.

In his speech Aurelius addresses Dorigen as the lady of courtly love. The fact that a woman is married does not in itself mean that she will not accept this role in relation to a man other than her husband: courtly love is, in fact, often set in an adulterous situation, if the marriage concerned is not also a love relationship.¹⁸ Dorigen, however, loving her husband, chooses to refuse Aurelius, and she does so in straightforward and unmistakably 'fynal' terms, rejecting the possibility of a role which would prevent her functioning as a proper 'wyf' (980-87). But then, 'in pley' (988), she creates what should be an entirely fictitious scenario in which he may win her. Just as it is only once she has entered the garden that she becomes vulnerable to the attentions of her neighbour Aurelius, so it is only in the language of the artificial garden that she will agree to play his game. Dorigen acts out a convention of courtly love by setting Aurelius a task to carry out for her: if he will remove all the rocks along the coast of Brittany so that not one remains visible, she will grant him her love (989-98). But this task is inherently impossible, as Aurelius himself admits (1009), and Dorigen's very language indicates that she is not serious: she

mimics the extended and disturbed syntax of Aurelius's own speech briefly (989-98), to announce the task, and she agrees to keep her end of the bargain in exactly the same words which marked her promise to Arveragus — 'Have heer my trouthe' (998; cp. 759) — a clear sign of the 'pley' status of her promise to Aurelius, since the promise to her husband would take precedence in its implication of lifetime commitment, automatically precluding commitment to another party.¹⁹ Then she reverts to a straightforward style of language as she reiterates her refusal, declaring that he will never be able to fulfil the task set, labelling his words to her 'folies', and again reminding him that the role he proposes for her cannot exist alongside what is for her a full-time role as 'wyf' (1000-05).

Functioning only within the narrow bounds of his role as courtly lover, Aurelius has just two courses open to him, both presenting problems: either to perform the impossible task, or to die. His first thought is to appeal to the gods for help with the task, and in a long prayer to Apollo (1031-79)²⁰ he asks that the rocks might be hidden by an exceptionally high tide for two years, starting the following August (when the tide would naturally be at its highest), or that they might be swallowed up under the sea floor. As with Dorigen's prayer earlier, so Aurelius's prayer now proves to have no effect on the narrative. August comes and goes, but the rocks are not hidden by the sea, nor are they drawn down under the sea floor; and the prayer has no therapeutic value, for Aurelius continues in his lovesick state, always dying but not dead, for over two years more (1102).

For Dorigen the episode in the garden has no further meaning at this stage. Arveragus returns home, having achieved what he set out to do and become 'of chivalrie the flour' (1088), and they resume their married life of 'blisse' (1099).

The narrative has left Aurelius suspended in an inactive state between hope of accomplishment and failure to die; a new factor is needed to reactivate him and move the narrative on, and Aurelius's brother is introduced for the purpose. In learning of Aurelius's situation and acting for him, the brother takes on the role of confidant,²¹ which should probably, like marriage, be seen as a special kind of friendship. He arranges that they should go together to Orleans, to seek a practitioner of natural magic to help accomplish the task (1104-70). The brother himself is a clerk, and his two identities function together as he brings his brother Aurelius into the world of the clerks, where he himself will be able to consult another clerk as one professional to another. Aurelius's brother is never named: as brother,

he acts only for Aurelius and has no independent identity; as clerk, he can deal on equal terms with another unnamed clerk, the implication of the lack of names being that these clerical dealings are just a means to an end in the exploration of the noble world of Arveragus, Dorigen, and Aurelius, with whose definition the tale is primarily concerned.

If Aurelius's brother can belong to the world of the nobility²² and yet be a clerk, however, a situation has been established from the start in which the two worlds are not wholly distinct from each other. There is no comment at all on the family of the clerk of Orleans; the discourse here swings from focus on inherited nobility to focus on personal achievement. He is presented as a householder of considerable means (1183-88), and it is implied that he has been able to sell his talents for large sums in the past (1223-25) — the very fact that it was he who approached Aurelius and his brother, as they made their way towards Orleans (1171-82), represents him as an experienced salesman confident of success, and he concludes a deal with them whereby Aurelius gives his 'trouthe' (1231) to pay one thousand pounds for the clerk's services. He has achieved social position through personal endeavour; by comparison, Arveragus has validated an inherited social position through successful personal endeavour in chivalry, and Aurelius has yet to validate his inherited social position through some or other kind of noble action.²³

While Aurelius and his brother are his guests, the clerk ascertains from his 'squier' that their supper is ready (1209-16).²⁴ As far as the plot is concerned, this information could as well have been obtained from a page or other servant; but the fact that the clerk has a squire serving him indicates that he has reached a social position in which men of Aurelius's own rank are not necessarily his superiors. Indeed, from another point of view, the knowledge of astrology that Aurelius has displayed in his prayer to Apollo has already placed him to some extent in a shared world with the clerk.

If a clerk, then, can reach a social status similar to that of a squire, or even higher, the question that follows naturally is whether he will be able to sustain the conduct which is appropriate to such status. In this way the scene at the clerk's house poses indirectly through the narrative the question which the narrator asks of the audience directly at the end of the tale.

The clerk duly carries out his side of the bargain to the satisfaction of Aurelius (1239-1305). There is some reason to doubt whether the task set by Dorigen has in fact been accomplished, but the clerk's

actions can be seen to fit the demands of the tale the Franklin is telling.

Dorigen stipulates that the rocks should be removed so that they cannot interfere with shipping, and assumes that the evidence of this having been done will be that the rocks will disappear from sight (992-98). Aurelius then chooses to consider disappearance and removal as more or less separate issues. In his prayer he first tells Apollo, at some length, how the rocks could be made to disappear by being covered over by a high tide (1043-70). The rocks would still be there, although, if there were five fathoms of water over them (1060), many ships could pass safely. This state of affairs should ideally last for two years (1062), a long but finite time, whereas actual removal would, presumably, be permanent. The alternative put to Apollo, that the rocks should be drawn down under the sea floor, is mentioned briefly as something of an afterthought (1071-76), but this is the suggestion which actually tackles the possibility of removal; it also echoes the specific wish expressed by Dorigen at the end of her prayer (891-92). The clerk can be seen as going one step further, for he deals only with the issue of disappearance and does not contemplate removal at all. He creates an 'illusion' through 'apparence or jogelrye' (1264-65), so that,

. . . thurgh his magik, for a wyke or tweye,
It semed that alle the rokkes were aweye. (1295-96)

The Franklin makes appropriate comments on the evils of 'swiche illusiouns and swiche meschaunces' as were practised in the old, pre-Christian days by 'hethen folk' (1292-93), although at the same time he avoids condemnation of the clerk in person, because it must later seem reasonable for him to be compared with Arveragus and Aurelius.

The actual removal of the rocks could, in fact, have been achieved only with supernatural aid. This might have been the work of an evil force or a good force; Dorigen, under the impression that the rocks have really gone, observes that the phenomenon is 'agayns the proces of nature' (1345),²⁵ but is uncertain whether it is a 'monstre' or a 'merveille' (1344). In either case, the intervention of a supernatural force would have made the whole story different in kind. If God or a beneficent pagan deity intervened, to ensure the safety of shipping and allow some moral testing for Aurelius and Dorigen, the story would have been quasi-hagiographical rather than romantic. If the devil or a malevolent pagan deity intervened, to confirm Aurelius in a bad course of action and destroy Dorigen, the story would have been frightening rather than pleasantly interesting. The clerk's 'illusioun' preserves the romance and the pleasant interest. The plot itself,

moreover, does not demand that the task set should be accomplished in reality, but that Dorigen should believe it to be so.

Aurelius breaks the news to Dorigen in a long speech, characteristically convoluted in style (1311-38). He appeals to her on the grounds of 'grace' rather than 'right' (1324-25), but also keeps reminding her of her promise ('trouthe', 1320, 1328; 'biheste', 1335). Dorigen does not express doubt, either about the performance of the task, or about the validity of the 'trouthe' she swore to him. While Aurelius merely continues in the role of courtly love he has held from the beginning, Dorigen is faced with her 'pley' role as his lady suddenly becoming a role in earnest. Yet at the same time she is Arveragus's lady-wife, and these two roles are incompatible.

Again the existence of a dilemma in the mind of a character is marked by a soliloquy, here a long complaint addressed to Fortune (1355-1465). Dorigen sees a choice of two courses before her, 'death' or 'dishonour' (1358), declares that death is the better course, and recalls the examples of many women in the past who preferred death to dishonour. She takes no action, however, but remains suspended in her dilemma for a day or so,

Purposynge evere that she wolde deye, (1458)

until Arveragus returns home from a short absence.

The two possible choices Dorigen identifies for herself are not necessarily those which would spring to mind in naturalistic terms. Why, for instance, does she not even contemplate sending Aurelius some excuse, or simply telling him that she had not really meant what she said? The definition of her dilemma as a choice between death and dishonour is to be explained as arising from the treatment of the situation as an intellectual exercise.

In logical terms, Dorigen's decision should lie between going to Aurelius and not going to Aurelius. Either course of action would mean denying one 'trouthe' she has sworn at the cost of the other. To win out in the relationship with Arveragus, which has been defined in terms of courtly-love-subsumed-into-marriage, she has to be able to continue making her contribution to their agreed marital arrangement, and this entails not breaking her 'trouthe'; to win out in the relationship with Aurelius, which has been defined in terms of courtly love alone, she must again not break her 'trouthe', yet at the same time remain the unyielding beloved, a combination of achievements which is not within her own unaided capacity. The two relationships have a different narrative status, however, and this difference, it can be argued, allows

one logical course of action, that is, going to Aurelius, or accepting dishonour, as a real possibility, while disallowing the other logical course of action, that of not going to Aurelius.

The relationship of Dorigen and Arveragus is an established reality. It has been undertaken with the consent of both parties; it has undergone development since its inception; it has been recognized and accepted by their society, and its existence cannot be denied. The manner of its continuance, however, is not yet fixed. It might proceed from this point either with or without bliss: the preservation of bliss would entail not going to Aurelius, and the loss of bliss would entail going to him. Either course is thus a real option in respect of the marriage relationship. The relationship of Dorigen with Aurelius, on the other hand, is not yet an established reality; its existence has an ambivalent status. It has been set up at the instigation of one party, but with only 'pley' consent on the part of the other party; it has not undergone development since that setting up; and it has had no social recognition. Its coming into existence would be stopped at this point, and its setting up cancelled and invalidated, if Dorigen should decide to reject the 'pley' — that is, if Dorigen should decide not to go to Aurelius, the result would be not that their relationship was spoilt, but that it could be seen never to have existed at all. In that case, however, Aurelius's role in the tale, which has been entirely confined to that of Dorigen's courtly lover, would have had no significance in itself, but have been at most a means to an end, in — unnecessarily — confirming the strength of the marriage relationship. Yet Aurelius's role has been even more prominent than that of Arveragus: while Arveragus's marriage to Dorigen has generated the main action of the tale, Aurelius's attempts to draw her into a relationship with him have constituted that main action. It would make a nonsense of the narrative to deny him commensurate significance, and a nonsense, therefore, to allow the possibility that Dorigen should not go to Aurelius to stand as a real option. Thus, while Dorigen's going to Aurelius would be a real option in the courtly love relationship as well as in the marriage relationship (it would, in fact, bring the courtly love relationship to realization), her not going cannot be a real option because it would invalidate one of the two relationships involved, along with the most prominent male role in the tale.

Death, then, is a kind of substitute for, or perhaps a variation on, not going as the second of the two choices; it would put a physical end to both relationships, but it would not retrospectively invalidate either, because all earthly relationships must be postulated on a presumption of the ultimate mortality of the parties concerned. The

greater part of the complaint can be seen as a justification for advancing death as the alternative to dishonour through the collection of precedents. Dorigen declares a preference for death over dishonour because it would at least mean not losing in either relationship, even though she would not actually win. In death, she could not be said to have surrendered her stake in 'trouthe', whether as long as she lived, in the case of Arveragus ('til that myn herte breste', 759), or to the utmost of her capacity, in the case of Aurelius ('in al that evere I kan', 998); and death alone would enable her both to preserve her good name as the wife of Arveragus (1360-66) and to remain forever the unyielding beloved of Aurelius.

What Dorigen has at stake is the preservation of the marital bliss she would hope to share with Arveragus for the term of their natural lives, and death would not negate this bliss, as dishonour would; but it would certainly prevent further participation in it. The most death can offer is a means of preserving virtue and being remembered by society for having done so — fame being the nearest thing to immortality achievable in this world. With no truly satisfactory solution to her problem, Dorigen takes no action at all — again a soliloquy has no effect on the narrative. As with Aurelius earlier, so with Dorigen now an external factor is needed to move the narrative on, and this need is met by having Arveragus return home, learn about the situation which has developed, and take action on her behalf (1459-92).

What Arveragus does is to decide for Dorigen that she should go to Aurelius, and he puts this decision into action by appointing attendants to escort his wife to her destination. In naturalistic terms, this course of action seems astonishing. In a recent overview of the tale, for instance, the basic uneasiness about *The Franklin's Tale* which is felt by many readers is located in 'the discrepancy we are aware of between the story, as story, and the ideal values of truth and *gentillesse* that it purports to be a triumphant vindication of';²⁶ this discrepancy becoming most obvious where Arveragus sends his wife off to commit adultery, all because of a rash promise: 'in so doing [Arveragus] denies a great truth in order to serve, as we may feel, a petty truth, in addition to behaving in a wholly ridiculous and unlikely manner'.²⁷

The likelihood of such a reaction actually appears to be predicted in the text itself, as the Franklin speaks in an aside to pre-empt criticism:

Paraventure an heep of yow, ywis,
Wol holden hym a lewed man in this

SYDNEY STUDIES

That he wol putte his wyf in jupartie.
Herkneth the tale er ye upon hire crië.
She may have bettre fortune than yow semeth;
And whan that ye han herd the tale, demeth. (1493-98)

This aside is printed in most editions of the tale, but is found in only two manuscripts, not including the earliest. Given the unfinished state of *The Canterbury Tales*, it is generally acknowledged that individual copyists often introduced changes into the text they had which would allow them to render it in a form that appeared more coherent, and lines 1493-98 are almost certainly a case in point, the work of an editing scribe.²⁸ They explicate what is already implicit in the text, and specifically echo Arveragus's own words a short while before:

'It may be wel, paraventure, yet to day.' (1473)

The passage emphasizes the narrator's expectation that the audience will engage in assessing the problems that arise from the narrative, and lays a foundation for the direct questioning of the audience which constitutes the conclusion to the tale. Otherwise, in regard to the immediate context, the aside is simply misleading, perhaps a joke. In logical terms, it can be argued, there is nothing surprising about Arveragus's decision; the real problem being posed is how the narrative in the rest of the tale, moving on from that decision, will handle and dispose of the main characters in an appropriately meaningful way.

In this scene Dorigen confides in Arveragus and he takes action on her behalf; and so, like Aurelius's brother earlier, Arveragus functions here in the role of confidant.²⁹ Consequently, he accepts the limitation of options perceived by the primary character and acts within that limitation to bring about the result which seems best for that character. Aurelius's brother implicitly rejected the option of death, even by merely pining away, and drove forward what was Aurelius's own preferred option, the disappearance of the rocks. Here Arveragus likewise implicitly rejects the option of death, active suicide being an even more outrageous proposition than pining away, despite the fact that death is, at least ostensibly, Dorigen's own preferred option, and adopts the remaining option, that Dorigen should go to Aurelius. The decision he makes is, then, the inevitable one. Dorigen could not have made it for herself without breaking her 'trouthe' to Arveragus to be his 'trewe wyf' (758), but this is avoided if she acts at his direction.

The handling of the four main characters following Arveragus's decision continues to depend on the nature of the relationships that exist among them. Thus far the course of the narrative has been

determined by the formation and continuance of the marriage relationship, a partnership between Arveragus and Dorigen; the courtly love relationship, a contest between Dorigen and Aurelius; and the business relationship, an exchange between Aurelius and the clerk of Orleans. The rest of the narrative is determined by a new relationship which resolves the other three one after the other as it proceeds towards its own resolution. The fourth relationship has actually been initiated in this scene, as a more detailed consideration of it shows.

The exchange between Arveragus and Dorigen is consistent with the original agreement they reached about the nature of their relationship, and enacts the decisions made at that time concerning their behaviour towards each other and the distinction between their public and private lives. Dorigen reveals her situation to Arveragus voluntarily, and his actual directive is accompanied by an expression of the utmost personal generosity: it would be preferable for him to suffer death than for her not to keep her word (1474-78). Earlier, by comparison, Arveragus offered to serve her in everything and display no 'jealousie' (748); and she recognized how 'large a reyne' (755) he offered her out of 'gentillesse' (754), but voluntarily gave her 'trouthe' to be his 'humble' wife (758). Here Arveragus speaks to Dorigen 'in freendly wyse' (1467) and 'for verray love' (1477). Earlier their original agreement was said to come into being only because he first 'loved' Dorigen (730), and the narrator's subsequent comments on that agreement both confirmed the fact of the 'love' (e.g. 764, 767, 771, 798) and identified the relationship as one between 'freendes' (762). Then again, whatever might happen in their personal lives, society should be able to assume that the conventions are being observed. Here Arveragus insists that Dorigen should tell no one of her meeting with Aurelius, while he will do his best to endure his personal grief, just as originally he insisted that he should appear to have the conventional authority of the husband over his wife even though he would actually be continuing to serve her as a lover. The marriage relationship thus survives the crisis without either party failing to observe the terms of the original agreement. Nevertheless, the bliss has gone out of it. In *The Franklin's Tale*, as is usual in life and literature, personal relationships must affect and be affected by other factors in the larger social framework. On an earlier occasion society required that Arveragus should leave his wife for a time in order to promote chivalry, and difficulties arose for the marriage as a result. At this point the bliss of the marriage depends on whether someone outside the relationship, Aurelius, will act towards it with the unselfish goodwill which has been shown by each party to the other within

the relationship.

In this scene the central issue is not the question of sovereignty in marriage, as in the scene at the beginning of the tale, but the imperative that 'trouthe' should be kept. Arveragus tells Dorigen,

'Ye shul youre trouthe holden, by my fay!' (1474)

and observes,

'Trouthe is the hyeste thyng that man may kepe.' (1479)

This line is probably the dramatic high point of the tale. It takes the form of the rhetorical figure *sententia*, that is, a statement based on experience of life and regarded as a universal truth; the figure has otherwise appeared in the tale only in the narrator's own comments (in, for example, lines 761-76, 779-86, and 1113-15), and so it carries a considerable weight of authority here. Yet at the same time this line highlights the very problem on which the whole episode turns. In context, Arveragus's attention is clearly directed to the 'trouthe' Dorigen swore to Aurelius, but the statement of line 1479 in itself simply declares in general terms that keeping one's 'trouthe' is the most important rule in life, and it could equally refer to Dorigen's marriage 'trouthe' — or, indeed, Aurelius's business 'trouthe'. 'Trouthe' is the element shared by all three relationships and is at the heart of each; and it is by reference to 'trouthe' that the three are brought into line with each other as the tale nears its end.³⁰

Dorigen, as indicated above, has technically kept her 'trouthe' to Arveragus by submitting to his decision; her 'trouthe' to Aurelius is being kept now; and it remains to be seen if Aurelius will keep his 'trouthe' to the clerk. A sequence of 'trouthe'-keeping actions is set in motion as Arveragus announces the importance of 'trouthe', and this sequence of actions creates the fourth main relationship in the tale, a three-way competition amongst the men. Just as in the Bible the Law of the Old Testament is superseded by the Grace of the New Testament, so the legalistic keeping of 'trouthe' gives way to the gracious waiving of it through 'franchise' and 'gentillesse' (1524; cp. 1527, 1543, 1574, 1595, 1604-05,³¹ 1608, 1611, 1622). The superiority of what these qualities can effect in comparison to the mere keeping of 'trouthe' has actually been foreshadowed in Arveragus's encouragement to Dorigen at line 1473, which is amplified in the narrator's aside at lines 1493-98.

Dorigen sets off for the garden with her attendants, but she meets Aurelius in the street, on his own way to the garden (1502-05). The

fact that their encounter on this occasion takes place outside the garden is an indication that the courtly love relationship will not be realized, and other generic factors confirm this.

When Aurelius asks, courteously enough, where she is going, she answers,

‘Unto the gardyn, as myn housbonde bad,
My trouthe for to holde — alas, allas!’ (1512-13)

Dorigen says clearly that she intends to keep her ‘trouthe’ to Aurelius; but the part played by her husband in bringing this about makes it impossible for Aurelius to accept her ‘trouthe’. In the literature of courtly love it is a convention that the husband of a lady involved with another man will be filled with jealousy and act accordingly; and the lovers will be at great pains to keep their feelings a secret from him. In *The Franklin’s Tale* Arveragus appears to have set up an ideal opportunity for Aurelius to have what he wants, but he has actually robbed him of any such opportunity. Far from displaying any sign of jealousy, Arveragus has co-operated to the full in arranging their assignation, and has made it impossible for it to be a secret from him. In so doing he has destroyed important elements of the courtly love situation; and Aurelius recognizes this and acknowledges the end of this relationship (1514-44).

This move does not, however, reduce Aurelius’s role in the tale to insignificance, as would have been the case if Dorigen had simply not allowed validity to the ‘trouthe’ she swore to him. Rather, it transforms Aurelius’s role into that of the hero of romance who undergoes a period of testing from which he learns more about life, so that he emerges wiser at the end. The nature of Aurelius’s growth is made clear in the terms of his response to Dorigen’s words. That response is motivated by two factors: his pity for the evident distress of both Dorigen and Arveragus, their loss of bliss; and his perception of the nobility of Arveragus.

For the first time in the tale Aurelius looks beyond his personal desires to take account of the world around him,

Considerynge the beste on every syde, (1521)

and this movement out of himself coincides with a movement from illusion to reality. For a start, he no longer speaks extravagantly, but ‘in few wordes’ (1525). The affair existed as a relationship involving two people only insofar as Dorigen had given him her ‘trouthe’ in ‘pley’; but now Aurelius gives her his ‘trouthe’ (1537) to make no further

demands of her, and this 'trouthe' is delivered in the legal terminology of the real world (1532-34). Previously Aurelius had thought of his feelings as 'peyne' (974, 1079) and of the lady as actively intending his death (1038), and he had appealed to her for 'mercy' (978) and 'grace' (999) and to the god for 'pitee' (1040) and 'compassioun' (1079). Now he categorizes his feelings as 'lust' (1522),³² in distinction from the 'love' he recognizes as existing between Arveragus and Dorigen (1532), and he feels 'compassioun' (1515) and 'routhe' (1520) for them because of the sorrow he has demonstrably brought upon them.

At the same time, Aurelius recognizes that Arveragus has displayed 'franchise and alle gentillesse' (1524; also 'grete gentillesse', 1527), qualities which give expression to the social function of a 'worthy knyght' (1517), and he sees his own intentions towards Dorigen in a new light, as 'cherlyssh wrecchednesse' (1523). Arveragus has behaved in a manner appropriate to his position, whereas Aurelius would be behaving basely, in a manner quite inappropriate to his position. Arveragus has set an example which Aurelius feels compelled to match, his social self now being more important to him than his personal self. His acceptance of this challenge is evident in the specific contrast of the expressions 'cherlyssh wrecchednesse' and 'gentillesse', highlighted by their carrying the rhyme in the couplet of lines 1523-24.

At the end of Aurelius's speech, four lines offer further comment on the events of the tale:

'But every wyf be war of hire biheeste!
 On Dorigen remembreth, atte leeste.
 Thus kan a squier doon a gentil dede
 As wel as kan a knyght, withouten drede.' (1541-44)

These lines are regarded by some scholars as continuing and concluding Aurelius's speech, but by others, as an observation from the narrator after Aurelius has stopped speaking.³³ Each view has different implications for an understanding of Aurelius's role and the narrator's function in the tale, but either way the audience is alerted to the topic of comparative achievements in 'gentillesse'. Together with the implicit comparison made a few lines earlier, as Aurelius admires the 'gentil' behaviour of Arveragus and rejects non-'gentil' behaviour for himself, these last lines establish a relationship between Arveragus and Aurelius which is a kind of competition in the achievement of 'gentillesse'.

The courtly love relationship is over and done with, having been satisfactorily resolved by acts of 'gentillesse' on the part of Arveragus, acting for Dorigen, and Aurelius himself. The marriage relationship, the narrator notes briefly, is set to continue indefinitely 'in sovereyn

blisse' (1552); this relationship, it may be recalled, was founded on 'gentillesse' (754), and now its preservation in bliss has depended on a 'gentil' deed of Arveragus, emulated by Aurelius. The business relationship between Aurelius and the clerk remains to be resolved, and this resolution, too, is effected through the working out of the 'gentillesse' competition.

In his new-found social awareness, Aurelius faces the consequences of his own rash promise to the clerk.³⁴ He does this in the last soliloquy of the tale, which, unlike the previous soliloquies, does affect the narrative; here the speaker both intends to take action and is in a position to do so. He applies his mind in a practical way to taking stock of his situation and the courses of action open to him (1557-70), and then brings these before the clerk (1571-84).

The situation Aurelius faces is that, although he has given his 'trouthe' to the clerk to pay him a thousand pounds for services which he has now received, the sum is so large that simply handing it over now would entail selling his inherited possessions and becoming a beggar. This course of action would displace him from his proper position in society and also 'shamen' his family (1565), so that, apart from his personal distress, he and others would suffer a form of loss at the social level. Aurelius thus has social as well as personal responsibilities now: he must find a way to avoid both defeat for himself in his relationship with the clerk, which would follow if he failed to honour his commitment, and social loss for himself and others, which, it appears, would follow if he honoured it.

In logical terms, the decision he must take would seem to lie between keeping and not keeping his 'trouthe' to the clerk. Not keeping it would not negate the business relationship, as was the case with the courtly love relationship; this 'trouthe' was both given and received in earnest, and the relationship has undergone development from its inception to the point where one of the two parties has already completed his part of the 'bargayn' they struck (1230). Both keeping and not keeping his 'trouthe' are real options for Aurelius. Nevertheless, he does not contemplate not keeping his 'trouthe' as a possible option. Rather, he makes his intention of keeping his 'trouthe' the starting point for further deliberations (1570, 1577), and thus opens up the possibility of avoiding both defeat in the business relationship and loss in society at the same time. The element of time is introduced as the focal topic of consideration, and the available alternatives are expressed as prompt repayment, which would bring about the predicted loss for Aurelius himself and his society, or gradual repayment, in instalments, which

would allow him to accumulate the total sum from periodic income, without disturbing his capital, that is, his inheritance. The latter course is clearly preferable, but it can be accomplished only with the co-operation of the clerk; and so Aurelius throws himself on the 'grace' of the clerk (1566), as he had previously thrown himself on the mercy of Dorigen and Apollo.

As he has done with the god, Aurelius explains in specific terms the form mercy should take. Neither the god nor the clerk takes any notice of the scheme proposed; but where the god does not respond to Aurelius's plight at all, the clerk does respond, with an even happier solution than Aurelius had though possible.

Aurelius offers to pay the clerk half the amount at once and the rest within two or three years (1572-82). The passing of time in the tale is usually measured in similar periods, but especially in relation to the actions of Aurelius: he loves Dorigen 'two yeer and moore' (940) before addressing her; he wants the rocks to be covered over by a high tide for 'yeres tweyne' (1062); and he continues in his lovesick state another 'two yeer and moore' (1102). Such a period is otherwise referred to as the length of Arveragus's absence abroad ('two yeer', 813), which corresponds to the first stage of Aurelius's love for Dorigen. Both an inclination to manipulate time and the actual period concerned are thus characteristic of Aurelius's approach to a problem, and the introduction of time as a topic in his thinking about his debt is a cohesive, not a random, move. He bases his appeal to the clerk on two grounds; his own dire straits (1583-84), and the clerk's 'gentillesse' (1574). The clerk asks first if he has not kept the 'covenant' he made to Aurelius (1587), his end of the 'bargayn'; Aurelius agrees that the clerk has indeed met his obligation. The clerk then asks if Aurelius has not consequently received his lady's favours; Aurelius says no, and explains what has transpired. The clerk thus responds first with a question which suggests that in his view a deal is a deal, and Aurelius should meet his obligation as the clerk has done. Aurelius's financial difficulties are not enough in themselves to induce the clerk not to press for the prompt keeping of his 'trouthe'; it is the other ground of Aurelius's appeal which achieves this.

The possibility that the clerk might show 'grace' to Aurelius is established when he makes an effort to understand more about Aurelius beyond his role as the consumer of a service; he has already, on an earlier occasion, felt 'routhe' for Aurelius (1261) and acted on this feeling by making an effort to produce his illusion without delay. The terms in which such 'grace' might be realized are set out in a series

of verbal correspondences. First, a potential parallel is established between the clerk and Arveragus: Aurelius asks the clerk if he will act generously 'of his gentillesse' (1574), and reveals that Arveragus has already acted generously 'of gentillesse' (1595). Then he goes on to say of Dorigen's sorrow:

'That made me han of hire so greet pitee;
And right as frely as he sente hire me,
As frely sente I hire to hym ageyn.' (1603-05)

These lines report a parallel already established between Aurelius and Arveragus: as Arveragus acted 'frely' towards him, so he acted 'frely' towards Arveragus, by showing 'pitee' to Dorigen (in the narrative of the event, 'routhe', 1520). The implicit message is thus that, if the clerk wants to emulate the 'franchise' and 'gentillesse' of Arveragus and Aurelius, he can do so by showing 'pitee', or 'grace', towards Aurelius now.

The clerk takes up this challenge to join Arveragus and Aurelius in his response to Aurelius:

. . . 'Leeve brother,
Everich of yow dide gentilly til oother.
Thou art a squier, and he is a knyght;
But God forbede, for his blisful myght,
But if a clerk koude doon a gentil dede
As wel as any of yow, it is no drede!' (1607-12)

His intention is signalled when he addresses Aurelius as 'brother'. The two are now linked with each other directly, as fellow practitioners of 'gentillesse', whereas they had previously been linked only indirectly, through Aurelius's blood brother, a fellow to the clerk in professional terms. The specifically 'fre' conduct of which Aurelius has just spoken is redefined by the clerk as 'gentil' conduct, leaving no doubt that it is in overall nobility, rather than a particular manifestation of it, that the clerk wishes to be associated with the knight and the squire.³⁵ The couplet of lines 1611-12, which refers explicitly to the link between the clerk, on the one hand, and the knight and squire, on the other, echoes the couplet of lines 1543-44, which refers explicitly to the corresponding link between the squire and the knight. The clerk joins the company of those who exemplify 'gentillesse' in the same way as the squire has already done. The act that achieves this for the clerk is his statement to Aurelius,

'Sire, I releesse thee thy thousand pound,' (1613),

which echoes Aurelius's corresponding statement to Dorigen earlier,

'I yow relesse, madame, into youre hond
Quyrt every serement and every bond.' (1533 — 34)

In emulating Aurelius's act of 'gentillesse', the clerk does more than Aurelius has asked of him, cancelling the debt completely:

'I wol nat taken a peny of thee
For al my craft, ne noight for my travaille.' (1616-17)

The clerk will receive no recompense for the practice of his skills; but there is no suggestion in the text that working for Aurelius has made him miss out on working for someone else who was really ready to pay him. The 'al' set against the 'nat . . . a peny' creates the illusion of considerable sacrifice; but this expression of regret aligns him further with Arveragus and Aurelius, both of whom have spoken of the 'wo' they felt at their own sacrificial gestures (1484 and 1531-32, respectively). The clerk concludes by saying,

'Thou hast ypayed wel for my vitaille.
It is ynogh, and farewel, have good day! (1618-19)

Aurelius's hospitality to the clerk in Brittany has evidently been on a par with the clerk's hospitality to Aurelius and his brother in Orleans, where

Hem lakked no vitaille that myghte hem plese. (1186)

With regard to the costs of hospitality, there has been a fair exchange between the two men, and the clerk has indeed received 'ynogh'. The business relationship is thus resolved happily, without loss to either party, through the working out of the 'gentillesse' competition, according to which Aurelius has endeavoured to match the 'gentillesse' of Arveragus and the clerk has endeavoured to match the 'gentillesse' of both Arveragus and Aurelius.

As the clerk rides off the narrative ends and the narrator poses a question directly to the audience:

Lordynges, this question, thanne, wol I aske now,
Which was the mooste fre, as thynketh yow? (1621-22)

The same question is posed in *Filocolo*, and after some discussion those who have heard that tale agree that the husband was the most generous because what he was giving up was of the greatest worth (4.34).³⁶ *The Franklin's Tale* comes at the end of Fragment 5, so-called, and no subsequent exchange of views amongst the pilgrims is recorded. Each of the three men has been generous, and the phrasing of such

key lines as 1543-44, 1605-06, and 1607-12, all quoted above, implies an equivalence in their actions; but lines 1605-06 and 1607-12 are statements made by characters in the tale, as lines 1543-44 may also be; and the views of the characters are not necessarily those of the narrator, just as the views of both the characters and the narrator are not necessarily those of the poet.

The end results of the three displays of generosity throw no more light on a 'correct' answer. The clerk has not actually lost money, but has simply foregone the opportunity to add to what he already has. Aurelius, similarly, has not lost the woman he loves, because he never had her. And Arveragus has not lost anything from his marriage, which continues intact. The tale has a completely happy ending, in the manner of comedy.³⁷

The Franklin's question concerns acts of generosity on the part of the three men. These acts of generosity evidently belong to the basic story as received by Chaucer. Behind the Franklin's explicit question, however, lies a more fundamental one concerning the nature of 'gentillesse', which is posed implicitly by the treatment of the story in this tale, that is, by the discourse which seems to be peculiar to this rendering of the story: Is true 'gentillesse' a matter of birth or individual choice? Or, in applied terms, Has the clerk been able to demonstrate as much 'gentillesse' as either or both of the other two men? The importance of character rather than inheritance in determining true nobility was a familiar topic in both philosophical and literary works, such as Boethius's *De consolacione philosophiae* (2.6, 3.6) and Jean de Meun's part of *Le Roman de la rose* (18607-96);³⁸ Chaucer himself addresses the topic elsewhere as well, notably in his short poem *Gentillesse* and in *The Wife of Bath's Tale*. Discussion of the Franklin's question could no doubt give rise to both 'sentence' and 'solaas', the criteria established for successful tale-telling in the *General Prologue* (798); but the asking of the question is more significant than any specific answer that might be given to it.

Bringing a tale to its conclusion by posing a question that involves an evaluation of characters and their actions is a common enough practice in medieval literature, a variation on the simple declaration of the lesson to be derived. Different kinds of relationship between narrative and lesson are explored in the course of *The Canterbury Tales*: in *The Physician's Tale*, for example, the narrator's own conclusion is so limited that it throws those areas of the narrative not covered by it into greater relief as subjects for further consideration; in *The Nun's Priest's Tale* the lessons enunciated by the narrator and

the characters in the tale are multiple and must be weighed against each other by the audience. The question asked at the end of *The Franklin's Tale* limits consideration of the tale to one element, generosity, but in so doing provokes discussion of the larger philosophical issue which surfaces at several points in the tale, and must have been of particular interest to a poet and audience living in a society whose traditional structures and institutions were undergoing substantial changes.

The romantic fairytale thus comes to an end on a note of philosophical enquiry; but the characters have throughout the tale been placed in problematic situations whose outcomes have been determined by considerations of logical and generic expectation. The dilemmas and resolutions of the narrative can be seen as a measure of the challenges and successes of the narrator — or, rather, in this context, the poet — in an *almost* impossible task of literary transformation.

NOTES

- 1 All references to Chaucer's work in this paper are based on *The Riverside Chaucer*, third edition, ed. Larry D. Benson, Oxford and New York, 1988. Line numbers are the same as those given in the editions of Chaucer's *Works* by F. N. Robinson, 1957, repr. Oxford, 1974, and of his *Canterbury Tales* by A. C. Cawley, London, 1975.
- 2 A general survey of this literary genre may be found in Mortimer J. Donovan, *The Breton Lay: A Guide to Varieties*, Notre Dame and London, 1969. A brief survey may be found in the introduction to *Sir Orfeo*, an English 'Breton lay' of the early fourteenth century, in my *Medieval English Romances*, 2 pts, second edition, Sydney, 1989, pp.123-30. For the possibility that Chaucer may have been familiar with the Auchinleck manuscript, which contains the earliest extant text of *Sir Orfeo*, see Laura Hibbard Loomis, 'Chaucer and the Breton Lays of the Auchinleck Manuscript', *Studies in Philology* 38 (1941), 14-33. The relationship of *The Franklin's Tale* to the genre is discussed by Kathryn Hume, 'Why Chaucer Calls the *Franklin's Tale* a Breton Lai', *Philological Quarterly* 51 (1972), 365-79. For Marie de France see *Les Lais*, ed. Jean Rychner, Les Classiques français du moyen âge 93, Paris, 1969; and *The Lais of Marie de France*, trans. Glyn S. Burgess and Keith Busby, Harmondsworth, 1986.
- 3 A brief survey of discussions on Chaucer's source for the story may be found in Joanne Rice's notes to the tale in *The Riverside Chaucer*, pp.895-96. For Boccaccio see *Filocolo*, ed. Antonio Enzo Quagli, *Tutte le opere di Giovanni Boccaccio*, 1, Milan, 1967; and *Il Filocolo*, trans. Donald Cheney and Thomas G. Bergin, New York and London, 1985. Another version of the story is also given by Boccaccio in his *Decameron*, 10.5. See the edition of Mirko Bevilacqua, 3 vols, Universale letteratura 17-19, Rome, 1980; and *The Decameron*, trans. G. H. McWilliam, Harmondsworth, 1972. Sources for the various ideas expressed at the level of discourse have been indicated by Rice and earlier editors of the tale. Two works of fundamental importance in this regard are *De consolatione philosophiae*, by

Boethius, and *Le Roman de la rose*, by Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun. For Boethius see *The Consolation of Philosophy*, ed. and trans. H. F. Stewart, E. K. Rand, and S. J. Tester, Cambridge, Mass., and London, 1973; and Chaucer's *Boece*. For *Le Roman de la rose* see the edition by Ernest Langlois in 5 vols, Société des anciens textes français, Paris, 1914-24; *The Romance of the Rose*, trans. Charles Dahlberg, Princeton, 1971; and Chaucer's *Romaunt of the Rose*.

- 4 As well as the overall *diminutio*, there is a double circumlocution in lines 721-22 (two roundabout ways of saying 'I never studied rhetoric'); metonymy in the use of a scholar's name for the subject he promoted in line 722; a pun on 'colours' (variously of rhetoric, flowers, and dye or paint) in lines 723-26; and continuing use of the figure *interpretatio*, as the one point (the claim to speak without benefit of rhetorical training) is repeated throughout the passage in several different ways. The use of rhetoric in *The Franklin's Tale* is discussed by Stephen Knight in *The Poetry of The Canterbury Tales* and *Rymyng Craftily: Meaning in Chaucer's Poetry*, both Sydney, 1973.
- 5 The narrator is, of course, the Franklin; but it does not necessarily follow that the tale is fully a speech-in-character of the Franklin as he is presented in the *General Prologue* (331-60). A romantic tale about noble men and noble manners, presenting an ultimately optimistic outlook on life, is an appropriate enough tale to assign to this pilgrim, but it is difficult to insist that every idea expressed proceeds as if from that one personality rather than from the poet in his own person. It has been pointed out by H. L. Rogers, for instance, that the narrator's false modesty in the prologue 'is a far better joke if placed in the poet's mouth': 'The Tales of the Merchant and the Franklin: Text and Interpretation', in *Studies in Chaucer, Sydney Studies in English*, Sydney, 1981, p.17. In general, it is being increasingly recognized that individual traits which distinguish one pilgrim from another in the frame-story are exemplified occasionally rather than consistently in the tales; and a narratorial voice which appears to represent simply a stance of the poet himself accounts for substantial passages throughout the work. The limitations of the 'dramatic' approach and the advantages of recognizing the operation of a complex of narratorial voices in each tale have been canvassed recently by David Lawton, *Chaucer's Narrators*, Chaucer Studies 13, Cambridge, 1985, and C. David Benson, *Chaucer's Drama of Style: Poetic Variety and Contrast in the Canterbury Tales*, Chapel Hill and London, 1986.
- 6 Gerald Morgan points out that, in contrast to the modern presupposition, the medieval presupposition would be that 'characters will be distinguished in terms of their typicality rather than their individuality': Introduction to his edition, Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Franklin's Tale from The Canterbury Tales*, London, Sydney, Auckland, and Toronto, 1980, p.1.
- 7 This term is used by scholars and critics to refer to a kind of sentiment and behaviour existing between a man and a woman of the leisured classes in a large body of medieval literature. Precise categorization, however, has been a matter of controversy. A useful survey of the subject is provided by Roger Boase, *The Origin and Meaning of Courtly Love*, Manchester, 1977.
- 8 'Blisse' in Middle English can signify simple pleasure, but it often signifies supreme happiness, in more or less philosophical terms. Such happiness, however, even when experienced on earth, is understood as a foretaste of the happiness of heaven, and 'blisse' is commonly used with a directly theological meaning. The marital bliss of Arveragus and Dorigen is no trite thing; and it is associated with heavenly bliss in the text itself by reference to the 'blisful myght' of God (1610), in the clerk's

SYDNEY STUDIES

- speech at the end of the tale. For uses of 'blisse' see the relevant entry in the *Middle English Dictionary*, ed. Hans Kurath and others, Ann Arbor, 1954.
- 9 As, for example, in *Sir Orfeo*: see n.2 above.
 - 10 The importance of unity in one's mortal existence is argued in a philosophical context, from various points of view, in Boethius's *De consolazione philosophiae*, 3.2-12, and in a theological context in the words of Christ in the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 6.24. For Bible texts see *Biblia Sacra iuxta Vulgatem Clementinam*, fifth edition, Madrid, 1977; and *The New English Bible with the Apocrypha*, Oxford, 1970.
 - 11 Biblical quotations are taken from *The New English Bible*: see n.10 above.
 - 12 Ed. and trans. William Armistead Falconer, London and Cambridge, Mass., 1932.
 - 13 For Boethius and Jean de Meun see n.3 above.
 - 14 Ed. Wendelin Foerster, *Sämtliche Werke*, 3, Halle, 18990; and trans. D. D. R. Owen: Chrétien de Troyes, *Arthurian Romances*, London and Melbourne, 1987.
 - 15 For a survey of the debate in English tradition see Francis Lee Utley, 'Dialogues, Debates, and Catechisms', with Bibliography, in *A Manual of the Writings in Middle English 1050-1500*, 3, ed. Albert E. Hartung, New Haven, 1972.
 - 16 The 'God' of Dorigen's prayer is the God of Christian philosophy, established in Christian tradition by the Church Fathers on the basis of amenable materials from Greek philosophy. Such philosophical (rather than theological) reference to God has the advantage of allowing some ambiguity about whether a pagan or a Christian deity is intended. In this way, the audience can be invited to consider issues raised in the prayer and elsewhere in the tale in terms of present-day relevance, while at the same time the story itself can be set clearly in the pagan past when magic could be practised freely: cp. Aurelius's prayer to Apollo, 1031-79, and the narrator's comments on magic, 1131-34, 1271-72, 1292-93.
 - 17 Fo the nature and function of such gardens see D. W. Robertson, Jr, 'The Doctrine of Charity in Mediaeval Gardens: A Topical Approach through Symbolism and Allegory', *Speculum* 26 (1951), 24-49; and Ernst Robert Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, trans. Willard R. Trask, New York and Evanston, 1953, ch.10.
 - 18 In *The Allegory of Love*, Oxford, 1936, ch.1, C. S. Lewis argues that adultery can be identified as an essential element of courtly love, but this extreme position is not generally accepted now in view of the great range of literature associated with the idea of courtly love.
 - 19 In *Filocolo* it is pointed out in the discussion which follows the tale that any earlier vow, properly sworn, has precedence over any later vow, especially if the later vow is improperly sworn; and this must be the case if the earlier vow was that which established a marriage, since the marriage vow is intended to last for always without being superseded (4.34.)
 - 20 On Aurelius's prayer to a pagan deity see n.16 above.
 - 21 This identification is made by Stephen Manning, 'Rhetoric, Game, Morality, and Geoffrey Chaucer', *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 1 (1979), 114.
 - 22 See n.23 below.
 - 23 Aurelius clearly moves in the same circles as Arveragus and Dorigen, and is described as the epitome of courtliness (901-34). He can be regarded as occupying a social position similar to that of the pilgrim Squire, the son of the Knight (*General Prologue*, 79-100).

24. Arveragus, similarly, is served by a squire (1487).
25. For Dorigen, in a fully rational frame of mind since her husband has returned home, the rocks represent order in the divine scheme of things, not the disorder she previously saw in them (cp. 868-72). The changing significance of the rocks for Dorigen was pointed out some time ago by Charles A. Owens, Jr, in 'The Crucial Passages in Five of *The Canterbury Tales*: A Study in Irony and Symbol', *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 52 (1953), 294-311, repr. in *Chaucer: Modern Essays in Criticism*, ed. Edward Wagenknecht, New York, 1959, pp.251-70.
26. Derek Pearsall, *The Canterbury Tales*, London, Boston, and Sydney, 1985, p.150.
27. *ibid.*, p.151.
28. The passage quoted is found in the Ellesmere manuscript, on which the text in *The Riverside Chaucer* and most other editions is based, and in one other manuscript, but not in the Hengwrt or other manuscripts thought to represent earlier stages of composition. For the development of the text and the view that this passage is the work of a scribe see N. F. Blake, *The Textual Tradition of the Canterbury Tales*, London, 1985, esp. pp.x-xi, 21, 142, 196-97.
29. As noted by Manning (see n.21 above), p.115.
30. 'Trouthe' in Middle English means both 'troth' and 'truth', or, more broadly, both faithfulness and honesty. In *The Franklin's Tale*, however, the word is used of specific enactments of faithfulness and is preceded by determiners such as 'my' and 'yours' in almost every case; only at line 1479 is there no determiner. 'Trouthe' thus signifies an event on all but one occasion, where it signifies a quality. In this respect it functions differently from 'love' and 'gentillesse', which always signify qualities that may then give rise to particular events. It may be thought that 'trouthe' nevertheless carries some resonance of meanings referring to quality; but strictly speaking it operates almost entirely in a different linguistic category from the other two words, and it should be grouped with them in discussions of theme only with appropriate caution and qualification. For uses of 'trouthe' see the relevant entries in *A Chaucer Glossary*, compiled by Norman Davis, Douglas Gray, Patricia Ingham, and Anne Wallace-Hadrill, Oxford, 1979; and *The Oxford English Dictionary*, ed. J. A. H. Murray and others, 12 vols plus supplements, Oxford, 1933-86.
31. In these lines the word used, twice, is the adverb 'frely'; the corresponding adjective 'fre' is the word used in line 1622. In *The Franklin's Tale* these words make a set with the noun 'franchise', although there is no etymological connection: see the relevant entries in *The Oxford English Dictionary* (see no.30 above). The connection seems, rather, to be due to a confluence of sense reinforced by the alliteration.
12. 'Lust' in Middle English refers to pleasure either in a general sense or with specifically sexual connotations. The word occurs elsewhere in *The Franklin's Tale* only once, at line 812, where the general meaning is clearly to be understood. At line 1522 either meaning is possible, but the word probably has the general meaning again: if 'lust' meant 'sexual pleasure', Aurelius would be castigating himself for his previous thoughts in a clerical tone quite out of keeping with his presentation elsewhere in the text. For uses of 'lust' see the relevant entries in *A Chaucer Glossary* (see n.30 above); and the *Middle English Dictionary* (see n.8 above).
13. The lines concerned are allocated to Aurelius in Gerald Morgan's edition and in *The Riverside Chaucer*, and to the narrator in the editions of Robinson and Cawley (see nn.1 and 6 above).
14. The parallel between the rash promise of Aurelius and that of Dorigen is noted

SYDNEY STUDIES

- by H. L. Rogers (see n.5 above), p.19.
- 35 'Fre' conduct, or 'franchise', is explained as one of several elements contributing to the broad idea of 'gentillesse' by Lindsay A. Mann, "'Gentillesse" and the *Franklin's Tale*,' *Studies in Philology* 63 (1966), 10-29.
- 36 In the *Decameron* the same question is posed, but no final agreement is reached (10.5-6).
- 37 This observation has been made by Margaret Singer, '*Adventure or grace: Lucky in Love in the Franklin's Tale?*', in *Words and Wordsmiths: a volume for H. L. Rogers*, ed. Geraldine Barnes, John Gunn, Sonya Jensen, and Lee Jobling, Sydney, 1989, p.118.
- 38 For texts see n.3 above. The passage in *Le Roman de la rose* includes the further argument that learned men have a greater opportunity than princes and kings to acquire true nobility, since they will know from their studies how to avoid vice and pursue virtue. Some other instances of discussion of the topic are listed by Christine Ryan Hilary in her notes to line 1109 of *The Wife of Bath's Tale* in *The Riverside Chaucer*, p.874; and by Lindsay A. Mann (see n.35 above), pp.10-12.