

Western Kentucky University

TopSCHOLAR®

English Faculty Publications

English

2008

"My trouthe for to holde-allas, allas!": Dorigen and Honor in The Franklin's Tale

Alison Ganze

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.wku.edu/english_fac_pub



Part of the [English Language and Literature Commons](#), [Medieval Studies Commons](#), and the [Women's Studies Commons](#)

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by TopSCHOLAR®. It has been accepted for inclusion in English Faculty Publications by an authorized administrator of TopSCHOLAR®. For more information, please contact topscholar@wku.edu.

Western Kentucky University

From the Selected Works of Alison (Ganze) Langdon

2008

"My trouthe for to holde—allas, allas!": Dorigen
and Honor in *The Franklin's Tale*."

Alison Ganze, Western Kentucky University



Available at: https://works.bepress.com/alison_langdon/8/



Project
MUSE[®]
Scholarly journals online

“MY TROUTHE FOR TO HOLDE—ALLAS, ALLAS!”: DORIGEN AND HONOR IN THE *FRANKLIN’S TALE*

by Alison Ganze

Perhaps the most oft-quoted (and debated) words in the *Franklin’s Tale* are those of Arveragus when he admonishes Dorigen that she must keep her promise to sleep with the squire Aurelius should he succeed in the task she playfully set him, for “Trouthe is the hyste thing that man may kepe” (V 1479).¹ The question is, exactly what kind of *trouthe* does Arveragus mean, and how does this *trouthe* apply to Dorigen? In addressing the first part of this question, we must bear in mind that *trouthe* is perhaps the single most multivalent word in Middle English. Its meaning had not yet been largely reduced to factual veracity, as it has in Modern English—in fact, this aspect of *trouthe’s* meaning was still relatively new in Chaucer’s time.² For most of the Middle English period, *trouthe* comprised a wide range of interrelated meanings. The *MED* gives no fewer than sixteen different definitions of the word *trouthe*, including ‘loyalty’ (to one’s kin, one’s country, one’s beloved, one’s God); ‘adherence to vows and promises’; ‘constancy’; ‘honor, nobility, integrity, or moral soundness’; ‘honesty’; ‘character or behavior that conforms to religious or divine standards, righteousness, or holiness’; ‘faith,’ especially Christian faith, the tenets of Christian belief; ‘absolute truth,’ usually identified with spiritual reality; ‘factual information’; and ‘justice,’ usually in the context of natural law. These definitions are further complicated by the awareness that each definition is often implicated in or evoked by one or more of the others. Indeed, the *MED* offers its definitions with the caveat that, although quotations have been provided to illustrate each of the various senses of *trouthe*, it would be a mistake to assume that any quotation is exclusive in its illustration of a given meaning, for the word “and the concepts it expresses defy rigid categorization.”³

Since Arveragus directs his wife to keep her promise to Aurelius, and since in her complaint Dorigen repeatedly expresses her desire to remain chaste to her husband, it is easy to conclude that Arveragus privileges one kind of *trouthe*—promises, or verbal fidelity—while Dorigen privileges another—loyalty to her spouse, or bodily fidelity. In fact, the concerns of

both husband and wife are united in yet a third sense of *trouthe*, that of honor. However, since the nature of that honor is itself a matter of debate, we are not much further along in resolving our dilemma. In Middle English, the word *honour* is nearly as semantically loaded as *trouthe*, encompassing both mundane and transcendent meanings. Its own synonyms include *worship*, *curteisie*, *renoun*, *noblesse*, *glorie* (both worldly and spiritual), *worthynesse*, *name*, and *fame*. Further complicating matters, one may note a dichotomous relationship between these two groups of synonyms. As Derek Brewer eloquently puts it,

honour is Janus-faced. On the one side honour looks towards goodness, virtue, an inner personal quality; the other side looks towards social or external reputation, to marks of dignity, like giving generous feasts, or making honorific gestures like kneeling.⁴

This dichotomy is beautifully illustrated in Chaucer's translation of Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy*. In Book II, Prosa 6, *honour* follows from the personal virtue that is the only true good:

But now, if so be that dignytees and poweris ben yven to gode men, the whiche thyng is ful zelde, what aggreable thynges is ther in tho dignytees or powers but oonly the goodnesse of folk that usen hem? And therefore it is thus that honour ne cometh nat to vertu for cause of dygnite, but, ayenward, honour cometh to dignyte for cause of vertu. (*Bo* II.Pr.6.20–27)

Ideally, of course, worldly reputation would be a reflection of inner virtue. In fact, as Gerald Morgan argues, "Honor in the sense of fame or reputation holds the status of a moral quality" because of the assumed correspondence "between external behavior and internal movements of the soul."⁵ Yet honor can too easily be simply equated with virtue and thus made an end in itself. Later in *Boece*, the entirety of Book III, Prosa 4 is dedicated to Lady Philosophy's condemnation of honor, here associated with public esteem, as one of the false goods that are mere appearances of the true good.

We can see from the beginning of the *Franklin's Tale* that honor as public esteem is an overriding concern for Arveragus, who qualifies his exceedingly courtly marriage vow, swearing always to remain Dorigen's servant in love, with the condition that he retain the public appearance of lordly husband, "That wolde he have for shame of his degree" (V 752). He will grant his wife complete freedom as long as that freedom remains private, veiled from the public eye. Arveragus must strive continually to maintain his knightly renown lest he be accused of shameful recreance, and for most of the tale he is absent, traveling to England

To seke in armes worshipe and honour—
 For al his lust he sette in swich labour.

(V 811–12)

Aurelius, too, devotes himself to the quest for honor: as an aspiring knight, he must prove himself in competition with another, greater knight. Here this competition takes the form of winning Dorigen away from her husband, along with the “grace” (V 999) she bestows on him by virtue of her “heigh kyndrede” (V 735).

Others have explored in detail the deep and abiding concern with honor Arveragus and Aurelius evince in the tale.⁶ However, Dorigen’s own preoccupation with honor—no less significant in the tale’s exposition of *trouthe*—has not received much critical attention. Indeed, the question of Dorigen’s honor is often preempted by analysis of the (masculine) chivalric code of honor, which subsumes female honor within it. Yet an analysis of Dorigen’s promise to Aurelius and of her despairing complaint will reveal that she, too, participates in the same concept of *trouthe* that binds her male counterparts, one that privileges *trouthe* not simply as honor but specifically as public reputation—the esteem others accord a person. My argument here is twofold: first, that while bodily fidelity to her husband is important, indeed crucial to Dorigen, we should not overlook the concern she evinces for verbal fidelity as well, for her dilemma (false though it may be) is predicated on that concern. Second, I will show that in both cases, it is the *reputation* for such fidelity that matters most—far more so than adherence to any truly moral or ethical code of behavior. It is this reduction of *trouthe* to *repute* that leads to the central dilemma in the tale, and leaves readers uneasy with its resolution.

I

Those who have directly addressed the question of Dorigen’s sense of honor tend to limit it to her personal identity as a “humble trewe wyf” (V 758), eliding Dorigen’s concern for her social identity as constituted through the public display of honorable behavior. While Emilio Englade acknowledges that the men in the tale all subscribe to an ideal of honor based upon a preoccupation with appearances, he insists that Dorigen exists outside this world of “masculine” values.⁷ According to Englade, Dorigen’s conception of honor is “strikingly different,” consisting solely of bodily fidelity—that is, the literal fact of her marital chastity.⁸ Effie Jean Mathewson is also critical of the selfish concern for reputation that passes for *trouthe* among the male characters, yet she does not extend

this critique to Dorigen. For Mathewson, *trouthe* means fidelity to one's word, a masculine value, while Dorigen is more concerned with being *trewe*, or faithful, to Arveragus: "Trouthe is a knightly concept, belonging to the masculine world [Arveragus] inhabits, not a part of Dorigen's moral existence, which does not extend beyond the concerns of maidenly and wifely virtue."⁹ Far from acknowledging the importance Arveragus's version of *trouthe* has for Dorigen, Mathewson argues that chastity is Dorigen's sole concern:

It is clear that keeping her bargain with Aurelius would mean a loss of chastity for Dorigen as well as shame to her body. But what she means by "Or know myselven fals" is not clear. False to what? If the examples in the complaint are applicable in Dorigen's case, falseness would mean betrayal of Arveragus to whom she owes the primary obligation of fidelity. Falseness to her word does not appear in Dorigen's reflections; neither in the examples she invokes nor in her comment on them is *trouthe* in this sense suggested.¹⁰

Following Mathewson, Mary Bowman also argues that male and female moral values are at odds in the tale, collapsing all senses of Dorigen's possible honor—"of my body to have a shame, / Or knowe myselven fals, or lese my name" (V 1361–62)—into bodily fidelity. Arveragus

sets great store by public opinion: just as he reserves to himself the "name of soveraynetee" in spite of his promise to defer to his wife's will, not out of a concern for reciprocity or the divine order, but for "shame of his degree," he is less disturbed by the thought of his wife's having sex with another man than by the prospect that someone might hear about it.

To Dorigen, however, the "masculine" value of *gentillesse*—which encompasses both Arveragus's insistence on fidelity to one's word and his and Aurelius's concern for name—is "either meaningless or bear[s] a different interpretation."¹¹ Bowman contends that "the public opinion Arveragus values so highly" is "foreign" to Dorigen, claiming that the exempla in Dorigen's complaint consist entirely of women who prefer death to being sexually unchaste, with no concern for reputation.¹² This last claim of Bowman's is factually untrue. As we shall see in the following section, more than a few of the women in Dorigen's complaint do not consider suicide; others do not have their chastity threatened. For some, neither is the case. Like Englade and Mathewson, Bowman misinterprets the nature of the dishonor Dorigen hopes to avoid by limiting her analysis to Dorigen's horror at the thought of being unfaithful to Arveragus.

Chaucer makes it clear that Dorigen finds the idea of sexual infidelity to her husband abhorrent, and that chastity is a significant part of her conception of *trouthe*. It is also true that the exempla she draws upon do not directly concern fidelity to one's word. But if Dorigen conceives of her honor solely as chastity, if she does not value *trouthe* in a fashion similar to Arveragus and Aurelius, why does she never question her obligation to fulfill her promise to the squire? Mathewson at least acknowledges Dorigen's implicit acceptance of her obligation, noting that "Dorigen never questions the validity or binding force of her rash promise to Aurelius, despite the fact that the promise is absurd and its fulfillment impossible."¹³ Mathewson does not, however, pursue the implications of this observation. It is precisely because Dorigen omits any discussion of breaking her facetious promise to Aurelius that we can see her implicit acknowledgement of its importance. Far from dismissing verbal fidelity as a concern, Dorigen does not consider the possibility of going back on her word. Confronted with infidelity to her husband or infidelity to her word, Dorigen sees only two options available to her: "deeth or elles dishonour" (V 1358). She does not acknowledge a third option: to disregard her promise to Aurelius on the grounds that it was not a valid one.

Certainly there is much in the tale to suggest that the validity of her promise is questionable. Most fundamentally, a previous trothplight—the marriage vow to Arveragus—has its claim on Dorigen, and thus there is a logical flaw in Arveragus's insistence that she must keep the promise she swore to Aurelius in order for her to "kepe trouthe." The previous vow takes precedence and negates the conditions under which Dorigen is free to make such a promise. Boccaccio's *Il Filocolo*, Chaucer's closest analogue for the *Franklin's Tale*, makes this precedence explicit in the exchange between Menedon and Fiametta. As the two debate which of the three men in Menedon's tale was the most generous, Fiametta declares that the husband, "who gave up his wife, in whom his honor consisted," was the most generous, "although he behaved less than wisely." When Menedon protests that the husband gave up nothing, for he was bound by his wife's promise, Fiametta corrects him, saying that the wife's promise was invalid, both because the union of marriage dictates that man and wife are one, and thus the wife's promise could not be made without her husband's consent, and because the promise to Tarolfo directly contradicted her previous marital vow.¹⁴

Moreover, a fourteenth-century reader would understand that for Dorigen to fulfill her promise to Aurelius would mean committing adultery, a mortal sin, and as medieval commentators make abundantly clear, one is not bound by promises that entail illicit consequences. In two fine articles Alan Gaylord and Douglas Wurtele review these arguments

extensively, so I will limit myself to some of the most pertinent points here.¹⁵ In *Summa Theologiae* Thomas Aquinas explains that

Certain things are good, whatever be their result; such are acts of virtue, and these can be, absolutely speaking, the matter of a vow: some are evil, whatever their result may be; as those things which are sins in themselves, and these can nowise be the matter of a vow: while some, considered in themselves, are good, yet they may have an evil result, in which case the vow must not be kept.¹⁶

The anonymous fourteenth-century *Book of Vices and Virtues* bears out this judgment: “whan a man swereþ þing þat he may not holde wiþ-out synne; suche sweryng schal a man not holde, but wiþdrawe hym and do his penaunce for þe oop folily sowren.”¹⁷

Nor is this perspective limited to theologians; in the *Tale of Melibee*, Prudence, the embodiment of practical reason, echoes Aquinas in her advice to Melibee regarding the circumstances in which promises are not to be kept:

“Thou mayst also chaunge thy conseil if so be that thou fynde that by error, or by oother cause, harm or damage may bityde./ Also if thy conseil be dishonest, or ellis cometh of dishonest cause, chaunge thy conseil./ For the lawes seyn that ‘alle bihestes that been dishoneste been of no value’;/ and eek if so be that it be impossible, or may nat goodly be parfourned or kept.” (VII 1227–30)

Prudence’s second condition, that of honesty, parallels Thomas’s explanation of the role of intention:

When the intention of the swearer is not the same as the intention of the person to whom he swears, if this be due to the swearer’s guile, he must keep his oath in accordance with the sound understanding of the person to whom the oath is made If, however, the swearer uses no guile, he is bound in accordance with his own intention.¹⁸

The Franklin tells us that Dorigen gives her word “in pley” (V 988), implying that it was never her intention at all to pledge her love to Aurelius, but even without this assurance, the fact that her promise is framed by two responses affirming Dorigen’s fidelity to her husband, and that the condition she sets is one she believes impossible to fulfill, makes her intention explicit. In the first of these responses, Dorigen swears that she will never be unfaithful to Arveragus in word or deed:

“By thilke God that yaf me soule and lyf,
 Ne shal I nevere been untrewed wyf
 In word ne work, as fer as I have wit;
 I wold been his to whom that I am knyght.
 Taak this for fynal answer as of me.”
 (V 983–87)

It is important to emphasize the last line of her response, for here Dorigen tells Aurelius how to understand the rest of her words. If we adhere to the meaning of her words here, nothing she says later should countermand this “fynal answer.”

Even if Dorigen were to give herself to Aurelius, she would not be his alone, as the third section of her response makes clear. She advises Aurelius,

“Lat swiche folies out of youre herte slyde.
 What deyntee sholde a man han in his lyf
 For to go love another mannes wyf,
 That hath hir body whan so that hym liketh?”
 (V 1002–5)

Aurelius must then see the impossibility of Dorigen’s promise to love Aurelius better than any other man, and his despairing cry—“Is ther noon oother grace in yow?” (V 999)—indicates his full understanding of Dorigen’s intent. Just as it is impossible for Aurelius to fulfill the conditions Dorigen sets, it is likewise impossible for her to fulfill his desire. The phrasing of her promise to Aurelius does suggest her genuine wish that the impossible task she sets him could actually be accomplished. But yet, the promise still confirms her love for Arveragus, and thus reiterates the impossibility of the very thing she promises to do: to love Aurelius “best of any man” (V 997). The qualified conclusion of Dorigen’s pledge—“Have heer my trouthe, *in al that evere I kan*” (V 998, italics mine)—draws a final distinction between the possible and the impossible. The promise itself is merely a playful way of saying “when pigs fly,” and Aurelius should know it.¹⁹

Even though she is excused from keeping her promise by the medieval commentators, and even though the promise itself is clearly not a serious one, Dorigen still sees herself bound to keep it once Aurelius has fulfilled her conditions. Were Dorigen to deny that she is in fact under any obligation to Aurelius, she would risk neither her chastity nor her fidelity to Arveragus. She would, however, endanger her honor, because she would be violating her *trouthe*—not merely in the sense that she would be breaking her word, but also in that she would be vulnerable to defamation if

Aurelius were to make her promise public—something she seems to think is likely to occur if she does not keep that promise, given her fear that, if she were to break it, she would “lese my name” (V 1362). Aurelius’s brother, who first devises the plan to seek out magical assistance to appear to fulfill Dorigen’s condition, explicitly recognizes the opportunity to damage Dorigen’s reputation. If the young men are able at least to make it appear that the rocks have been removed,

“Thanne moste she nedes holden hire biheste,
Or elles he shal shame hire atte leeste.”
(V 1163–64)

It is not entirely clear which specific shame Dorigen fears—to be known for having broken a promise, or for having apparently consented to adultery—but in either case it is a public shame. Both the dilemma Dorigen finds herself in and the solutions she proposes in her complaint are predicated on her concern for honor.

II

Englade, Mathewson, Bowman, and others who privilege Dorigen’s concern for chastity are not entirely incorrect when they argue that the desire to be “trewe” to Arveragus is a primary motivating factor. I argue, however, that this desire is itself at least partly motivated by Dorigen’s desire to maintain her public reputation—that it is not merely the fact of being “trewe,” but also the need to be known for being “trewe” that matters. Like Crisyede, who fears that she will be remembered throughout history for her infidelity to Troilus, Dorigen knows that a woman’s chastity may determine whether her reputation will live on in praise or in infamy, and her complaint is intended to illustrate the virtue of her desire to commit suicide rather than compromise the chastity of her marriage and thereby dishonor her name.

The complaint itself consists of a lengthy catalogue of virtuous pagan women, most of whom similarly choose death over the dishonor of compromised chastity:

“Hath ther nat many a noble wyf er this,
And many a mayde, yslayn hirself, allas,
Rather than with hir body doon trespas?
Yis, certes, lo, thise stories beren witnessse.”
(V 1364–67)

The exempla that comprise the complaint are drawn from Jerome's *Adversus Jovinianum*, a tract advocating the superiority of virginity and chaste widowhood. Perhaps surprisingly, although Jerome provides many examples of married women who protect their chastity, Dorigen does not focus on married women alone. Instead, she chooses to include examples of virgins in her complaint as well. The sheer number of exempla provided in Dorigen's complaint, the varying degrees of applicability to Dorigen's own situation, and the apparent absence of any overarching organizing principle have led some to find the complaint "comically tedious," an embarrassing intrusion into the narrative marked by its irrelevance and incoherence.²⁰ According to this view, Chaucer draws the exempla from Jerome seemingly at random; one might imagine him simply closing his eyes and laying a finger on the manuscript in front of him, taking whatever exemplum his finger landed upon. Even those inclined to read Dorigen sympathetically often have difficulty discerning cohesive order and purpose in her complaint. Mathewson, for example, sees Dorigen "giving herself a rote recital, a kind of catechism of virtuous womanhood which is only partly understood."²¹

Yet I believe that Chaucer knew what he was about when he gave Dorigen this hodgepodge of exempla culled from Jerome, and that the complaint both has an important purpose and fulfills it well. Given the horrific situation in which Dorigen finds herself, it is logical to assume that the apparent incoherence and disorganization of the complaint reflect the confusion and desperation in Dorigen's mind. But its significance may go deeper than this. By disrupting Jerome's method of organization, Dorigen undermines the distinction Jerome makes between virgins and wives, a distinction that is largely irrelevant to her. Whether she be virgin or wife, a woman's honor is grounded largely in her chastity, and it is through a demonstration of this virtue that Dorigen may vindicate her own name.

The first twelve exempla, from Phidon's daughters to Nicerates's wife, fulfill most unambiguously Dorigen's stated purpose at the beginning of the complaint. With only one exception, the women in these twelve initial exempla commit suicide to avoid or to expunge the dishonor of an assault upon their chastity. What becomes clear as Dorigen proceeds through their stories is the indelible link between chastity and honor. Being chaste is not enough—one must be known for one's chastity. Lucretia articulates this theme particularly well. Among the other women listed in the complaint, Lucretia stands out as one who kills herself explicitly to avoid any stain on her reputation:

“Hath nat Lucesse yslayn hirself, allas,
 At Rome, whan that she oppressed was
 Of Tarqyun, for hire thoughte it was a shame
 To lyven whan she hadde lost hir name?”
 (V 1405–8)

Chaucer emphasizes the importance of reputation for Lucretia in the *Legend of Good Women* as well; when Tarquin comes to rape Lucretia, he specifically threatens to sully her name if she should resist him:

“I shal in the stable slen thy knave,
 And ley hym in thy bed, and loude crye
 That I the fynde in swich avouterye.
 And thus thow shalt be ded and also lese
 Thy name, for thow shalt non other chese.”
 (F 1807–11)

It is this threat that finally overcomes Lucretia. She is so horrified at the thought of this slander that fear of death is secondary, as the narrator explains

These Romeyns wyves lovede so here name
 At thilke tyme, and dredde so the shame,
 That, what for fer of sclaunder and drede of deth,
 She loste both at ones wit and breth.
 (F 1812–15)

When the crime is finally revealed to Lucretia’s friends and family, Lucretia insists that her death is necessary, not only to protect her name but her husband’s as well:

She sayde that, for hir gylt ne for hir blame,
 Hir husbonde shulde nat have the foule name.
 (F 1844–45)

All insist that Lucretia is in no way to blame—she bears no guilt for the rape, since “it lay not in hir myght,” and they offer “ensamples many oon” in demonstration (F 1849–50)—but Lucretia is not to be dissuaded, and stabs herself. Paradoxically, Lucretia’s act of self-annihilation eternally memorializes the sense of self she wishes to preserve—her social identity as a true wife. She accomplishes this by ensuring that her last act on earth is one that dramatically affirms this identity.

Despite the explicit references to her chastity, Lucretia's story seems just as much an articulation of her concern for honor and reputation. This concern is the focus of Saint Augustine's criticism of Lucretia's motive for suicide. In his introduction to Lucretia's story, the *Legend* narrator claims that Augustine "hath gret compassioun / Of this Lucesse" (F 1690–91), but this may be disingenuous. While Augustine absolves Lucretia of the sin of adultery because she did not consent to Tarquin's embrace, he does find her guilty of the sin of pride, having valued her worldly reputation above all else:

When [Lucretia] slew herself because she had endured the act of an adulterer even though she was not an adulteress herself, she did this not from love of purity, but because of a weakness arising from shame. . . . Being a Roman lady excessively eager for praise, she feared that, if she remained alive, she would be thought to have enjoyed suffering the violence that she had suffered when she lived. Hence, she judged that she must use self-punishment to exhibit the state of her mind to the eyes of men to whom she could not show her conscience.²²

For Augustine, it is Lucretia's concern for her appearance "in the eyes of men" rather than her concern for virtue that motivates her suicide. In the *Legend* Augustine's judgment of Lucretia's overriding concern for fame is further borne out by the narrator's comment that, after she stabs herself, Lucretia is careful to fall so that her body remains completely covered by her clothing:

And as she fel adoun, she kaste hir lok,
 And of hir clothes yet she hede tok.
 For in hir fallynge yet she had a care,
 Lest that hir fet or suche thyng lay bare;
 So wel she loved clenness and eke trouthe.
 (F 1856–60)

The pettiness of Lucretia's concern for appearances here is almost comical, and affirms Donald Rowe's observation that her "determination to die to establish her virtue, though she is innocent, reveals that being thought blameless is more important to her than being blameless."²³

By her suicide Lucretia transforms a potential instance of greatest shame into one of greatest fame, and by asserting that she will imitate Lucretia's example, Dorigen seeks to do likewise, as a woman who will be honored for keeping her *trouthe* with Arveragus, rather than as one dishonored for breaking her *trouthe* with Aurelius. While Dorigen's promise may have been imprudent, she is, like Lucretia, not guilty of

adultery in her heart. Her innocence may not be evident to others who might learn of that promise, however, and her assertion that she should kill herself is born out of that same “weakness of shame” that motivates Lucretia, the fear that suicide is the only way to exonerate herself of any accusations that her promise to Aurelius expressed true desire on her part to commit adultery.

As with Lucretia, the majority of the exempla in Dorigen’s complaint do indeed consist of women who fulfill the theme Dorigen originally proclaims; that is, they choose “death” over “dishonour” (V 1358). However, a striking shift occurs at the end of the second section of the complaint with the reference to Alcebiades’s concubine, who does not face an assault on her chastity in any way. Instead, she risks her life to vindicate her lover’s honor by defying the injunction against his burial:

“How trewe eek was to Alcebiades
His love, that rather for to dyen chees
Than for to suffre his body unburyed be.”
(V 1439–41)

Many of the women in the concluding section of the complaint similarly earn fame through their sensitivity to their husbands’ honor, a display of loyalty that accrues honor for the women as well. Much as Alcebiades’s concubine shows concern for her beloved’s continued honor after death, Artemesia honors her husband Mausoleus by erecting the funeral monument from which the modern mausoleum derives its name. In another exemplum, Penelope quite literally defends her husband’s place from a barrage of suitors, practicing a strategy of deferral that may very well be what Dorigen had in mind when she imposed her impossible condition on Aurelius.

These final exempla in Dorigen’s complaint give particular insight into the way Dorigen privileges the conception of *trouthe* as honor, specifically in terms of public reputation, a way very similar to the concern for honor evidenced by Arveragus and Aurelius. In her version of Arveragus’s concern for name, Dorigen emphasizes the pervasive and enduring nature of these women’s reputations: “Al Grece” (V 1444) knows of Penelope’s chastity through Homer’s song; Laodomia’s name is also handed down to us by poets (V 1445–47); and “Arthemisie / Honored is thurgh al the Barbarie” (V 1451–52). The profusion of names here in the conclusion of Dorigen’s complaint is significant. Whereas in the previous sections of the complaint only two of the women—Lucretia and the virgin Stymphalides—are named, each of the ten women who comprise the final section is mentioned specifically by

name. In fact, the last five references are to names only, without any details of their virtuous acts.

As Gerald Morgan argues, this litany of names suggests that what is most important in these last exempla is fame in and of itself. In the case of Alcestis, for example, “Chaucer suppresses the fact that she dies in the place of her husband Admetus although Jerome refers to it, since that fact may encourage us to think in terms of her fidelity rather than her fame.”²⁴ Alcestis gives her life in place of her husband, only to be rewarded for her virtuous act with literal resurrection. The fact that six of the ten women in the conclusion of the complaint survive rather than commit suicide becomes less significant, for Dorigen’s primary objective is not death but rather salvaging her honor and reputation. Metaphorically, Dorigen hopes that with her death she might “resurrect” herself through her good name. Like Teuta, another woman named in the final section, Dorigen would have her “wyfly chastitee / To all wyves . . . a mirour bee” (V 1453–54). Dorigen wishes to be included in this company of chaste and honorable women; she would live on in memory, not as a false Criseyde, but as a true Penelope.

III

Dorigen does not, of course, commit suicide in the end, nor does she appear to suggest this option to Arveragus when she tells him what has transpired. Instead, she waits until Arveragus returns home once again and informs him of her promise to Aurelius, and then, half mad with grief and horror, obeys Arveragus’s demand that she keep her word. What are we to make of Dorigen’s apparent reversal? We must remember that Arveragus’s marriage vow was essentially a promise to love Dorigen in the manner of a courtly, chivalric knight, ceding his patriarchal right to *maistrye* in marriage and committing himself to courtly obeisance:

Of his free wil he swoor hire as a knyght
That nevere in al his lyf he, day ne nyght,
Ne sholde upon hym take no maistrie
Agayn hir wyl, ne kithe hire jalousie,
But hire obeye, and folwe hir wyl in al,
As any lovere to his lady shal.

(V 745–50)

Yet there is still a sense in which Arveragus may respond in keeping with his courtly vow and also save Dorigen from Aurelius. Were he to challenge the squire, Arveragus would be within his rights both as a husband and as courtly lover—a course of action that would preserve the “humble, wys accord” (V 791) the Franklin praises.

Here the example of Penelope offers one more useful insight into Dorigen’s conception of her own honor. There are more than a few similarities between the two women and the situations in which they find themselves. Both have had to endure their husbands’ lengthy absences, and while certainly Arveragus’s two years can hardly compare with Odysseus’s twenty, the Franklin attributes a grief to Dorigen that is more in keeping with Penelope’s in its intensity (V 815–94). I have already noted above that each woman attempts to evade outright rejection of her suitor or suitors as well, by setting what amounts to a self-negating condition. But Odysseus’s response is significant as well. Although neither Jerome nor Dorigen explicitly refer to what happens after Odysseus’s return, the hero’s violent reclaiming of what is his is as much a part of Penelope’s story as her own fidelity and chastity, and as such it informs Dorigen’s reference to her. I would suggest that Dorigen wants Arveragus to be an Odysseus and get rid of the suitor—in other words, to respond as a chivalric knight and act as a champion for her honor. As Michael Wright astutely observes, “An Arveragus who threatened to kill Aurelius might have been less New Age, indeed downright primitive, but considerably more use and comfort to Dorigen.”²⁵

There is historical as well as literary precedent for the response I believe Dorigen desires from Arveragus, one that bears more than a passing resemblance to the *Franklin’s Tale*. In a 1386 entry in his *Chroniques*, Jean Froissart relates the story of Jean de Carrouge, a knight in the service of the count Pierre d’Alençon.²⁶ Like Arveragus, Jean leaves his wife to seek renown in far-off lands. In his absence, Jean’s wife entertains a visiting squire named Jacques le Gris, also in the count’s service. Trusting in his honor, the lady conducts Jacques on a tour of the castle’s dungeons, where the squire rapes her. The lady says nothing of what she has endured until her husband returns home. Once convinced of what has transpired, the knight immediately resolves that the malfeasant squire must die and takes his case to the count. However, with only the lady’s word against the squire’s, the count denies Jean’s plea for justice. Undaunted, Jean appeals his case to the Parliament in Paris, where it is judged that the matter shall be decided through trial by combat. Much is at stake: if Jean were to lose the fight, his life would be forfeit and his lady would face death by burning. In the end, justice carries the day; after a long and difficult fight, Jean de Carrouge kills Jacques le Gris and vindicates his lady’s name. Charles V is so impressed

by Jean's dedication to his wife's honor that he rewards him with a gift of a thousand francs and makes him a member of the royal household.

Despite the personal risk entailed—a risk that involves both his life and his reputation—Jean does not hesitate to defend his wife's honor publicly. Such a response from Arveragus would allow Dorigen to preserve her honor in all three of the senses she refers to in the beginning of her complaint: her chastity, her fidelity to her word, and her name, all intact and inviolate. Unfortunately for Dorigen, Arveragus's response is very different. Not only does Arveragus insist that Dorigen keep her promise to Aurelius, he also forbids her “up peyne of death” (V 1481) to breathe a word of this to anyone and enjoins her to “make no contenance of hevynesse / That folk of yow may demen harm or gesse” (V 1485–86). One is inclined to agree with Thomas J. Hatton's observation that Jean de Carrouge's decision to champion his wife “makes an interesting contrast to the behavior of Arveragus, who is willing to sacrifice the honor of his wife for a vow made in jest, providing she will keep the matter quiet.”²⁷

Most critics credit Arveragus with the denouement of the tale, reading his comment that “It may be wel, paraventure, yet to day” (V 1473) as evidence that he anticipates Aurelius's noble and compassionate response releasing Dorigen from her promise. By ordering Dorigen to make no sign of her distress, however, Arveragus would remove some of the impetus for that response. It is Dorigen, in her disobedience of Arveragus's command, who elicits the desired reaction from Aurelius by publicly appealing to his own sense of honor. When Dorigen offers herself to Aurelius as her husband commands, she does so not in the privacy of the garden, but “Amydde the toun, right in the quykkest strete” (V 1502)—and makes a determined (though no less sincere) display of her grief, which David Raybin and Anne Thompson Lee both argue is at least as much a factor in Aurelius's decision to release her as his desire to match Arveragus in generosity.²⁸ Aurelius recognizes that his own reputation is at stake; he is aware that he would appear “cherlyssh” (V 1523) if he were to insist that Dorigen give herself to him now, for if Arveragus refuses to play the part of the jealous husband so that Aurelius may play the noble wooer, then Aurelius is forced into the role of rapacious cad. In disregarding her husband's order, Dorigen thus effectively shifts the potential for dishonor onto Aurelius—and, indeed, onto Arveragus as well, for Dorigen makes it clear that she has come, not of her own free will, but only “as myn housbonde bad” (V 1512). If any stories are told, they will include Dorigen's devotion and innocence, reaffirming her reputation as a “humble trewe wyf.”

IV

We can see from the discussion above that Dorigen is no less impelled by the desire for public honor than any other character in the *Franklin's Tale*, even when the pursuit of such honor runs counter to logic or virtue. Dorigen's desire to preserve her reputation—her refusal even to consider treating her *trouthe* with Aurelius as the jest they both know it to be—is what leads her into the dilemma she faces, and the same desire determines the responses she sees as options available to her. To make this argument is not necessarily to condemn Dorigen, and certainly the Franklin does not do so. But his tale does illustrate the conflicts that arise when abstract concepts such as *trouthe* are manifested in the real world of human contingencies. To keep one promise means to break another; to behave honorably in one sense means to commit an act that is inherently dishonorable. The choices Dorigen makes necessitate a choice between *trouthes*, between inner virtue and the outward appearance of virtue, and it is outward appearances that ultimately prevail.

Western Kentucky University
Bowling Green, Kentucky
 (alison.ganze@wku.edu)

1. All Chaucer quotations are from *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry D. Benson, 3rd edn. (Boston, 1987).
2. For a richly detailed exploration of *trouthe* in late medieval England, and one to which I am greatly indebted, see Richard Firth Green, *A Crisis of Truth: Law and Literature in Ricardian England* (Philadelphia, 1999).
3. *MED*, s.v. *trouthe* n.
4. Derek Brewer, *Tradition and Innovation in Chaucer* (London, 1982), 90.
5. Gerald Morgan, "A Defence of Dorigen's Complaint," *Medium Evum* 46 (1977): 77–97, at 87.
6. Douglas Wurtele provides the most succinct (and scathing) assessment of Arveragus; see "Chaucer's Franklin and the Truth about 'Trouthe,'" *English Studies in Canada* 13 (1987): 359–74. Not all readers of the tale are inclined to see Arveragus in such a negative light, however. Gerald Morgan offers a passionate defense of Arveragus in "Boccaccio's *Il Filocolo* and the Moral Argument of the *Franklin's Tale*," *Chaucer Review* 20 (1986): 285–306, esp. 299–304; see also Kathryn Jacobs, "The Marriage Contract of the *Franklin's Tale*: The Remaking of Society," *Chaucer Review* 20 (1985): 132–43. For a discussion of Aurelius's concern for honor, see Wolfgang E. H. Rudat, "*Gentillesse* and the Marriage Debate in the *Franklin's Tale*: Chaucer's Squires and the Question of Nobility," *Neophilologus* 68 (1984): 451–70.
7. Emilio Englade, "'Straw for Youre Gentillesse!': Masculine Identity, Honor, and Dorigen," *Publications of the Medieval Association of the Midwest* 5 (1998), 34–57, at 36, 50.

8. Englade, "Straw for Youre Gentillesse!," 38.
9. Effie Jean Mathewson, "The Illusion of Morality in the *Franklin's Tale*," *Medium Ævum* 52 (1983): 27–37, at 30.
10. Mathewson, "The Illusion of Morality," 28.
11. Mary Bowman, "'Half As She Were Mad': Dorigen in the Male World of the *Franklin's Tale*," *Chaucer Review* 27 (1993): 239–51, at 245.
12. Bowman, "Half As She Were Mad," 246–47.
13. Mathewson, "The Illusion of Morality," 28.
14. Giovanni Boccaccio, *Il Filocolo*, trans. Donald Cheney with Thomas G. Bergin (New York, 1985), 262–63.
15. Alan Gaylord, "The Promises in the *Franklin's Tale*," *ELH* 31 (1964): 331–65, esp. 350–46; and Wurtele, "Chaucer's Franklin," 363–66.
16. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 2nd edn., trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (London, 1920), pt. II–II, q. 88, art. 2.
17. W. Nelson Francis, ed., *The Book of Vices and Virtues*, EETS o.s. 217 (London, 1942), 62.
18. Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, pt. II–II, q. 89, art. 9.
19. Carol Pulham, "Promises, Promises: Dorigen's Dilemma Revisited," *Chaucer Review* 31 (1996): 76–86, at 77, argues that disregarding a promise made in jest is a modern, not medieval, concept, for in modern society with a longer history of literacy, "the attitude towards oral promising has changed" to one that favors written agreements as more binding; thus, modern readers tend to minimize the gravity of Dorigen's situation. In the Middle Ages, oral contracts are certainly considered binding, but this does not mean that all oral contracts are equally valid, and both secular and ecclesiastical courts required more evidence to determine if a contract was made in good faith. An historical example will help illustrate this point. In a case cited by Green, a young man named Claude Nonette playfully offered a drink "in the name of marriage" to one of his companions. Another woman, Nicole Loyseau, took the cup and, after drinking from it, declared that she and Claude were now formally betrothed. When the flabbergasted Claude refused to acknowledge the betrothal, Nicole sued him for breach of promise. Fortunately for Claude, the court quickly determined that he had never intended to betroth himself to Nicole and dismissed the case. For Green, the fact that Nicole evidently believed she had a legitimate claim regardless of Claude's intentions indicates that modern readers may too easily dismiss the "rash promises" so popular in medieval romance. However, while such instances certainly do complicate our analysis of stories such as *FranT*, they do not allow us to conclude just as easily that every promise, whether rashly made or not, was sacrosanct. See Green, *Crisis of Truth*, 293, citing H. d'Arbois de Jubainville and F. André, eds., *Inventaire sommaire des archives départementales antérieures à 1790*, Archives Ecclésiastiques, ser. G, vol. 2 (Paris, 1896), 309.
20. Germaine Dempster, "Chaucer at Work on the Complaint in the *Franklin's Tale*," *Modern Language Notes* 52 (1937): 18–20.
21. Mathewson, "The Illusion of Morality," 28.
22. Augustine, *The City of God against the Pagans*, ed. and trans. R. W. Dyson (Cambridge, U.K., 1998), 31.
23. Donald Rowe, *Through Nature to Eternity: Chaucer's Legend of Good Women* (Lincoln, Neb., 1988), 65.
24. Morgan, "A Defence," 91.
25. Michael J. Wright, "Isolation and Identity in the *Franklin's Tale*," *Studia Neophilologica* 70 (1998): 181–86, at 183.
26. Jean Froissart, *Chroniques*, III, XLIX; trans. Thomas Johnes, *Chronicles of England, France, Spain, and the Adjoining Countries*, 2 vols. (New York, 1901), 1:377–80. The circumstances described here are not completely analogous with Dorigen's situation, of course.

In Froissart's account, the lady makes no promise that suggests, even ironically, that she is willing to sleep with the squire. However, the essence of rape is the violation of the victim's will, and in her complaint Dorigen makes it quite clear, through her emphases on the threatened or inflicted violations of the women, that her promised liaison with Aurelius would be against her will. Warren Smith, "Dorigen's Lament and the Resolution of the *Franklin's Tale*," *Chaucer Review* 36 (2002), 374–90, at 383–86, shows that the language characterizing her complaint shifts Jerome's righteous praise of the suicides to lamentation of the circumstances that force many of the women into such terrible actions. Rape itself becomes the focus, as Dorigen continually refers to the "foul delit" and defilement the women face, and to the anguish they suffer. While Jerome expresses his approval of the women's examples, Dorigen grieves for them; Jerome downplays the rape itself, while Dorigen brings it to the forefront. And as Smith points out, Dorigen explicates several of the exempla from Jerome in a way that underscores the threat of rape.

27. Thomas J. Hatton, "Magic and Honor in the *Franklin's Tale*," *Papers on Language and Literature* 3 (1967): 179–81, at 181.

28. David Raybin, "'Wommen, of Kynde, Desiren Libertee': Rereading Dorigen, Rereading Marriage," *Chaucer Review* 27 (1992), 65–86, at 76; and Anne Thompson Lee, "'A Woman True and Fair': Chaucer's Portrayal of Dorigen in the *Franklin's Tale*," *Chaucer Review* 19 (1984), 169–78, at 176.