THE ROCKS AND THE GARDEN: THE LIMITS OF ILLUSION
IN CHAUCER'S FRANKLIN'S TALE

In Chaucer and the Imagery of Narrative, V. A. Kolven argues that each of the
Canterbury Tales is organized around one or more 'images created by the na-
rative action' that serve as 'memorial centers' for the reader's reconstruction of
the poem's essential meanings.1 Kolven's study treats the first five Canterbury
Tales. Of those tales that Kolven will presumably take up in subsequent vol-
umes, the Franklin's Tale would seem particularly suited to his approach; even
a cursory glance at the tale's critical history will reveal how frequently com-
mentators have returned to two of its images — the rocky seacoast where
Dorien imagines the shipwreck of her absent husband and the paradisaical
garden where she makes her promise to Aurelius — as a way of organizing their
experience of the poem. Writing about the Franklin's Tale in his biography of
Chaucer, Donald Howard contrasts the rocks and the garden, which 'represent
a world of illusion', with the busy city street where Dorien and Aurelius meet
by chance, 'in the quotidian atmosphere where the realities of everyday life are
attended to'.2 In what follows, I want to reexamine the poem's two central
images from the perspective suggested by Howard's brief gloss. Initially, the
rocks and the garden are scenes of personal obsession: the rocks both cause and
symbolize Dorien's paralyzing anxieties about her husband's safety, the gar-
den is the setting for Aurelius's courtly fantasies. Through their association
with magic, these images become more complexly intertwined with illusion as
the narrative unfolds. Almost from the beginning of the tale, however, the
Franklin reminds us that 'privately constructed worlds answering to singular
desires',3 have their limits, and their dangers; asserting the counter-claims of
common sense and mutual understanding, he prepares us for the exorcism of
illusion that occurs at the poem's conclusion.

We first see the Franklin supplying a wider, mitigating context for private
obessions in the episode of Dorien's complaint against the black rocks. Dorien's
troubled meditation grows out of the sudden disruption of her marital idyll by an unexpected turn of events — her husband's departure for England
'to seke in armes worshipe and honour' (F 811).4 Arveragus's freedom to pur-
sue his chivalric destiny highlights by contrast Dorien's powerlessness and
sense of isolation:

1 V. A. Kolven, Chaucer and the Imagery of Narrative: The First Five Canterbury Tales (Stanford,
3 The phrase is that of Anne Middleton, 'War by Other Means: Marriage and Chivalry in
Chaucer', in Studies in the Age of Chaucer. Proceedings, No. 1, 1984: Reconstructing Chaucer,
4 The Riverside Chaucer, 3rd ed., general editor Larry D. Benson (Boston, 1987), p. 179. All
subsequent citations of Chaucer's works are from this edition.
She moorneth, waketh, wayleth, fasteth, playneth;
Desir of his presence hire so destreyeth
That al this wyde world she sette at noight. (F 819-21)

Filling the empty hours by sitting on a cliff and gazing into the sea, she projects her ‘derke fantasye’ (F 844) onto the ‘grisly rokkes blake’ (F 859) that lie below her. Dorigen’s concern for the safety of her seafaring husband is no idle fear: shipwreck on hidden reefs and shoals was a constant danger for medieval sailors, a circumstance reflected in the literary use of the image of a vessel cast up on rocks to represent human subjection to Fortune. As Harry Berger points out, however, Dorigen ‘converts the normal hazards of life and love into a purely negative vision’; in a passionate address to ‘eterne God’ (F 865), she demands to know why he has created ‘this werk unresonable’ (F 872), and why — if he is a benevolent deity — he makes means to destroy mankind. These questions about God’s providence remain unanswered, both in this scene and in the work as a whole. Although the irrelevance of Dorigen’s queries to the tale’s subsequent concerns has been reckoned a flaw in the poem’s design, I would argue that this gap is deliberate, and dramatically functional; Dorigen’s speech shows her enmeshed in fruitless speculations that draw her away from those things which, in the Franklin’s view, would provide her with genuine solace. What Dorigen requires is not the consolation of philosophy, but human companionship, the ‘compaignye’ (F 843) that will take her mind off the frightening rocks and dispel her gloom.

Dorigen’s need for society is supplied by her friends, who at once feel the weight of her grief and recognize her response as excessive:


8 Compare Anne Middleton’s comment on the Franklin’s ‘reveat’ about ‘dwelling on speculative puzzles that take the mind away from what concerns the human condition, such as Dorigen’s wondering on God’s purpose in making the rocks’ (*Chaucer’s “New Men“ and the Good of Literature in the Canterbury Tales*, in *Literature and Society*, ed. Edward W. Said [Baltimore, 1980], p. 43).
Hire freendes, whiche that knewe hir hevy thoghth,
Conforten hire in al that ever they may.
They prechen hire, they tell hire nyght and day
That causelesse she sleeth hirself, alas!
And every confort possible in this cas
They doon to hire with al hire bisynesse,
Ai for to make hire leve hire hevynesse. (F 822-8)

The friends’ attempt at comfort is succeeded by the following comment from the Franklin himself:

   By proces, as ye known everichoon,
   Men may so longe graven in a stoon
   Til some figure therinne emprented be.
   So longe han they conforted hire til she
   Receyved hath, by hope and by resoun,
   The emprentynge of hire consolacioun,
   Thurch whir grete sorwe gan aswage;
   She may not alwey duren in swich rage. (F 829-36)

Like Dorigen’s companions, the Franklin both comprehends her sorrow and (unlike Dorigen) can see beyond it to its inevitable end. The Franklin also draws his audience into this community of sympathetic observers; in assuming our familiarity with the slow workings of ‘proces’ — in stone-carving as in consolation — he attributes to us the ability to take the long view, to respond to Dorigen’s plight with the patience and detachment she cannot attain herself.

Hoping to banish her ‘hevynesse’ (F 828), Dorigen’s solicitous friends employ the antidotes to melancholy recommended in contemporary medical manuals — pleasant surroundings, singing, dancing, and games:9

Hire freendes sawe that it was no disport
To romen by the see, but disconfort,
And shopen for to playen somwher elles.
They leden hire by ryveres and by welles,
And eek in othere places delitables;
They dauncen and they playen at ches and tables. (F 895-900)

Their progress through unspecified ‘places delitables’ leads them to a particular garden, rendered in loving detail by the Franklin:

   So on a day, right in the morwe-tyde,
   Unto a gardyn that was ther bisyde,
   In which that they hadde maad hir ordinaunce
   Of vitaille and of oother purveiaunce,
   They goon and playe hem at the longe day.
   And this was on the sixe morwe of May,
   Which May hadde peynted with his softe shoures
   This gardyn ful of leves and of floures;

9 Glending Olson, Literature as Recreation in the Later Middle Ages (Ithaca, 1982), pp. 56-61, 78-9.
And craft of mannes hand so curiously
Arrayed hadde this gardyn, trewely,
That neve was ther gardyn of swich prys
But if it were the verry paradys.
The odour of flourers and the freshe site
Wolde han maked any herte lighte
That ever was born, but if to greet siknesse
Or to greet sorwe helde it in distresse,
So ful it was of beautee with pleasaunce. (F 901-17)

From the perspective of Dorigen’s companions, the garden is a healthful alternative to the ‘foul confusion’ (F 869) of the grisly rocks; its enlivening sights and odors refresh the weary soul just as the ‘vitaille’ with which they have stocked it sustains the body. The particulars of the description — the May setting, the artfully ordered landscape, the comparison to the ‘verray paradys’ — also link the garden with the dream-landscapes of the Roman de la Rose and its numerous progeny; enclosed pleasures created for the leisured pursuit of fin amor. These associations prepare us in turn for the entrance into the poem of the garden’s ‘natural inhabitant’, the lovelorn squire Aurelius. When Aurelius makes his first appearance, the garden’s essential qualities are reinscribed as his personal attributes:

At after-dyner gone they to daunce,
And singe also ...

..................

Upon this daunce, amonges othere men,
Daunced a squier biforn Dorigen,
That fresher was and jolyer of array,
As to my doom, than is the month of May.
He syngeth, daunceth, passyenge any man
That is, or was, sith that the world bigan. (F 918-19, 925-30)

Initially part of the entertainment proposed by Dorigen’s friends, the dance takes on, with the emergence of the young squire from the general company of dancers, something of the iconographic significance it has in the Roman — as an invitation to sexual dalliance. At the moment we learn Aurelius’s name, we also discover that he is a ‘servant to Venus’ (F 937), and that he has loved Dorigen in secret for more than two years. Unable to give direct utterance to his passion, he turns his poetical skills to veiled representations of his distress, composing

many layes,
Songes, compleintes, roundels, virelayes,
How that he dorste nat his sorwe telle,
But langwissheth as a furye dooth in helle
And dye he moste, he scyde, as dide Ekko
For Narcisius, that dorste nat telle hir wo. (F 947-52)

Whether we attribute the comparison with Echo to the Franklin or to Aurelius himself (the syntax permits both possibilities), the analogy deflects the more logical — and less complimentary — parallel with the male figure of Narcissus, whose self-absorbed and self-destructive infatuation mirrors the squire’s own. It is the Fountain of Narcissus, reflecting the image of his beloved but inaccessible Rose, that the Dreamer in the Roman discovers in the center of Mirth’s garden; like him, Aurelius inhabits a space (arrayed, significantly, by ‘craft of mannes hand’) that figures forth a masculine fantasy of frustrated desire.

Establishing Dorigen’s relation to this garden is a matter of some importance, both for our interpretation of her promise to Aurelius and for our sense of her character more generally. In the lines omitted from the passage quoted above, she is described as standing apart from the pleasures of the garden, her mind still on Arveragus:

At after-dyner gonne they to daunce,  
And synge also, save Dorigen alone,  
Which made alwey hir compleinte and hir moone,  
For she ne saugh hym on the daunce go  
That was hir housbonde and hir love also. (F 918-22)

Although Dorigen continues to display some of the excesses of emotion we saw in the episode of the rocks, her refusal to take part in the dance is a touching sign of her commitment to her marriage; the reminder that the absent dancer is not only ‘hir housbonde’, but ‘hir love also’ makes participation in the dance, even before the introduction of Aurelius, seem a romantically frivolous activity. Thus, when Dorigen, in response to Aurelius’s entreaties, promises ‘in pley’ (F 988) that she will ‘love [him] best of any man’ (F 997) if he removes the rocks from the coast of Brittany, it seems unlikely that (as Gerhard Joseph suggests) she is ‘caught up in the garden’s aura of “gentil” coyness’. I would argue, on the contrary, that Dorigen adopts the manner of a standfallish romance heroine in an attempt to deflate Aurelius’s amorous rhetoric; the patently impossible assignment she playfully devides for the squire parodies the outlandishness of his adulterous longings. Her promise can be read as an ‘elegant variation’ on the two unambiguous, plain-style rejections of Aurelius’s suit that stand on either side of it (F 979-87, 1000-5), speeches that submit courtly assumptions to a cold bath of common sense. On one level, Dorigen’s choice of a task is a continuation of her earlier concern about Arveragus’s safety, and thus an assertion of her care for him. But away from the immediate presence of the rocks — and hence from the emotional turmoil they created — Dorigen realizes the impossibility of her earlier wish that they disappear; recognizing that the rocks can’t be removed (‘For wel I woot that it shal never bityde’ [F 1001], she tells

12 See above, page 116.
Aurelius), she uses their permanence as an image of the stability of her marriage in the face of the squire’s courtly challenge. Far from being irresponsible, ‘rash’, or showing that she’s ‘entered a world of illusion’, Dorigen’s promise is deeply unillusioned; accepting the reality of the rocks, she transforms them into an emblem of the unshakable trouthe of her marriage vow.

The illusion in this scene is wholly Aurelius’s. In calling Dorigen’s request ‘an impossible’ (F 1009), the squire seems to recognize that she intends the vow as a figure of speech, a hyperbolic way of underlining her refusal. With the perversity that comes of obsession, however, he reads the trope literally, and attempts to engage the help of Phoebus Apollo and his sister, the moon-goddess Lucina, in creating a ‘miracle’ (F 1056) — a high tide that will cover the rocks for two years. Aurelius’s ‘pleyn’ (F 1029) to Apollo has been compared to Dorigen’s earlier lament over the rocks; the two passages contain verbal parallels (notably the echo of Dorigen’s prayer that the rocks might be ‘sonken into helle’ [F 892] in the squire’s request that Lucina ‘synken every rok adoun / Into hir owene dirke regioun / Under the ground, ther Pluto dwelleth inne’ [F 1073-5]), and it can be argued that Aurelius’s plea has its ultimate origin in Dorigen’s unhappiness with the black rocks. Despite these connections, however, the two speeches affect us quite differently. Dorigen’s address to the Creator issues from her concern for her husband’s safety, while Aurelius’s ‘orisoun’ (F 1026) is wholly self-serving, a projection of his desires on the universe (‘Lord Phebus’, he prays, ‘dooth this miracle for me’ [F 1065]). His monologue is a reworking on a grander scale of the narcissistic rhetoric of his lyrics, and of his initial wooing speech to Dorigen, in which self-interest is masked in the deferential language of courtly ‘servvyce’ (F 972). Given the fact that Aurelius’s project is built on his refusal to recognize that his ‘sovereyn lady deere’ (F 1072) is happily married, there is more than a little irony in his request to Apollo for ‘pitee’ (F 1040) and, at the conclusion of the speech, for ‘compassioun’ (F 1079) — precisely those qualities of empathy and understanding he fails to display in relation to Dorigen.

The Franklin is at pains to show that, in attempting to win Dorigen’s love, the squire is pursuing an illusion: his own declaratory comments before and after Aurelius’s speech (F 1019-30, 1084-6) are reinforced by Apollo’s silence; the squire’s words, directed ‘up to the hevene’ (F 1024), elicit no response. It is

16 The parallel between the solidity of the rocks and Dorigen’s fidelity to Arveragus — first noted by H. B. Hinckley (Notes on Chaucer: A Commentary on the Prolog and Six Canterbury Tales [Northampton, 1907], p. 239) — has become something of a commonplace in discussions of this scene.
17 On Chaucer’s use of the rhetorical figure of impossibilita or adynata, see Christopher Brookhouse, ‘Chaucer’s Impossibilita’, Medium Aevum, 34 (1965), 40-2, and Jean Klene, C.S.C., ‘Chaucer’s Contribution to a Popular Topos: The World Upside-Down’, Viator, 11 (1980), 325-6. In vowing fidelity to Troilus, Criseyde employs a series of impossibilita, the third of which anticipates Dorigen’s promise (with the crucial difference, of course, that Criseyde will prove unfaithful): ‘first shal Phebus fallen fro his speere, / And everich egle ben the dowves feere, / and everich roche out of his place sterke, / Er Troilus out of Criseydes herte’ (Troilus 3. 1495-8).
the magic practiced by the Orleans clerk whom the squire and his brother hire to remove the rocks, however, that calls Aurelius's enterprise most seriously into question. In part arcane astrological knowledge — the clerk's 'voyding' of the rocks is preceded by elaborate computations of planetary positions — magic is also represented as theatrical spectacle; searching for a means of carrying out Dorigen's request, Aurelius's brother recalls the 'apparences' (F 1140) created by 'subtile tregetoures' (F 1141) — professional illusionists who manipulate elaborate stage machinery at court banquets. The sampling of marvels that the clerk produces for his prospective clients is a version of such entertainments; the sights he conjures up in his book-lined study — a deer hunt, 'fauconers upon a fair ryver' (F 1196), jousting knights — are scenes from romance and dream-vision, images of aristocratic wish-fulfillment tailored to the tastes of a young squire. The spectacle culminates in an evocation of Aurelius's 'lady on a daunce, / On which hymself he daunced, as hym thoughte' (F 1200-1); we are back in the garden, with the dance now representing the realization of Aurelius's fantasy. At its climactic point, however, the show is abruptly broken off:

And when this maister that this magyk wroughthe
Saugh it was tyme, he clapt his handes two,
And farewell! Al oure revel was ago. (F 1202-4)

The first-person adjective — 'oure revel' — attests to the Franklin's sense of kinship with the clerk who produces visions out of old books. He acknowledges this connection, however, at the very moment the performance is dissolved; like magic and stage illusions, romantic fictions can be made to vanish with a clap of the creator's hands.

The verses that directly follow the episode in the clerk's house — the much-praised description of the coming of winter that introduces the disappearance of the coastal rocks — depict, from a different perspective, the glamor of magic and romance giving way to a more prosaic reality:

Upon the morwe, whan that it was day,
To Britaigne tooke they the righte way,
Aurelius and this magicsen bisyde,
And been descended ther they wol abyde.
And this was, as thise bookees me remembre,
The colde, frosty seson of Decembre.
Phebus wax old, and hewed lyk latox,
That in his hoote deeulyacion
Shoon as the burned gold with stremes brighte;
But now in Capricorn adoum he lighte,
Where as he shoon ful pale, I dar wel seya.
The bitte frostes, with the sleek and reyn.

18 Laura Hibbard Loomis ('Secular Dramatics in the Royal Palace, Paris, 1378, 1389, and Chaucer's "Tregetoures".', *Speculum*, 33 [1958], 242-55) has shown that some of the elements of the 'apparance' reported by Aurelius's brother — water and a barge, a castle (F 1139-51) — appeared in a dramatization of the First Crusade commissioned by Charles V of France as a banquet entertainment for his uncle, Emperor Charles IV, in January, 1378.
Destroyed hath the grene in every yerde.
Janus sit by the fyr, with double herd,
And drynketh of his bugle horn the wyne;
Biforn hym stant brawn of the tusked swyn,
And 'Nowel' crieth every lusty man. (F 1239-55)

Phoebus, vigorous and brilliant when Aurelius prayed to him in May, now
grows old and pale with the approach of December frost; in a parallel fashion,
the winter weather destroys 'the grene in every yerde', including, presumably,
the spring garden where Aurelius wooed Dorigen. We can trace this passage
back to a detail in the probable source of the Franklin's Tale, the fourth ques-
tione d'amore in Boccaccio's Filocolo. In Boccaccio's story, the knight Tarolfo
employs Tebano, a learned herb-gatherer, to bring about the miracle — a May
garden blossoming in January — requested by the lady.19 Where Boccaccio's
winter setting, however, emphasizes Tebano's ability to reverse the regular
processes of nature — the lady ascertains that the garden is a 'true' one by
walking in it and tasting its out-of-season produce — the December date in
Chaucer's poem marks the limits of magic; the clerk's complex astrological
calculations do not, in fact, enable him to remove the rocks from the coast of
Brittany, but merely to create an artful (and temporary) impression that they
have vanished: 'for a wyke or tweye, / It semed that alle the rokke was aewaye'
(F 1295-6; my emphasis).

The anticlimactic 'semed' (used earlier [F 1146, 1151] to describe the 'trege-
toures' sleight-of-hand) underscores the illusory nature of Aurelius's claim.
Unsurprisingly, the squire omits this qualifying verb when he announces to
Dorigen that he has met the terms of her request: 'In yow lith al to do me lyve
or deye — / But wel I woot the rokke been aewaye' (F 1337-8). Aurelius's
falsification of the clerk's 'miracle' is a fitting conclusion to a speech (F 1311-
38) in which he both misrepresents the intent of Dorigen's promise and engages
in a kind of ethical doublespeak. Claiming that Dorigen's honor, and not his
own suffering, is uppermost in his mind, Aurelius disavows legalistic motives in
pressing his case. Yet he leaves no doubt about what his rights would be:

For, madame, wel ye woot what ye han hight—
Nat that I chalange any thyng of right
Of yow, my soveryn lady, but youre grace—
But in a garden yond, at swich a place,
Ye woot right wel what ye blichten me;
And in myn hand youre trouthe plighten ye
To love me best—God woot, ye seye so,
Al be that I unworthy am therto. (F 1323-30; my emphasis)

19 The two men return to the city 'very close to the month [January] in which the garden had been
asked for' ('assai vicini al mese del quale era stato dimandato il giardino') — presumably in
December. The relevant passages from Il Filocolo are reprinted in Sources and Analogues of
Chaucer's Canterbury Tales, eds. W. F. Bryan and Germaine Dempster (Chicago, 1941), pp.
378-83.
Earlier in the tale, Aurelius had appeared to understand Dorigen's vow as a refusal. Now, however, he treats her oath as binding, and invokes the garden, the scene of the promise, as a reminder of her solemn obligation.

In so doing, Aurelius anticipates Arveragus's later directive, when he sends his wife off to fulfill her bargain with the squire, that she return to the place where she first made it; announcing that 'ye shul youre trouth e holden, by my fay!' (F 1474), he summons two members of his household and instructs them to 'goo[n] forth ... with Dorigen ... and brynge[n] hire to swich a place anon' (F 1488-9). Arveragus's behavior in this scene has occasioned considerable debate among readers of the tale. For those who see him as exercising the very 'mais-trie' (F 747) he had earlier sworn to abjure as part of his marriage agreement, the parallels with Aurelius's speech (the reference to Dorigen's 'trouth', the designation of the garden as 'swich a place') might suggest that, in the guise of upholding a high moral ideal, Arveragus is simply repeating the squire's coercive and self-interested treatment of Dorigen. A more traditional (and, to my mind, more plausible) view is exemplified in Mary Carruthers' comment: 'if Arveragus were to ... get [Dorigen] off her own hook by simply forbidding her to go ... he would then be acting for her as though she were an irresponsible child, making her own honor and trouth as illusory as Aurelius's fulfillment of the conditions of her promise.' Arveragus's action, Carruthers implies, arises from motives diametrically opposed to those of Aurelius. The squire's appeal to the sanctity of Dorigen's oath is a thinly veiled form of emotional blackmail, calculated to bring about the lady's submission to his desire. Arveragus, on the other hand, suppresses his personal interests; by requiring his wife to take responsibility for her words, he pays homage to her autonomy and integrity.

Arveragus's insistence that Dorigen return to the garden to keep her vow is, paradoxically, what allows the garden to disappear from the tale. Following her husband's instructions, the lady sets off for the garden; on her way, she meets Aurelius, also headed 'gardyn-ward' (F 1505). In their previous encounter, Dorigen had been a silent observer: Aurelius made his set speech, announced that the rocks had disappeared, and swiftly departed. Now, however, they enter into a dialogue:

... he saleweth hire with glad entente,
And asked of hire whiderward she wente;
And she answerede, half as she were mad,
'Unto the gardyn, as myn housbonde bad,
My trouth e for to holde — allas, allas!' (F 1509-13)

David Aers, for example, calls Arveragus's response to Dorigen's confession a 'display of unregenerate egotism' (Chaucer [Atlantic Highlands, 1986], p. 89. See also Robert Lane, 'The Franklin's Tale: Of Marriage and Meaning', in Portraits of Marriage in Literature, eds. Anne C. Hargrove and Maurine Magliocco (Macomb, 1984), pp. 119-20. Leonard Michael Koff has explored the problematics of interpretation in this scene; see his Chaucer and the Art of Storytelling (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1988), pp. 187-94.

Dorigen’s piteous response to his question works a transformation in the squire:

Aurelius gan wondren on this cas,
And in his herte hadde greet compassion
Of hire and of hire lamentacioun,
And of Arveragus, the worthy knyght,
That bad hire holden al that she had hight,
So looth hym was his wyf sholde breke hir trouthe;
And in hys herte he caughe of this greet routhe,
Considerynge the beste on every syde,
That fro his lust yet were he leve re abyde
Than doon so heigh a cherlyssh wrecchednesse
Agayns franchise and alle gentilisses. (F 1514-24)

As he ponders Dorigen’s words, Aurelius gradually awakens from his solipsistic daydream: we observe him internalizing the feelings of both husband and wife, connecting Arveragus’s actions with the appropriate ethical abstractions, and, finally, expressing his new-found ‘compassioun’ (F 1515) in a formal address releasing Dorigen from her vow (F 1526-40). As a result of Aurelius’s decision to forgo his rights to the lady, the garden is never reached; it simply drops out of the story along with the courtly illusions it has symbolized. Although it occupies only a single line of verse, the setting of this scene is (as Howard implies) essential to the moral topography of the tale. ‘Amydde the toun, right in the quykest strete’ (F 1502) — in the sort of place where the Franklin might conduct his own business — the fantasies associated with the rocks and the garden give way to discourse grounded in mutual understanding.

The shared understanding that arises from communicative speech and sympathetic listening is also the keynote of the tale’s final episode. The magician is moved to forgive Aurelius his debt of a thousand pounds after the squire, in response to his questions (“‘Have I nat holden covenant unto thee?... Hastow nat had thy lady as thee liketh?... What was the cause? Tel me if thou kan’” [F 1587-91]), recounts the ‘tale’ (F 1592) of Arveragus’s ‘gentilisses’ (F 1595), Dorigen’s faithfulness and ‘sorwe’ (F 1598), and his own ‘pitee’ (F 1603) for her distress. His newly-acquired capacity for empathy, moreover, allows Aurelius to acknowledge the fraudulence of his claim to Dorigen, and her blamelessness in the entire affair: ‘hir trouthe she swoor thurgh innocence, / She nevere erst hadde herde speke of apparence’ (F 1601-2).

Aurelius’s admission that Dorigen was deceived by magic reminds us that the rocks still lie along the coast of Brittany.²² The persistent presence of the rocks has seemed to some critics emblematic of the limitations of the Franklin’s own vision; like the clerk’s magic, they argue, the tale’s idealistic ending is super-

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²² According to Chauncey Wood, the clerk simply forecasts a series of prolonged high tides that cover the rocks; see his Chaucer and the Country of the Stars: Poetic Uses of Astrological Imagery (Princeton, 1970), pp. 245-71.
ficial, merely covering up difficulties that continue to exist below the surface. But the Franklin finally distinguishes his art from that of the clerk. While the dangerous rocks merely seem to have disappeared, the threats to our happiness posed by human weaknesses, the Franklin implies, can genuinely be made to vanish. In the successive renunciations that conclude the poem, we witness the operation of what Gertrude White has rightly called the ‘real magic’ of the *Franklin’s Tale*: the power of ordinary virtues — pity, patience, generosity — to dispel illusions and bring about changes of heart.

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