

# DORIGEN'S LAMENT AND THE RESOLUTION OF THE *FRANKLIN'S TALE*

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In a 1997 article in *Chaucer Review*, I argued that the Wife of Bath in her *Prologue* “defends the plain truth of Scripture against the polemics of St. Jerome, and adopts what is in essence an Augustinian position on marriage.”<sup>1</sup> In this paper I extend my argument to the *Franklin's Tale*. In this tale, as in the *Wife of Bath's Prologue*, we have another instance of a passage of considerable length in which Chaucer causes a character to react to, and offer an implicit reply to, an argument from Jerome's *Against Jovinian*, this time relating to the virginity and marital relationships of pagan or pre-Christian wives. As in the case of the *Wife of Bath's Prologue*, our understanding of the function of Dorigen's Lament in its context will be greatly enhanced by a close study of how it relates to and softens the message of *Against Jovinian*, its principal model.

Arguments about Dorigen's Lament (*FT* 1355–1456) sometimes recall the critical debate about the *Wife of Bath's Prologue*, to the detriment of Dorigen, who, like the Wife, has been accused of rambling and incoherent speech (although occasionally this fault is transferred to Chaucer himself). The Lament has been characterised as “hasty writing” indicating lack of interest in the material on the part of Chaucer,<sup>2</sup> has been called a “tragicomic role call” marked by “irrelevance,”<sup>3</sup> an argument which “degenerat[es] into confusion”<sup>4</sup> and “incoherence.”<sup>5</sup> Even Dorigen's most eloquent defenders, those who see her as the most sympathetic character in the tale, tend to be numbed by the rhetoric of her lament, so that Anne Thompson Lee, for example, bluntly says, “The biggest problem with her speech . . . is its utter dreariness: none of the critics have been able to get round that . . .”<sup>6</sup> A more thoughtful attempt to interpret the structure of the passage is the close analysis and defense of the Lament by Morgan (1977),<sup>7</sup> who traces the history of the apostrophe or complaint as a classical rhetorical device, and argues that Dorigen's Lament has coherent divisions by subject matter. In this paper I go further in arguing that, as in the *Wife of Bath's Prologue*, Chaucer's clear and careful distinctions from Jerome, here taking the form of Dorigen's sincere but naïve

emotional responses to the grim stories in *Against Jovinian*, point to his efforts to mark out a differentiation from Jerome's position on marriage and virginity, again with a favorable glance toward the position of Augustine in contrast with that of Jerome. I also argue that the manner in which Dorigen presents her lament justifies the length to which it is drawn out, by pointing to a favorable resolution of the dilemma caused by her rash promise to Aurelius.

Dorigen's Lament in the *Franklin's Tale* is just over 100 lines long (1355–1456) and thus occupies about one-ninth of the entire tale (a length which Chaucer seems humorously to acknowledge by saying that Dorigen needed "a day or two" [1348] to complete it). It contains a series of approximately 22 exempla, some consisting of a single proper name, others several lines long, which she examines as possible precedents for her to decide whether suicide is justifiable as an alternative, either to breaking her word with Aurelius (now that he has fulfilled the condition she set down in return for giving her love to him, of removing the rocks from the coast of Brittany), or shaming herself by committing adultery with him. The seeming hopelessness of her plight is the theme of the opening lines in which she feels herself a victim of Fortune:

"Allas" quod she "on thee, Fortune, I pleyne,  
That unwar wrapped hast me in thy cheyne,  
Fro which t'escape woot I no socour,  
Save oonly deeth or elles dishonour."

(1355–1358)

As so stated she indeed has no hope, but the exaggeration has a humorous side, since she seems to have already reached her conclusion at the start of the lament rather than drawing on her nearly two dozen examples as an aid to judgment; but we, as readers, are thereby invited to read between the lines and to look closely in the rest of the soliloquy for a possible way out. Dorigen's despair, sincere as it is, anticipates the tragic bathos of the clown players in Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (and prompts us as readers to react indulgently to her, as Theseus did to the rustic players). Part of Pyramus' lament in *MND* follows Dorigen in surrendering tragically to the power of cosmic forces: "What, stain'd with blood? Approach, ye Furies fell! O Fates, come, come," etc. (*MND* 5.1.283–287).

Death or dishonor—those are the choices Dorigen sees before her:

Hath ther nat many a noble wyf er this,  
And many a mayde, yslayn hirself, allas,  
Rather than with hir body doon trespas?

(1364–66)

The twenty-two exempla which follow in her long lament are all taken from St. Jerome's *Against Jovinian* 1.41–46, the second half of Book One, where Jerome has finished his look at Biblical examples and announces, "I will quickly run through Greek and Roman and Foreign History, and will show that virginity ever took the lead of chastity." (1.41. init.)

The *Wife of Bath's Prologue* draws its Jerome material largely from the first forty chapters of Book I of *AJ*, where the issue is Biblical exegesis. In the *Franklin's Tale*, Chaucer focuses on the pagan exempla of the later chapters, in accordance with the occasional pagan or pre-Christian assumptions of the tale. As a highly rhetorical passage the Lament gives the lie to the disavowal of rhetorical color made by the Franklin in his *Prologue* (716–27). This inconsistency is a clear example of irony or humor, but those who dismiss the Lament as a long-winded rhetorical exercise miss its more serious point, which becomes evident only in close comparison with its source. It would be accurate to say that the rhetoric of Dorigen "corrects" the highly artificial rhetoric of Jerome along with its stern moral system, which is seemingly rigid but is also riddled with inconsistency and undermined by inappropriate humor. By subtle but unmistakable touches, Dorigen sends Jerome's rhetoric in a different and more humane direction, one which implies a strong insistence on the distinction between right and wrong, as we will examine more closely in this paper.

Moreover, whereas Dorigen's lament continues the sharp analysis which Chaucer already gives to the "Jovinian" treatise in the *Wife of Bath's Prologue*, here the approach of the analysis is entirely different. The *Wife of Bath* mocks and refutes the views of Jerome, though not mentioning him by name until later in the *Prologue* (673–75). She exposes the fanaticism of his extremist, neo-Stoic ascetic views, and uses the very scripture quoted by Jerome to arrive at a common-sense moral compromise which elevates and sees goodness in marriage. In the *Franklin's Tale*, the situation is changed, and the setting is non-Christian (though there are a few seemingly Christian references, such as Dorigen's appeal to "Eterne God," 865). Accordingly, the examples taken from Jerome are from the part of his treatise which considers pagan rather than Christian examples. Dorigen follows Jerome's treatise faithfully in one sense, but by additions and omissions, and above all by the emotional and moral asides she makes, she softens and transforms the "acid, polemical" chapters in Jerome which are her source. Perhaps it is going too far to say that she "Christianizes" them (though she sounds like an inquiring Christian, as Wright says), but at least she elevates their moral tone by additions of sympathy for the victimized women and disapproval for the actions of their oppressors. In the "Breton lais," of which the *Franklin's Tale* purports to be an example, as Kathryn Hume says, ". . . protagonists' actions

are judged more by the standards of *gentillesse* than by those of Christian morality,"<sup>8</sup> and in the *Franklin's Tale* a great deal of our sympathy for Dorigen will depend on our judgement as readers of the validity of her reasoning in her lament, which is the most detailed glimpse we get of her inner self.

Before continuing our analysis of Dorigen's lament, let us consider how the chapters in question fit into the structure of Jerome's first book of *Against Jovinian*. Jerome begins by quoting the Apostle Paul (*AJ* 1.1–15), dwelling heavily on I Corin 7, a passage which Jerome dissects obsessively and repetitively as he tries to drive home Paul's supposed aversion to marriage. Following, he claims, the format set by Jovinian himself in his lost treatise on marriage, Jerome moves on to the Old Testament (where his task of proving a preference for celibacy is much more difficult and his arguments consequently are more strained), he jousts with Jovinian on these stories for ten more chapters (16–25), then starts to take up the Gospels, but continues to pick and choose a variety of Biblical stories (26–40), pushing his point that chastity was always the preferred choice of men and women in the Bible.

Having considered the Biblical evidence at length (though selectively, and frequently resorting to allegory to put a surprise twist on the literal meaning), Jerome declares that he has already given more than enough Christian illustrations, and in 1.41 turns to Greek, Roman, and other examples as his "ace in the hole," proving that chastity has always been honored even among pagans, as though such a surprising and more difficult argument will clinch his Biblical examples. The breadth of the pagan examples, however, creates a new kind of challenge for Jerome. In fact, Jerome's argument in this part of the treatise never entirely escapes confusion and uncertainty because he is combining several kinds of examples whose lessons cannot easily be reconciled with each other. Thus some women are praised for maintaining their virginity (41–42), either because they resisted all offers by suitors (e.g. Atalanta), or because they resisted rape (the daughters of Phidon, borrowed by Dorigen as her first example), or because, while still remaining virgin, they had given their heart to a fiancée who subsequently died (the daughter of Demotion, Dorigen's eighth example, *FT* 1426–27). It will be obvious that Jerome is including at least two kinds of stories: first, those which extol virginity and second, others, seemingly at cross purposes with this theme, that extol fidelity to a single partner. Adding to the complexity is that some of Jerome's virgins (e.g. Phidon's daughters) killed themselves to avoid violation, while others (the Theban virgin who is Dorigen's example in 1432–34) killed themselves as a result of being dishonored by rape.

The section on virginity ends with chapter 42 of *AJ*; the examples are complex but the general point is clear, that many women who have cho-

sen virginity have resorted to suicide, either when they had been raped, or to avoid rape or forced marriage. In Chapter 43, Jerome shifts the issue to marital fidelity rather than virginity when he moves on to list widows whose love for their husbands continues after their partners' death, and leads them to take desperate measures to avoid being forced to take on a second husband. The bliss and faithfulness associated with married love, which motivates this group of women to remain faithful to their former spouses, seems to come to Jerome almost as an afterthought, and his use of such examples risks contradicting him at several points: it blunts his attempt to prove the universal desire for virginity over married life, and it is also inconsistent with his barbs, borrowed from the satiric tradition, against female lechery and the natural tendency of wives to be unfaithful (themes most prominently found in the later chapters, 1.47–49). In ch. 43 his examples include two North African women, Dido and the wife of Hasdrubal. In 44 and 45 he considers Greek wives, and in 46, Roman wives. Sometimes he lists women who died rather than submit to marriage with a second husband. Dido's suicide is supposedly an example of this, since Jerome is not following either Ovid or Vergil here (as Chaucer does in his several versions of the Dido story), but a version from a separate tradition (recorded in book 18.6 of the historian Justin, who is of uncertain date) in which Dido is not involved with Aeneas but kills herself to avoid the advances of her suitor Iarbas (Jerome may have derived this version either from Tertullian or from Servius' commentary on *Aeneid* 4.36; see detailed notes in Hanna and Lawler pp. 238–39). Others died after their husbands' deaths rather than face life alone (Artemesia; but this category even includes a concubine, namely the lover of Alcibiades, also included by Chaucer in 1439–41); and virgins continue to be listed in Jerome's account mingled in with stories of married women (Lucretia, ch. 46).

The most striking aspect of Jerome's examples, in this section of the *AJ* as earlier, is that he continues to try to win as much by rhetorical pleonasm as by compelling logic. Rigid as is his position in defense of chastity, he yet has little interest in presenting a series of proofs in logical order, or even in moving toward a dramatic climax; rather, he presents a cornucopia of examples, some of them right to the point, others ridiculous or made to fit his argument only by a surprise sophism. The technique is much like that of Juvenal's attack on marriage in the *Sixth Satire*, a poem which may have been known to Jerome,<sup>9</sup> and closely resembles the *AJ* in its satiric spirit. Juvenal in the course of a few lines can progress from denunciations of women who cause legal trouble for their neighbors (6.413–15), receive a full body massage in the baths (421–23), drink too much (430–32), and “worst of all” engage in literary debates

at the dinner table (434–36). Jerome produces a similar effect when among Roman wives he passes quickly over the suicide of the noble Lucretia (46 init), only to dwell at greater length on Bilia, the wife of the naval hero Duilius (46), a woman who deserves praise for her “extraordinary chastity.” What is the evidence for this chastity? When asked why she had never remarked on her husband’s bad breath, she replied that she thought all men had bad breath. Thus Jerome easily includes the ludicrous among the grim and powerful examples; the reference to Dido proving by her suicide that he thought it “better to burn than to marry” illustrates how the saint can use a cynical sneer to replace serious argument. It is also noteworthy, in remembering the variety and flexibility of the genre into which Jerome’s work falls, that immediately after his presentation of the examples so plentifully to be mined by Chaucer’s Dorigen, Jerome at the start of ch. 47 makes a semi-serious apology for the length of his list, then, abandoning all pretense of a serious theological argument, lists a satirical passage against women supposedly written by the Greek philosopher Theophrastus (who was also a satirist, as author of *The Characters*), from an otherwise unknown treatise *On Marriage*. The “Theophrastus” passage mocks women and marriage with an ostensibly serious premise (“A wise man must not take a wife,”) but uses an openly satiric tone which, with its laments against the troubles of marriage and the extravagance of wives, closely resembles some of the tirades by middle-aged bachelors in New Comedy (Periplectomenus in Plautus’ *Miles* 685–715; Megadorus in *Aulularia* 475–536). The case for the authenticity of the Theophrastus passage is perhaps helped by the way it sits in uneasy contradiction with the portraits of heroines presented earlier; it has the look of an lighthearted comic treatise, quite alien to its immediate context in spite of Jerome’s high praise for the merits of Theophrastus’ “golden book,” which he has forced into his ostensibly more serious discussion. (On the “Theophrastus” passage, see further Hanna and Lawler’s (1997) detailed discussion, pp. 14–17, 26; they believe Jerome “created [t]his work out of whole cloth.”). Authentic or not, the Theophrastus passage is a reminder of how far away we have strayed from serious theology in the *AJ*, a work that reveals its affinities by the first three authors to be quoted in the first chapter of its first book: Horace and Persius (the satirists) and Plautus (the comedian).

Let us now return to Chaucer’s use of the Jerome material in the *FT*. Dorigen’s “allas” in the introduction to her lament (quoted above) sets the tone for the greater part of the lament (until about line 1437, where the mood changes), and is indeed consistent with the tone of the preface to *LGW*, where Chaucer also quotes Jerome as an authority on female suicide (*LGW* preface G 281–87):

What seith Jerome agayns Jovynyan?  
 How clene maydenes and how trewe wyves,  
 How stedefaste widewes durynge alle here lyves,  
 Telleth Jerome, and that nat of a fewe,  
 But, I dar seyn, an hundred on a rewe,  
 That it is pite for to rede, and routhe,  
 The wo that they endure for here trouthe.

The narrator of *LGW* shares Dorigen's sympathy for women, be they virgins, wives, or widows, who killed themselves to avoid rape or other dishonor ("That it is pite for to rede"). In the *FT* the outbursts which intersperse Dorigen's list of martyred women may seem to us today a natural and spontaneous human reaction, one which bursts from the heart of a good and simple person such as she; but such sympathy is an innovation by Chaucer which would be out of place in Jerome's account, since the latter wants to show that virginity (or, fidelity to a single partner), always held precedence among women of virtue. We must consider further the purpose of his treatise.

The moral focus of the first book of the *AJ* is extremely narrow, as befits Jerome's purpose: far from taking a broad view of human relationships, he wants only to refute Jovinian's thesis that the married state is regarded as morally equal to virginity (see his prospectus in 1.4). The resolve of the women who would die rather than submit to rape is to be applauded, not deplored, precisely because their willingness to die is a proof they prefer celibacy over sex, whether forced or otherwise. The men who would do the outrage, barbarous as their actions may appear, are rarely explicitly condemned by Jerome; indeed it may be that any moral disapproval of the mens' violence and their lust is tempered by Jerome's apparent assumption that their cruelty had a good result after all, by providing the opportunity to test the honor of these women, and demonstrate their bravery. If Jerome is influenced by accounts of Christian martyrs, he is even more solidly in the Stoic tradition of the Romans who applauded the extreme sacrifices of heroes like Regulus, Cato of Utica, and Lucretia, who died for honor. The point to be added, however, is that Jerome also sees himself as part of the satiric tradition, hence his citation of such authors as Persius and Plautus alongside of Cicero, Seneca, and the Bible. He is so detached from the potential pathos of his material that he can intersperse his stories with humor (as witness his wry remarks about Dido and Bilia), make fun of marriage by pointing to the presence of a virgin, but no married couples, among the scorpions and crabs of the constellations (1.41), or, in a later chapter (48), sink to slapstick as he describes Xanthippe's pouring of dirty water on Socrates' head (an episode borrowed, with relish, by the Wife of Bath in her *Prologue*, 727–32, who adds

to Socrates' indignity by turning the water into "pisse."). He has no time to feel grief for his female victims amidst his applause for their preservation of their "honor." I have argued that the Wife of Bath, in her prologue, chooses to mock and expose the absurdities of Jerome's Biblical arguments about marriage. In the case of Dorigen, Chaucer causes her to turn to the examples of the virtuous pagan women, in this instance not so much mocking the examples as transforming them, giving them a lesson and a moral tone sympathetic to the women and disapproving of the violence of the men, human reactions for which one looks in vain in Jerome.

Before Dorigen ever made her rash promise about the removal of the rocks from the coast, she had already brooded over those rocks in the prayer (865–94) in which she cannot imagine why God would create black rocks on the seacoast to "destroy . . . mankynde" (876). Noteworthy in this prayer is her seemingly reluctant admission that the will of God will make all turn out right:

I woot wel clerkes wol seyn as hem leste,  
By argumentz, that al is for the beste,  
Though I ne kan the causes nat yknowe.

(885–87)

Though she seems to regard the argument that "al is for the beste" as a kind of cliché devised by scholars without much meaning for her, this aside by Dorigen, like her later comments in her Lament, ultimately points to a happy resolution of the dilemmas of the Tale, in ways which she cannot anticipate. Here she prays that all the rocks might sink into hell for the sake of her absent lord. This prayer is quite different from the parallel prayer in Boccaccio's *Il Filocolo* which is a probable model for the *Franklin's Tale*. In Boccaccio, the lady devises a "cunning stratagem" to thwart her suitor Tarolfo, saying she will love him if he presents her with a beautiful garden in the midst of January, and when he does so, with the help of a Thessalian sorcerer, she actually enjoys the garden, walking around it admiringly. Thus her request, despite her later regrets when she realizes the consequences, actually has an air of selfishness about it. As Leah Larson says:

Unlike the lady in *Il Filocolo*, Dorigen does not ask the unwanted lover to perform a seemingly impossible task which if it succeeds will result in something shallowly pleasing to her. Dorigen's request that the rocks be removed is distant from a fancy for a May garden in January. Rather, Dorigen thinks only of Arveragus and of her longing for his returning safely to her.<sup>10</sup>



Thus by a comparison with the quite different sympathies of Boccaccio's tale, it can be argued that Dorigen's wish, so guileless and unselfish in its origin and intent, really prefigures, contains already within itself, even while the dilemmas of the plot unfold, a happy ending in a renewal of the wedded love between Dorigen and Arveragus.

Dorigen's wish, apparently so impossible of fulfillment, will have an unexpected answer when she repeats it to Aurelius and he hires a magician to cause the rocks to disappear. The prayer has served as a model for Dorigen's later Lament in two ways: it establishes her as a person of pity and compassion, who cannot abide the senseless destruction of human beings: and it shows her caught up in a dilemma (cf. her appeal to God in 872, "Why han ye wrought this werk unresonable?") about a condition which seems unresolvable (the removal of rocks), until one is provided by Aurelius. By removing the rocks Aurelius fulfills what had been her heartfelt wish: but ironically this puts Dorigen in the position of finding she has inadvertently forfeited either her honor or her chastity (1357–1361). By following the inexorable logic of Jerome (as shown below), Dorigen finds herself caught on the horns of a dilemma, forced to accept Jerome's choice between loss of chastity and loss of life. No matter which of these she chooses, it will be "agayns the proces of nature" as Dorigen remarks in 1345 in reference to the removal of the rocks. She will be so torn until Aurelius, a second time performing the impossible, reveals to her a third alternative.

Dorigen's first example taken from Jerome is the story of the Thirty Tyrants who murdered Phidon and made his daughters strip and dance lewdly in their father's blood. According to Jerome, the daughters, when faced with this outrage, "hide their grief" (*dissimulato dolore*) and jump into a well in order to preserve their virginity. Such impassivity in the face of martyrdom is almost a cliché, frequently ascribed to Christian victims (see e.g. Bede *Ecclesiastical History* 1.7, of St. Alban), and this is paralleled by Stoic accounts (cf. Polyxena's stern and courageous acceptance of her sacrifice in Seneca *Troïades* 1151–52) of martyrs who, even though afraid, conceal their true feelings in order to deprive their murderers of satisfaction. In Chaucer's version, first of all, there is a much greater emphasis on the wickedness of the tyrants. Dorigen says that they are "ful of cursednesse" (1368), damns their sadistic demand by calling it a "foul delit" (1372), and even interjects a very un-Stoic imprecation against them ("God yeve hem meschaunce!") Finally, instead of implying praise, as Jerome does, for the maidens' refusal to show any emotion (a detail which Jerome stresses again in the case of the deflowered Theban maiden at ch. 41 fin, cf. Chaucer 1434–36), Dorigen calls them "woful maydens, ful of drede," not only ascribing human feelings to them but firmly establishing the emotional tone of the story: grief for the suffering maidens, contempt for their barbarous torturers.<sup>11</sup>

Even in the shorter examples Dorigen so tilts the emotional emphasis. So in the next story, on the men of Messene who attempt to rape fifty Lacedaemonian maidens, Chaucer stretches Jerome's bare verb *violare* (Migne 284A) into an entire line dripping with contempt at the male perpetrators, "On whiche they wolden doo hir lecherye" (1381). And in the case of Dorigen's fourth example, she turns to Jerome's list of married women in order to consider the wife of Hasdrubal (Jerome ch. 43). Jerome's slant on the story is that "Carthage was built by a woman of virtue" (a claim which he can make only by ignoring the familiar tradition about Dido found in Vergil and Ovid), "and its end was a tribute to the excellence of the virtue." Jerome reports that Hasdrubal's wife, following the example of her countrywoman Dido, leapt, with her children, into the burning ruins of her house at Carthage, after she saw that she could not escape capture by the Romans. Chaucer takes away the praise of the "virtue" of Hasdrubal's wife and adds a reference to the wickedness of the Romans who wanted to outrage her (Jerome mentions the prospect of "capture," not rape, by the Romans).

. . . and chees rather to dye  
Than any Romayn dide hire vileynye

(1403–04)

The fifth example on Dorigen's list is Lucretia, whose story is told at much greater length in *The Legend of Good Women* V (where the sources are Livy and Ovid's *Fasti*). In the *Franklin's Tale* reference, however, Chaucer continues to play off Jerome, jumping ahead to Ch. 46 to take the reference from his list of Roman women. Jerome's account follows:

I may pass on to Roman women; and the first that I shall mention is Lucretia, who would not survive her violated chastity but blotted out the stain on her person with her own blood.

This, typical of Jerome's tone, makes Lucretia's suicide sound justifiable and wise: by killing herself she atoned for her shame. There is no mention of the guilt of her rapist. But Chaucer alters this by reminding the reader that a crime had been committed against her "whan that she oppressed was / Of Tarquyn" (1406–07), and qualifying the suicide by transferring the rationale for it to Lucretia's own mind:

For hire thoughte it was a shame  
To lyven whan she hadde lost hir name.

(1407–08)

The reminder "hire thought" makes all the difference, for the justification of Lucretia was already a point of controversy between Jerome and

Augustine. Jerome bluntly poses the alternatives (shame or death) for Lucretia when he writes, “Lucretia would not survive her violated chastity, but blotted out the stain on her person with her own blood” (*AJ* 1.46). Her suicide becomes a central point in Augustine’s discussion of the episode in Book 1 of *City of God*, where Augustine strongly argues against Christian suicide in the case of a victim such as Lucretia, whose body cannot be said to have truly been violated since she did not give her consent. Even if Lucretia had sinned willingly with Tarquinius, Augustine argues, “she ought still to have held her hand from suicide, if she could with her false gods have accomplished a fruitful repentance” (*City of God* 1.19). Cato of Utica’s suicide was frequently held up by the Romans as a legitimate case of justifiable self-slaughter on behalf of the principle of Republican government (e.g. Horace Ode 1.25, *Catonis/ nobile letum*, “Cato’s noble death”); but Augustine much prefers the example of Job, who endured evil rather than sin by taking an escape from it. Augustine in fact uses the suicide of Lucretia as a cornerstone in his argument of the sinfulness of suicide and the need for Christians to seek a higher morality, though, like Jerome, he is willing to turn to pagan, pre-Christian material if it will support his point, as earlier in 1.19 when he quotes Vergil’s *Aeneid* 6.434–39, where the untimely dead such as suicides are described in Limbo. Augustine takes the passage to imply that those who, though guiltless, have killed themselves, will spend an eternity lamenting the rashness of their deed.

In 1395 ff. Dorigen turns from the examples of virgins to those of wives who would rather kill themselves than submit to men’s lust:

Now sith that maydens hadden swich despit  
 To been defouled with mannes foul delit,  
 Wel oghte a wyf rather hirselves slee  
 Than be defouled, as it thynketh me.

“Defouled,” “foul delit,” “defouled”—this emphasis on the nature of the outrage which men wished to do to the wives totally changes the emphasis from Jerome, at the start of chapter 43:

I will proceed to married women who were reluctant to survive the decease or violent death of their husbands for fear they might be forced into a second marriage, and who entertained a marvelous affection for the only husbands they had. This may teach us that second marriage was repudiated among the heathen.

It is “defoulment,” not loss of virginity, or second marriage, which occupies the mind of Dorigen, and thus, in the first part of her lament, covering at least the first ten examples (lines 1367–1434) she changes not only the emotional response, but, in the case of some of Jerome’s

examples, even the nature of the evidence. Although she professed in the lines quoted above, 1395 ff, to move on from virgins to start considering married women, in lines 1426–37, her eighth through eleventh examples, she actually returns to Jerome’s list of virgins from his chapter 41. The category which Dorigen is trying to maintain in this part of the lament is not centered on whether her women were virgins or married: rather the central ingredient is whether they committed suicide either to avoid, or in consequence of, rape (defoulment).

In *FT* 1419–27 Dorigen uses the already overworked word “defouled” three times to describe the alternative to committing suicide, including this instance (her eighth):

As dide Demociones doghter deere  
By cause that she wolde nat defouled be

(1426–27)

But it would appear that Dorigen here has added the attempted rape to try to make her examples consistent, since in Jerome’s version (41) there is no question of Demotion’s daughter being “defouled,” rather, the point is that her betrothed Leostenes has been killed in war, and she can think of no other man as husband after him.

Dorigen’s next example, her ninth (1428–30), relates to the daughters of Cedasus (Scedasus in Jerome), of whom Jerome asks, “How shall we sufficiently praise the daughters of Scedasus at Leutra in Boetia?” These maidens were raped by two young men whom they had entertained, and killed one another because they did not wish to survive the loss of their virginity. Jerome applauds their murder-suicide; Dorigen, little interested in the details of the crime, and far from applauding their deed, deplores the young women’s deaths:

O Cedasus, it is ful greet pitee  
To reden how thy doghtren deyde, allas,  
That slowe hemself for swich manere cas.

Dorigen’s tenth example is the Theban maiden who killed herself when she was desired by Nicanor after the capture of the town: Jerome in this instance highlights the grief that Nicanor felt at her death, but still emphasizes his own admiration that the Theban woman prized chastity so highly (“virginity is dearer to the pure in heart than a kingdom”). Dorigen extends this emotion in her introduction to the anecdote to universalize the pathos of her death:

As greet a pitee was it, or wel moore . . .

(1431)

Dorigen joins that example together with the case of “Another Theban mayden” who committed suicide after being deflowered by a Macedonian. In Jerome this last woman “hides her grief” and kills her oppressor as well; Dorigen omits the latter fact, thereby stressing only the woman’s status as victim. Almost all of Dorigen’s eleven examples so far have followed a clear pattern: each of them describes maidens, concubines, or wives who killed themselves, either in consequence of rape, or to avoid being “defouled” by men; and she repeats versions of the sentiment “Why sholde I thanne to dye been in drede?” (1386). Eleven examples have been gleaned from Jerome in 69 lines, in most cases with a change from Jerome’s emphasis. He praises the women’s example, Dorigen grieves for them; he leaves neutral the rape or violent action of their captors, Dorigen speaks of the men with a mixture of anger and contempt; in one instance (her eighth, Democion’s daughter), she even exaggerates the facts to tilt the emotion in favor of the female victim by deploring a “defoulment” which is not to be found in Jerome. By deploring the suicides and stressing the sinfulness on the part of the men who drove them to it, Dorigen has completely shifted the moral impact which had been implied in *AJ*, transforming it by her compassion and *gentillesse*.

Dorigen’s final eleven examples occupy a total of only 20 lines (1437–56), less than a third of the space given to the first eleven. None of these eleven examples is taken from Jerome’s chapter 41, where virgins are under consideration. Rather they come from chapters 43, 44, and 45, where the majority of the examples are married women. In such a condensed space of 20 lines, there will be a much restricted opportunity to develop any story or make any moral point. Moreover, clearly these last stories, perhaps selected to make a neat numerical balance with the first eleven stories, have been chosen by Chaucer for a different purpose. These are no longer women who died to avoid rape, or in consequence of rape; instead, Chaucer has searched through Jerome’s examples in chapters 43–45 to find instances of wives outstanding for their love of their husbands. As a result, there are no more “allas”es or deploring of the “foul” deeds of men who drove women to suicide. Instead of the note of lamentation we find praise for women whose love for their partners was outstanding. As was the case with the changes Chaucer made from Boccaccio in describing Dorigen’s unselfish desire for the removal of the rocks, so does he transform the tone of Dorigen’s complaint to make her consistently sympathetic with the suffering women of the examples and contemptuous of the violent men, thus reassuring us that her final decision about her fate will rest on a compassionate and morally upright basis.

The wife of Nicerates is the example used in a transition passage:

What shal I seye of Nicerates wyf,  
That for swich cas birafted hirself hir lyf?

(1389–90)

Although Nicerates' wife was a suicide, and as such strictly speaking belongs with the earlier examples, to Dorigen's mind the Greek woman's love for her husband suggests a change of topic, which introduces the entire concluding section of her lament.

“How trewe eek was to Alcebiades  
His love, that rather for to dyen chees  
Than for to suffre his body unburyed be.  
Lo, which a wyf was Alceste,” quod she,  
“What seith Omer of goode Penelopee?  
Al Grece knoweth of hire chastitee.”

(1439–44)

At last here is the praise of women for which we may have looked in vain during the first part of Dorigen's lament: she pities, but does not applaud, women who chose suicide, and reserves praise for wives who were faithful to their husbands; there is emphasis only on their devotion, (of which Penelope is the most famous example), not their sacrifice. Some of the women in this final list, it is true, such as Laodamia and Portia, are suicides who killed themselves rather than live without their husbands, but this only serves to verify the depth of their love; Alcestis, indeed, is the supreme example of a wife's obedience, since she obeyed her husband's request to die on his behalf, and was rewarded as a result with a return to life. The inclusion of Bilia on the list—the wife whose nobility consisted in never telling her husband he had bad breath—may include an implied sneer, a kind of aside for the cognoscenti, at the absurdity of some of the examples cited by Jerome; but mockery of Jerome is not a central focus for Chaucer in the *Franklin's Tale*. It is Jerome, not Chaucer, who risks the seriousness of his argument by giving the spotlight, in all of its anticlimactic details, to the story of Bilia and her husband's bad breath. Dorigen is a far different and more reticent storyteller than the Wife of Bath, who might have relished such a detail. Through Dorigen, Chaucer prefers to correct the emphasis of the *AJ*, especially its buffoonery and hyperbole, while drawing from it freely as a source, and to tilt the emotional impact away from the approval of suicide which is implicit in the original.

Thus the lament of Dorigen divides neatly into two sets of eleven examples: women whose tragic suicide is to be deplored because it resulted from the cruelty of their male oppressors; and women whose love for their husbands, even to the point of death, is to be admired. In dividing the material this way, with categories quite different from Jerome's, she has picked and chosen her examples from various parts of the chapters in *A* which deal with pagan women. Her treatment of the examples slants the materials in a way quite foreign to Jerome, and indeed she adds a high moral seriousness to stories which, in Chaucer's source, at their worst degenerate into farce of questionable taste. This new dignity and seriousness suggest a positive resolution to Dorigen's moral dilemma about the preservation of her "trothe" and the final outcome of the tale. Even as Dorigen repeatedly asks variations on the question "Why sholde I thanne to dye been in drede?" her own account of the deaths of nearly a dozen pagan women tells a different story, as it leaves a clear indication of her horror at their suicides which were a consequence, not of their own heroism, but of the shame which was forced on them by the barbarous cruelty of their male oppressors. It could be said that Dorigen's head gives her one answer, but her heart another. While it may technically be true that "the Church's ban on suicide cannot be relevant to Dorigen"<sup>12</sup> in any overt sense, Dorigen follows the lead of the Wife of Bath in her *Prologue* by tilting her moral frame of reference away from the extreme positions of Jerome in favor of the moderation of Augustine. The latter in the *City of God* is highly sympathetic to Lucretia, who "killed herself for being subjected to an outrage in which she had no guilty part" (*City of God* 1.19), yet Augustine also argues with great emphasis (perhaps in response to Jerome, see Hanna and Lawler (1997) p. 242) that suicide, even in the case of loss of chastity, merely compounds one crime with another and is a "detestable and damnable wickedness" (1.25). This opinion of Augustine was certainly known by Chaucer, who actually mentions Augustine's "gret compassioun" for Lucretia in *LGW* 5.1690–91. In that version of the story, Lucretia's friends, after she has confessed to them Tarquin's rape of her, follow Augustine in urging on her that she need not take any action to atone for the rape, which was not her fault (*LGW* 5.1848–49):

That they forgave yt hir, for yt was ryght,  
It was no gilt, it lay not in hir myght.

Meanwhile the last eleven examples of Dorigen's lament are chosen, not to stress the nobility of their death, but to affirm marriage and the true heroism and nobility of those women who remained true to their husbands. Such an emphasis continues to give a moral center to the tale,

one such as can hardly be claimed for the list in the form presented by St. Jerome, where virginity emphatically takes the preferred position, and the moral goodness of marriage itself is by no means a given.

The use of *AJ* is an improbable but ultimately an inspired one in the *Franklin's Tale*. Dorigen, forced to settle a moral dilemma which seems to present her with an impossible choice, turns to a document on the nature of female virtue which for all its buffoonery is unyielding and pitiless to the point of fanaticism on the subject of chastity. There is also some unmatched leg-pulling in including extensive citations from Jerome's anti-marriage treatise in a tale which many, following Kittredge, regard as Chaucer's "resolution of the 'marriage debate'" (L. Benson in *The Riverside Chaucer*, 895). The notion that Jerome's grotesque "chamber of horrors" would help Dorigen solve her moral dilemma is seemingly an absurd one, but in the end, her natural and human reaction to the atrocities of the stories in Jerome does give us a forecast of the gentle denouement of Chaucer's tale. Dorigen's moral comments and emotional additions to the list of heroines do not necessarily predetermine the happy outcome of the *FT*, but they do imply Dorigen's righteous horror at the prospect of being forced, like the noble virgins and maidens in her lament, to give in to the sexual request of Aurelius (a dilemma which, of course, is not fully parallel to those in Jerome since Dorigen has brought it on herself by her rash promise). In short, Dorigen's Lament reveals her struggling toward a resolution of her dilemma which will keep her from suicide and preserve both her "trothe" and her fidelity to her husband.

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1. Warren S. Smith, "The Wife of Bath Debates Jerome," in *ChauRev* 32 (1967), 129–45. I wish again to thank Professor Patrick Gallacher, who has allowed me to read the draft of his unpublished paper on the *Franklin's Tale*, which provided me with many insights for this paper.

2. Germaine Dempster, "Chaucer at Work on the Complaint in the *Franklin's Tale*," *Modern Language Notes* 52 (1937), 16–23 (quote from 22). Though I disagree with Dempster's conclusions about the structure of the lament, this was an important early look at the relationship between the Lament and its source.

3. James Sledd, "Dorigen's Complaint," *Modern Philology* 45 (1947) 36–45 (quote from 43).

4. Donald C. Baker, "A Crux in Chaucer's *Franklin's Tale*: Dorigen's Lament," *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 60 (1961), 57–64; quote from 61.

5. Daniel M. Murtaugh, "Women and Geoffrey Chaucer," *ELH* 38 (1971), 473–92; quote from 489.

6. Anne Thompson Lee, "'A Woman True and Fair': Chaucer's Portrayal of Dorigen in the *Franklin's Tale*," *CR* 19 (1984), 169–78 (quote from 174). See also A. C. Spearing, *Medieval to Renaissance in English Poetry* (Cambridge, Eng., 1985), 184–85 ("... the longer she goes on, the more remote the exemplary cases become from her own...")

7. Jerome is quoted from W. H. Fremantle, trans., *The Principal Works of St. Jerome*, in *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, sec. Series vol. 6,



(New York 1893). The text, translation, and interpretive notes of selections from the *Adversus Jovinianum* can now be found in *Jankyn's Book of Wikked Wyves*, ed. Ralph Hanna III and Taugott Lawler (Athens, Georgia: the Chaucer Library, 1997), pp. 158–93, 231–58. Gerald Morgan, “A Defence of Dorigen’s Complaint,” *Medium Aevum* 46 (1977), 78–97. Mortimer J. Donovan *The Breton Lay: A Guide to Varieties* (Notre Dame, 1969), 186–87.

8. “Acid, polemical:” David Weisen, *St. Jerome as a Satirist* (Cornell 1964), 51. On the pagan setting for the *Franklin’s Tale*, and for Breton lais, see Leah Jean Larson, *Love, Troth, and Magnanimity: the Weltanschauung of the Breton Lay from Marie de France to Chaucer* (diss., University of Southwestern Louisiana 1996), 144–45. Dorigen as “inquiring Christian:” Michael Wright, “Isolation and Individuality in the Franklin’s Tale,” *SP* 70 (1998), 181–86 (quote from 181); Kathryn Hume, “Why Chaucer Calls *The Franklin’s Tale* a Breton Lai,” *Philological Quarterly* 51 (1972) 365–79 esp. 371.

9. D. Wiesen, *St. Jerome as a Satirist*, 9–10.

10. *Il Filocolo* is cited from the translation by N. R. Havely, *Chaucer’s Boccaccio: Sources of Troilus and the Knight’s and Franklin’s Tales* (D. S. Brewer, Cambridge, 1984), 154–161. Leah Larson 1996 (see note 7), quotation from p. 151.), 239.

11. *pace* Baker (above, note 4) 61–62, I see nothing gained by subdividing the maidens who commit suicide further into those who killed themselves before or after rape.

12. Helen Cooper, *Oxford Guides to Chaucer: The Canterbury Tales* (Oxford 1989), 239.