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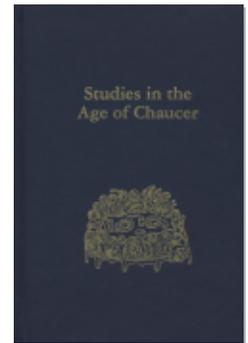
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## Chaucer's Dorigen and Boccaccio's Female Voices

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THE SPECIFIC BOCCACCIAN ANALOGUES for Chaucer *Franklin's Tale* have received detailed critical treatment. Scholars consider Menedon's story in the *Filocolo* the likely source, and even though there is no absolute critical consensus that Chaucer knew the *Decameron*, the version of the story in that collection (10, 5) has nonetheless fruitfully been compared to Chaucer's tale. Over the past twenty years, in fact, the complex relations between Boccaccio and Chaucer have been receiving ever expanding and dynamic treatment, without critics compelling themselves to determine whether Chaucer actually read the *Decameron* and employed it as a source.<sup>1</sup> I want to further these inquiries by engag-

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<sup>1</sup>The essential critical studies include David Wallace, *Chaucer and the Early Writings of Boccaccio* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1985), and *Chaucerian Polity: Absolutist Lineages and Associational Forms in England and Italy* (Stanford: University Press, 1997); Leonard Michael Koff et al., *The Decameron and the Canterbury Tales: New Essays on an Old Question* (Madison, N.J.: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2000); Karla Taylor, "Chaucer's Uncommon Voice: Some Contexts for Influence," in Koff, 47–82. Robert R. Edwards, "Rewriting Menedon's Story: *Decameron* 10.5 and the *Franklin's Tale*," in Koff, 226–46, traces the shifts in both authors' versions of the *Filocolo* source. The essay is reprinted in his comprehensive assessment of the two poets, *Chaucer and Boccaccio: Antiquity and Modernity* (New York: Palgrave, 2002), pp. 153–72; see also his "Source, Context, and Cultural Translation in the *Franklin's Tale*," *MP* 94, no. 2 (1996): 141–62. N. S. Thomson, *Chaucer, Boccaccio, and the Debate of Love* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), esp., pp. 318–21, describes Chaucer's potential exposure to the *Decameron*; Nick Havely, *Chaucer's Boccaccio* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1980), offers an anthology of the primary Boccaccian works that directly influenced Chaucer, whose relationship with the Italian author Havely calls "a working partnership between equals" (p. 12). An important overview of the issue of sources, including editions of all the relevant texts, is conveniently found in Robert M. Correale and Mary Hamel, *Sources and Analogues of the Canterbury Tales I* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer 2002), 211–65, which also includes a succinct critical and bibliographical summary of Chaucer's potential use of the *Decameron*, in Helen Cooper, "The Frame," pp. 7–13. Most recently, Warren Ginsberg, "Gli scogli neri il niente che c'è: Dorigen's Black Rocks and Chaucer's Translation of Italy," in

ing the *Decameron* beyond the obvious analogue at 10, 5 to include other *novelle* that reflect the conflicts and dramas of Chaucer's difficult tale, primarily concerning male desire and woman's language. I will also consider Boccaccio's understudied *Elegy of Lady Fiammetta*, a festival of woman's language and desire that offers striking parallels to the discourse of Chaucer's heroine.<sup>2</sup> I make no historical case for Chaucer's knowledge of the *Fiammetta*, but I believe Chaucer was familiar with the *Decameron* and thus align myself with those critics who treat it as an analogue, however firmly one defines that term.<sup>3</sup> However, my argu-

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*Reading Medieval Culture: Essays in Honor of Robert W. Hanning*, ed. Robert M. Stein and Sandra Pierson Prior (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 2005), pp. 387–408, has examined the Franklin's adaptation of Menedon's tale as a cultural translation of Boccaccio's world of social self-interest into the narrator's own social project as an "arriviste" into gentility. On *The Franklin's Tale* itself, the criticism is vast; see Kenneth Bleeth, *Chaucer's Physician's, Squire's, and Franklin's Tales, An Annotated Bibliography, 1900–2000* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, forthcoming); I thank Professor Bleeth for providing me an advanced copy. A pre-1979 survey of opinions on Dorigen and marriage is supplied by Janemarie Luecke, "Dorigen: Marriage Model or Male Fantasy," *Journal of Women's Studies in Literature* 1 (Spring 1979): 107–21. R. W. Hanning is currently preparing a major study of Chaucer and Boccaccio entitled *Poetics of Deliberation: Prudential Fictions in the Decameron and the Canterbury Tales*. Concerning the very nature of source study, Wallace, "Early Writing," p. 1, discusses going beyond line-by-line comparisons to address "abstract questions of cultural enterprise." Thompson, *Chaucer, Boccaccio, and the Debate of Love*, p. 313, suggests making thematic comparisons "beyond the search for verbal parallels." Peter Beidler, in Koff, pp. 25–46, addresses the issue in the very title of his essay, "Just Say Yes, Chaucer Knew the *Decameron*: or Bringing the *Shipman's Tale* out of Limbo." See also Janet Levarie Smarr, "Mercury in the Garden: Mythographic Methods in the *Merchant's Tale* and *Decameron* 7, 9," in *Classical Fable and the Rise of the Vernacular in Early France and England*, ed. Jane Chance (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1990), pp. 199–214, which defends studying Chaucer and Boccaccio comparatively, whether or not Chaucer directly knew the *Decameron*.

<sup>2</sup>On woman's language, satire, and potential feminism in the *Fiammetta*, see Victoria Kirkham, "Two New Translations: The Early Boccaccio in English Dress," *Italica* 70 (Spring 1993): 79–89; Michael Calabrese, "Feminism and the Packaging of Boccaccio's *Fiammetta*," *Italica* 74 (Spring 1997): 20–42; and Janet Levarie Smarr, *Boccaccio and Fiammetta* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986), pp. 129–48, exploring the work as a study of "obsessive passion."

<sup>3</sup>On the distinction between source and analogue, see Beidler, "Just say Yes." Thomas J. Farrell, "Source or Hard Analogue? *Decameron* X, 10 and the *Clerk's Tale*," *ChauR* 37, no. 4 (2003): 346–64, applies Beidler's definitions to the various "sources" behind the *Clerk's Tale* and argues, pp. 350–51, that Boccaccio's *Decameron* version is, in Beidler's terms, a "hard analogue," i.e., a work with narrative but not necessarily verbal parallels to Chaucer's poem and one that Chaucer may have read and knew but did not necessarily use in his own composition. Farrell also brings Christine's work to bear, deeming it, in Beidler's terms, a "soft analogue," a work Chaucer could not have read but one from which we can learn "something about the horizons of discourse in the later Middle Ages" from a "writer who was writing close to Chaucer in time and place" (p. 360).

ment does not require explicit historical evidence of Chaucer's reading, for I attend not so much to direct sources as to the textual environment or the horizon of expectation against which we can read Dorigen. In fact, even Christine de Pizan, whose discourses on marriage and language obviously postdate Chaucer, can help us understand Dorigen's predicament and the tense love triangle in *The Franklin's Tale*.

Studying these analogues also allows us to adjust recent critical assessment of Dorigen's emotional and ethical status, for if we consider *The Franklin's Tale* in comparison to the exempla of female verbal power offered by Boccaccio and Christine, we begin to see Dorigen as a woman who, in a moment of crisis when invited to commit adultery, uses words recklessly to court calamity, when she could have used them to bring order both to her own marriage and to the emotional life of her lovesick friend and neighbor, Aurelius. We need not prove that Dorigen's promise is rash; everyone, including her, knows this. But we comprehend better the particular workings of mischief in the tale and also its unlikely resolution of the problems of abandonment, insecurity, and flirtation when we witness how other amatory poets crafted female voices that negotiate dangers differently from Dorigen. Put another way, I want to see who Dorigen's literary sisters are and what they did rhetorically in similar circumstances. I hope, too, to raise the stock of the men in the tale, who are far from perfect but whose critical fortunes have suffered as Dorigen's have risen. To this end, I explore the role of male competition in the tale. That the men, however driven by a kind of competitive urge, actually do inspire and ignite one another's virtue may very well be one of the most gracious and miraculous aspects of the tale.<sup>4</sup>

I begin the essay with an overview of these conflicts in *The Franklin's Tale* itself. Then, as a specific prelude to studying Boccaccio's speakers, I will look at theories of rhetoric that Boccaccio and Chaucer would have shared and also at discussions of marriage and propriety in two works by Christine, *Le livre des trois vertus* and her *Livre du duc des vrais amans*. Christine's work bears the influence of the Italian poet and testifies to the shared conceptions that Christian, Humanistic poets would

<sup>4</sup> A convincing defense of at least one of the men is offered by Colin Wilcockson, "Thou and Tears: The Advice of Arveragus to Dorigen in Chaucer's *Franklin's Tale*," *RES* 54 (2003): 308–12. Stephen Knight, "Rhetoric and Poetry in the *Franklin's Tale*," *ChauR* 4, no. 1 (1970): 14–30, sees Arveragus as the first character who "sets aside self-indulgence for an intangible reason" and notes that "[f]rom this grand moment on, honour is triumphant" (p. 28).

have had about ethics, danger, and careless speech, particularly women's speech. I will then turn to a number of related *Decameron nouvelle*, beginning with I, 5, where we read of a wife who uses language keenly, cleverly, yet unambiguously to reject an unwanted love and restore order to her suitor's emotional life. In 6, 3 we meet a clever woman who extinguishes the base advances of a pimpish Archbishop and his friend the Marshall, who she knows has paid for sex with another man's wife. 9,1 will show how a widow confounds two unwanted suitors, and in 6, 7, we will hear how, at a critical moment, Madonna Filippa, by speaking wisely, undoes an old law that prohibits her from having an affair, displaying how woman's speech silences men and defeats their ambitions of control, whether that control means having sex with or denying sexual freedom to the woman. I will then move to the *Fiammetta*, an extended study of narcissistic female speech and emotionalism, inspired by an abandonment that leads to an empty threat of suicide. Fiammetta, like Dorigen, is a maker of lists, and the rhetorical style of each woman undermines her moral and emotional authority. At the end of the essay, I will turn briefly to the more apparent analogues of Chaucer's tale, *Filocolo* 4 and *Decameron* 10, 5 as a way of recapitulating my argument through comparisons to these more familiar renditions (one a direct source) of *The Franklin's Tale*.

### Language, Danger, and Competition in *The Franklin's Tale*

As we listen to all that Dorigen says, we would be wise to keep in mind the words of Boccaccio's Gilberto, the husband in the *Decameron* version of the tale, who tells his wife that "Le parole per gli orecchi dal cuore ricevute hanno maggior forza che molti non stimano, e quasi ogni cosa diviene agli amanti possibile" [the power of words received by the heart through the ears is greater than many people think and to those who are in love nearly everything becomes possible].<sup>5</sup> In the sequence below, Dorigen, motivated by her suitor's piteous complaint, speaks words powerful enough to compel him to attempt the impossible:

<sup>5</sup> All references to the *Decameron* are to Giovanni Boccaccio, *Decameron*, ed. Vittore Branca (Turin: Einaudi, 1980), here p. 1152. For short phrases quoted in Italian, I occasionally offer my own gloss, but I have most often provided translations from *Giovanni Boccaccio, The Decameron*, trans. G. H. McWilliam (Penguin: New York, 1972), here p. 728.

She gan to looke upon Aurelius;  
 "Is this youre wyl," quod she, "and sey ye thus?  
 Nevere erst," quod she, "ne wiste I what ye mente.  
 But now, Aurelie, I knowe youre entente,  
 By thilke God that yaf me soule and lyf,  
 Ne shal I nevere been untrewed wyf  
 In word ne werk, as fer as I have wit;  
 I wol been his to whom that I am knyht.  
 Taak this for fynal answer as of me."  
 But after that in pley thus seyde she:  
 "Aurelie," quod she, "by heighe God above,  
 Yet wolde I graunte yow to been youre love,  
 Syn I yow se so pitously complayne.  
 Looke what day that endelong Britayne  
 Ye remoeve all the rokkes, stoon by stoon,  
 That they ne lette ship ne boot to goon—  
 I seye, whan ye han maad the coost so clene  
 Of rokkes that ther nys no stoon ysene,  
 Thanne wol I love you best of any man;  
 Have heer my trouthe, in al that evere I kan."

Critics do not agree upon the significance of this offer.<sup>6</sup> In an important reading that maintains starkly that Dorigen does not, in fact, ever make

<sup>6</sup>References to Chaucer are to Larry D. Benson, *The Riverside Chaucer* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987), henceforth cited in the text. In the vast sea of criticism on Dorigen's promise, Alan Gaylord, "The Promises in the *Franklin's Tale*," *ELH* 31 (1964): 331–65, questions the authority of the promise "that no one really keeps" and that "was never really made!" (p. 348); Carol A. Pulham, "Promises, Promises: Dorigen's Dilemma Revisited," *Chaur* 31, no. 1 (1996): 76–86, focuses on the historical nature and gravity of the oral contract; Conor McCarthy, "Love, Marriage, and Law: Three Canterbury Tales," *ES* 83 (2002): 504–18, examines the legal aspects of the pledge, concluding that "she should not have made [it]" (p. 516). See also Joseph Hornsby, *Chaucer and the Law* (Norman, Okla.: Pilgrim Books, 1988), pp. 51–56, on the "complex relation of promise and intention," and the tension between the false "trouthe" of Dorigen's pledge, a "clearly invalid agreement" (p. 54), and the true "trouthe" of marriage. Hornsby concludes that "language for Chaucer is a powerful and dangerous tool, one that must be used with care because the consequences extend beyond any earthly hardship to those ultimately affecting the soul" (p. 56). Edwards, "Rewriting," p. 235, notes that "whatever Dorigen says about her intent and however much medieval ethics may have privileged intent over the literal language of promises, Dorigen wrongly assumes that she can quibble with language, just as Dianora [in the *Filocolo*] can dissemble with it." See also James I. Wimsatt, "The Wife of Bath, the Franklin, and the Rhetoric of St. Jerome," in *A Wyf Ther Was: Essays in Honour of Paule Mertend-Fonck*, ed. Juliette Dor (Liège: Université de Liège, 1992), pp. 275–81. Phyllis Hodgson, *The Franklin's Tale* (London: Athlone, 1960), p. 90, identifies Dorigen's prom-

any promises to Aurelius at all, Bonnie Wheeler argues for a particular significance to Dorigen's final comments in this scene: "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.1003–5). Wheeler argues that here Dorigen "unmasks Aurelius's courtly appeals for *mercy* and *grace* as barely veiled attempts at sexual theft as well as indelicacy," while, at once, "speaking to her own powerlessness, to her own disablement by rhetorical codes."<sup>7</sup> I read Dorigen's words, rather, as an inflammation of the male rivalry that Aurelius is conducting. The term "deyntee" is particularly telling; it may mean "state of honor, being held in high esteem, dignity," making for a good question, considering the themes of the tale and Aurelius's perceived station: "what honor is there in pursuing a married women?" But Dorigen's references to sexual access cast a prurient valence on the term, which in this case would mean "delight, pleasure," as the Franklin himself uses it when praising the Squire's tale as he interrupts it.<sup>8</sup> She is asking, therefore, in what sounds like a leading rhetorical question to a man in love, "what delight could you possibly have in loving a woman whom another man can have whenever he likes?" By reminding him in sexually suggestive terms that her body *is* being freely enjoyed, but not by him, she only encourages Aurelius to commit himself to achieving the "impossible" and to have what his rival freely enjoys. What she offers in play he commits himself to in earnest.<sup>9</sup>

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ise as a "common human weakness, that of not being able to give a flat refusal where it would cause pain." Cynthia A. Gravlee, "Presence, Absence, and Difference: Reception and Deception in the *Franklin's Tale*," in *Desiring Discourse: The Literature of Love, Ovid through Chaucer*, ed. James J. Paxson and Cynthia A. Gravlee (Selinsgrove, Pa.: Susquehanna University Press, 1998), pp. 177–87, argues (p. 170) that Dorigen "plays a game with Aurelius" and that therefore (p. 180) "the nobility of character inherent in gentillesse is not present" in her. R. D. Eaton, "Narrative Closure in Chaucer's *Franklin's Tale*," *Neophilologus* 84 (2000): 309–21, argues that Dorigen has "however innocently, bartered with her sexual favors," "has acted weakly and indecisively when cornered" (p. 310), and is a "victim of her own desire and her own sensuality" (p. 320). In an inventive and dynamic reading, Kathryn L. Lynch, "East Meets West in Chaucer's Squire's and Franklin's Tales," *Speculum* 70 (1995): 545–47, reads Dorigen's flirtation with Aurelius as a flirtation with the feminine and the exotic, both associated with the East.

<sup>7</sup> Bonnie Wheeler, "Trouthe without Consequences: Rhetoric and Gender in Chaucer's *Franklin's Tale*," *Representations of the Feminine in the Middle Ages*, ed. Bonnie Wheeler (Dallas: Academia, 1993), p. 107; Wheeler sees Dorigen as a crafty and capable rhetorician, who ultimately denies Aurelius "with a firm, categorical *no*."

<sup>8</sup> MED s.v. deinte, 2 a, 1 a; *Canterbury Tales*, V.681.

<sup>9</sup> Gerald Morgan, "Boccaccio's *Filocolo* and the Moral Argument of the *Franklin's Tale*," *ChauR* 20, no. 4 (1986): 285–306, argues, p. 297, that the task and promise offered "in play" are attempts "to restore the situation to its proper level of pleasantness and good cheer." Elizabeth A. Dobbs, "'Re-Sounding' Echo," *ChauR* 40, n. 2 (2006):

The exigencies of male competition do, in fact, drive the tale. The very vocabulary of Dorigen's initial promise betrays comparison and competition: she promises, by God no less, to love Aurelius the "best" of any man. Even Aurelius's initial revelation to her bespeaks competition and comparison: he tells her he wishes that the day Arveragus "hadde wente over the see" that he himself "hadde went ther nevere [he] sholde have come again" (V.869–71). The explicit terms of competition, including sexual competition, that inform Dorigen's speech compel an ongoing response and plant a seed that cannot be uprooted: "Be your love," "love you best," "another man has my body whenever he wants." These are taunts. However adorned Dorigen's performance may be throughout the tale with tears and sorrow, Chaucer wants us to see the engine of desire and the moral culpability beneath her "play," her colorful lamentation, and her perpetual complaint. The comic movement of the tale, however, unfolds when Aurelius converts the terms of his own competition from sexual to social, once he knows that sexual conquest would constitute a loss of honor and thus no victory over Arveragus. If he sleeps with her, Aurelius realizes, he will not really be the "best" in any sense of the term, but he can "better" Arveragus by courteously absolving Dorigen and freely denying himself that body that he has so long coveted. Dorigen's taunting question has thus set in motion a dangerous competition that foreshadows a redemptive tussle of gentility. As Arveragus's own chivalric travels, which take him away from his wife and into the world of men and violence, clearly establish, men in this tale are bound to compete. The one-upmanship that ends the tale may not be spiritually pure, but it does not have to be; it *works* to heal what can be healed in the combative world of honor, desire, sex, and money.<sup>10</sup>

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289–310, offers an excellent study of the relations of Dorigen and Aurelius to Narcissus and Echo, sparked by Chaucer's allusion to the pair at V 951–52; this reference betrays, says Dobbs, p. 302, Chaucer's "heightened interest in acts of speaking" in comparison to the two Boccaccian analogues to the tale. In the Ovidian mythological source, differences of meaning come into play, Dobbs notes, p. 303, because "what is echoed has been separated from its original context." Dobbs sees this phenomenon manifested in Aurelius's fragmented, partial, and selective interpretation of Dorigen's words and of her promise, until, dramatically, the end of the tale, when he responds, she says, p. 306, "to the larger meaning revealed by her grief" and "releases her from her promise."

<sup>10</sup>Edwards, "Cultural Translation," p. 154, studies the economic vocabulary of Chaucer's tale, noting that the "dominant aristocratic ethos of the Love Questions [in the *Filocolo*] is rephrased, hence revised in some measure, within the idiom of mercantile culture."

In fact, even before the tale begins we witness some one-upmanship between the veteran Franklin himself and the young Squire. The older man's interruption establishes the very theme of masculine competition while it also explores the issues of youth, rhetoric, and excess that the Franklin will embody in Dorigen, the most prolific speaker in the tale, Squire-like in her prolixity. The Franklin coyly anticipates Dorigen's rhetorics, her bathetic apostrophe, her endless amplification, and her amorous play, in his unconvincing disavowal of rhetoric, where he promises that, since he never studied Cicero, he will only speak "bare and pleyñ" (V.717–28):<sup>11</sup>

At my bigynnyng first I yow biseche,  
 Have me excused of my rude speche.  
 I lerned nevere rethorik, certeyn;  
 Thyng that I speke, it moot be bare and pleyñ.  
 I sleep nevere on the Mount of Pernaso,  
 Ne lerned Marcus Tullius Scithero.  
 Colours ne knowe I none, withouten drede,  
 But swiche colours as growen in the mede,  
 Or elles swiche as men dye or peynte.  
 Colours of rethorik been to me queynte;  
 My spirit feeleth noght of swich mateere.  
 But if yow list, my tale shul ye heere.

These odd claims provoke us to examine the emotional and stylistic disconnections in Dorigen's life and words. The colors, such as they are, that inform much of her language create the turmoil that drives the tale and betrays what Stephen Knight has termed her "emotional excesses."<sup>12</sup> Dorigen, both in her flirtation and in her overwrought laments

<sup>11</sup>James J. Murphy, "A New Look at Chaucer and the Rhetoricians," *RES* 15 (1964): 10, reads these terms to mean "'uncomplicated' rather than 'low' or 'humble,' which is the meaning of [John of] Garland's *bumilis stylus* or the *extenuatus* of [Cicero's] *ad Herrenium*." Challenging the notion of the "interruption" and summarizing the past scholarship is David Seaman, "The Wordes of the Frankeleyn to the Squier: An Interruption?" *ELN* 24 (1986): 12–18. See also Lynch, "East Meets West," pp. 542–43.

<sup>12</sup>Knight, "Rhetoric and Poetry," pp. 21–22, provocatively studies Dorigen's "rather unstable mentality" and her "hyperbolic character," as revealed in her own and in her narrator's rhetoric, that is, in the specific formal features of presentation and also in the rhythms and syntax of the poetry itself. Phyllis Hodgson, *Franklin's Tale*, pp. 103, 104, considers the allusions in Dorigen's catalogue "not equally pertinent," perhaps reflecting the "immoderation and illogicality of a frenzied woman," perhaps related to Chaucer's

and exempla, abuses rhetoric. The Franklin is often wry or dismissive of her words and emotions, treating her with somewhat less respect than he does that young person whom he cannot bear listening much to, the Squire. The young man, speaking of Apollo in pompous words that anticipate Aurelius's upcoming prayer to the god, plans to continue his tale, we might say, for another "day or twaye," when the Franklin ambushes him with a complex piece of interruption rhetoric. He softens the blow by commending the young man's great "wit," which is remarkable despite his "yowthe"; he then congratulates him for speaking "feelyngly" and claims that he has had "greet deyntee" in the young man's speech. The Franklin then contrasts him to his own son, who is more apt to "pleye" at dice than to act like a man "virtuous withal" or to show proper "gentillesse." He exclaims further that he would rather see his son reform than have "twenty pound" worth of land.

The Franklin has left some clues in his interruption here, for some of his words playfully anticipate the tale to follow: "twenty pound" for "a thousand pounds" to have the impossible happen; "deyntee" here and in Dorigen's question to Aurelius; the term "gentillesse," obviously, throughout the tale. "Doom" anticipates the "question" of judgment with which the Franklin ends his tale, the host's reference to "biheste" recalls the theme of contract that binds the pilgrims and will bind Dorigen, his son's failure to "entende" to virtue anticipates the themes of intention and morality that will permeate the tale, and finally the Franklin's pledge to "obeye" the host's will reflects the themes of *maistrise* and lordship that we are about to hear about. In short, Chaucer saturates the introduction with an anticipatory vocabulary that sets up the Franklin's own narrative. However, the specific terms of the interruption also reveal an important sentiment that will help us understand the Franklin's treatment of Dorigen: when we put his various polite phrases together, we see that the Franklin thinks that young people feel, speak, and play too much. He claims that the Squire has no peer, but he is about to present one in Dorigen, whom, he implies, could very well have been interrupted without much loss: "thus pleyned Dorigen a day or tweye, / Purposynge evere that she wolde deye" (V.1457–58). This gentle barb—the "day or tweye" is anticipated by the Franklin's

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attempt to "ridicule a common rhetorical practice [elaboration through exempla] by reducing it to an absurdity."

claim to the Host that he should be allowed to offer the Squire a “word or two”—characterizes his tone throughout the narrative.<sup>13</sup> The Franklin has interrupted one young, naive, feeling speaker to make room for one of his own, pulling rank on the Squire in a move that anticipates the class competition between men within the tale. Dorigen not only recalls the voluble young Squire but also the Franklin’s own son, who has not quite mastered the virtues of “gentility,” something more valuable than “twenty” or, we might add, “a thousand pounds” both in the Franklin family economy and in his tale. Chaucer loves the follies of both young and old, and it comes as no accident that the Franklin initiates a discussion of verbosity, emotion, and youth while Dorigen is waiting in the wings.

### Modern Advocacy and Medieval Analogues

To criticize the behavior of Dorigen opposes much of the critical treatment that she has received within the last twenty years, which tends to argue that Dorigen is so constrained by patriarchal circumstance—expressed through genre, law, custom, character, economics, sexual inequality—that she cannot produce a “no” that Aurelius will hear or respect.<sup>14</sup> A related critical move sees Dorigen not so much as a victim

<sup>13</sup> *Canterbury Tales*, V.700–701. Contributing to this tone, the Franklin mocks his own rhetorical excesses: “But sodeinly bigonne revel newe / Til that the brighte sonne loste his hewe, / For th’orisonte hath reft the sonne his light, / This is as muche to saye as it was night” (V.1015–18).

<sup>14</sup> The tendency to locate Dorigen’s oppression can be observed in a number of essays. Nina Manasan Greenberg, “Dorigen as Enigma: The Production of Meaning and the *Franklin’s Tale*” *ChauR* 33, no. 4 (1999): 329–49, explores Dorigen’s “absence” and how the question of “who is most free” excludes her. Dorigen is caught, she argues, in a “phallogocentric power structure,” a “masculinist sexual economy” and in the “commodification” of women within male discourse” (see pp. 335, 336, 338, 345). Her “exclusion is *intrinsic* to an order from which nothing escapes: the order of ‘man’s’ discourse.” Despite this exclusion, Greenberg nonetheless notes that “what is so exciting” is that Chaucer gives Dorigen the power to save or slay a man with one word. Mary R. Bowman, “‘Half as She Were Mad’: Dorigen in the Male World of the *Franklin’s Tale*,” *ChauR* 27, no. 3 (1993): 239–51, argues that Dorigen is “reduced to an object of exchange between Arveragus and Aurelius”; she is a “commodity” and the counterpart of a “sum of money” who still, in her long lament, is able to “shape self-expression within the discursive materials of [the male] world”; Bowman casts her lamentations as “the only surviving testament to the woman who is otherwise denied personhood by the tale,” with even the male narrator himself “unsympathetically” and unkindly mocking her speech (see pp. 241, 242, 248, 250). Most recently, Ginsberg, “niente che c’è,” p. 403, reads the lament as evidence of Dorigen’s cultural entrapment: “If the terrain Boccaccio gave women to express their selfhood was limited, the room they can call their own in the *Franklin’s Tale* has shrunk to the size of a tomb.” Eve

but as a gifted and morally evolved heroine, responsible for resolving the tale's conflicts through her own powerful agency.<sup>15</sup> Insofar as they are both Dorigenocentric, both camps produce exculpatory readings, resulting in a strong critical orthodoxy. Characteristic of the former perspective is Crane's account in *Gender and Romance in Chaucer's Canterbury*

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Salisbury, "Chaucer's 'Wife,' the Law, and the Middle English Breton Lays," in *Domestic Violence in Medieval Texts*, ed. Eve Salisbury, Georgiana Donavin, and Merall Llewelyn Price (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2002), pp. 73–93, sees Dorigen as the victim of "psychological abuse," an "abandoned," "unprotected" "target" and "virtually pimped" (see pp. 86–88). Pamela E. Barnett, "'And shortly for to seyn they were aton': Chaucer's Deflection of Rape in the *Reeve's* and the *Franklin's Tales*," *WS* 22 (1993): 145–62, calls the feminist literary project "one of recovery," concerned with "retrieving marginal voices and deflected gender issues"; she argues pointedly that the "*Franklin's Tale* is motivated by an attempted rape" and that "consent is not an adequate basis on which to rule out the existence of a rape scenario." In this reading, Aurelius forces himself on Dorigen sexually, appealing to "a patriarchal discourse on female sexuality in which 'no' means 'yes.'" The overall goal of this critical project, concludes Barrett, is "to locate what we consider to be rape according to our feminist standards," voicing the "woman's protest" and the "man's intent to harm" (see pp. 145, 155, 158, 161, 162). Francine McGregor in "What of Dorigen? Agency and Ambivalence in the *Franklin's Tale*," *ChauR* 31, no. 4 (1997): 365–78, argues, p. 376, that Dorigen sees Aurelius as a "potential violator" and the proposed assignation as threatened rape. M. C. Boden, "Disordered Grief and Fashionable Afflictions in Chaucer's *Franklin's Tale* and the *Clerks Tale*," in *Grief and Gender: 700–1700*, ed. Jennifer C. Vaught (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), p. 61, argues that Dorigen's catalogue of model suicides that capitulated to a male imperative for female purity displays a "classical muting of the oppressed group representing their condition in the discourse of the dominant group."

<sup>15</sup>A number of essays depict Dorigen heroically, often noting as well the circumstances of her oppression. David Raybin, "'Wommen of Kinde Desiren Libertee': Rereading Dorigen, Rereading Marriage," *ChauR* 27 no. 1 (1992): 65–86, sees in Dorigen "true courage" and "moral purity" and thinks her the "most important, sympathetic and convincing character in the tale," praising her "independent agency," how she "makes the bottom line choices" and "orchestrates the tale's delicate movement, both determining her own behavior and encouraging the generous responses of the two men" (see pp. 65–66). She does all this despite the fact that her "men may think they are in control—men usually do." Emilio Englade, "'Straw for Your Gentlewoman!' Masculine Identity, Honor, and Dorigen," *PMAM* 5 (1998): 34–57, argues, p. 50, that "the honor [the men] have retained has little to do with personal virtue; only Dorigen has consistently acted out of selflessness." In a detailed and productive source study, Warren S. Smith, "Dorigen's Lament and the Resolution of the *Franklin's Tale*," *ChauR* 36, no. 4 (2002): 374–90, reads Dorigen's lament specifically through its source in Jerome's *Against Jovinian* and argues that Chaucer "transforms 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" (p. 386). See also Andrea Rossi-Reder, "Male Movement and Female Fixity in the *Franklin's Tale* and *Il Filocolo*," in *Masculinities in Chaucer: Approaches to Maleness in the Canterbury Tales and Troilus and Criseyde*, ed. Peter Beidler (Cambridge and Rochester, N.Y.: D. S. Brewer, 1998), pp. 105–16. Dorigen, she writes "[a]s a medieval woman . . . has little access to the mobility and to the credit for deeds that men in her society enjoy." Because of this handicap, Dorigen has to use her mind more and thus "plays more of a moral role than any of

*Tales*, where she explores Dorigen's "ultimate failure to deflect Aurelius's courtship." Opposing the reading famously offered by R. E. Kaske, who spoke of Dorigen's "feminine flightiness," Crane locates her failure, rather, in the difficulty of "expressing resistance to courtship in romance" and of "being heard to speak against courtship." "That Dorigen finds herself ventriloquizing encouragement," Crane reasons, "as she attempts resistance reveals that there is no vocabulary of refusal in this generic context. . . . The only way for Dorigen to communicate refusal to Aurelius would be to relocate herself altogether outside of sexual circulation, and the many stories she later recalls can only imagine that outside as death."<sup>16</sup> But contemporary models for successful defense of the sort that Dorigen requires—the generic resource that Crane says does not exist—can indeed be found in Boccaccio, in works in fact that Chaucer may have known firsthand. Boccaccio demonstrates the existence of a high standard, and a high success rate, for a deflective female rhetoric. We see confirmation that Boccaccio is not unique in offering such models of the art of refusal in the works of Christine, obviously influenced by her countryman in this matter.

But the critical adjustments I exhort here, which oppose the tendency to see Dorigen either as a victim or a hero, are not meant simply to condemn Dorigen morally. Her sufferings, however artificial and hyperbolic in her monologues, are at other times trenchant and real, and by the end of the tale this woman has been ordered by her husband to sleep with another man and to keep it secret on pain of death. Chaucerian morality is never simplistic or even overt, but we must temper our sympathy, which can be a deceptive reader response to Chaucer, with an awareness of the poet's sense of ethics and language and also his sense, drawn in part from Boccaccio, that language, used well, can heal and

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the men, thereby deserving recognition for her morally grounded generosity" (pp. 108, 115).

<sup>16</sup>Susan Crane, *Gender and Romance in Chaucer's Canterbury Tales* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 62, 63, 66, 65. See R. E. Kaske, "Chaucer's Marriage Group," in *Chaucer the Love Poet*, ed. Jerome Mitchell and William Provost (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1973), pp. 45–65, esp. page 61 for the discussion of flightiness and Kaske's further contention that Dorigen is "certainly one of Chaucer's more attractive heroines and is portrayed with obvious sympathy." Complicating Crane's notions about the near impossibility of Dorigen finding a language of rejection, John A. Pitcher, "'Word and Werk' in Chaucer's *Franklin's Tale*," *L&P* 49, nos. 1–2 (2003): 77–109, argues that her "speech act also gives expression to a portion of her desire" (p. 90). Luecke, "Marriage Model," argues that Dorigen "is at best an adolescent; certainly a child by the standard of [Margaret] Paston and [Christine] de Pizan's documentary evidence of an adult woman" (p. 113).

can thus become its own form of personal advocacy against many forms of patriarchy.

### Ethics, Rhetoric, and Female Speech in Boccaccio and Christine de Pisan

How exactly can the *Decameron* and the amatory work of Christine help us understand Dorigen's plight and performances? Chaucer, always interested in human speech as a manifestation of morality, ethics, and social relations, would have seen in the *Decameron* various examples of reckless, dangerous speech, committed by both men and women. But he would also have seen that women can speak well and wisely to various but related ends: to defeat the sexual ambitions of cads; to chasten, educate, and heal weak men; and to combat authority, law, and constraint, with the goal, in all cases, of maintaining freedom and self-determination.<sup>17</sup>

Some have seen in Boccaccio's gendering of desire little more than an unending, insidious misogyny.<sup>18</sup> But we do not have to adjudicate this

<sup>17</sup>Thompson, *Chaucer, Boccaccio, and the Debate of Love*, pp. 69–70, writes most eloquently about Boccaccio's moral arts: "Into the general framework of an anatomy of moral failings, Boccaccio introduces the emergent theme of the power of words: they can be used to disguise reality, in which case a man may be fooled, but not God; they may also be used to convey a reforming message in disguise." On the issues of feminism and masculism in Boccaccio, see Michael Calabrese, "Men and Sex in Boccaccio's *Decameron*," *M&H* 28 (2002): 45–72, and "Male Piety and Sexuality in Boccaccio's *Decameron*," *PQ* 82 (2005): 257–76. See also Laura Di Sisto, "Boccaccio Friend or Foe? An Examination of the Role of Women in the *Decameron*," *Spunti e Ricerche* 10 (1994): 63–75, arguing that Boccaccio "restricts *Decameronian* women to sexual activity" and "hardly gives them credit for anything else" (p. 63). Of central importance to an understanding of the *Decameron's* moral universe is Victoria Kirkham, *The Sign of Reason in Boccaccio's Fiction* (Florence: Olschki, 1993).

<sup>18</sup>Marilyn Migiel, *A Rhetoric of the Decameron* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003), exposes what she sees as misogynist regulation and suppression of women beneath any apparent empowerment or expression of agency. Migiel argues that "rhetorical victories do not necessarily point to gains for women" (p. 119). See also her "Domestic Violence in the *Decameron*," in Salisbury et al., pp. 164–79. See also Mihoko Suzuki, "Gender, Power, and the Female Reader: Boccaccio's *Decameron* and Marguerite de Navarre's *Heptameron*," *CLS* 30, no. 3 (1993): 231–52, which indicts the *Decameron* as a "consistent presentation of masculine drives and judgments, which largely accord with the dictates of patriarchy" (p. 240). Kurtis B. Hass's "*The Franklin's Tale* and the Medieval *Trivium*: A Call for Critical Thinking," *JEGP* 106.1 (2007): 45–63, was published while this essay was in press; Hass examines how Dorigen and Aurelius deficiently employ the *trivium*, leaving them "vulnerable to the Orleans clerk's corruptions of the *quadrivium*" (p. 45). Though Hass also sees Aurelius's actions as constituting "an attempted rape," his conclusion that *gentilese* must be "girded by careful, moral thought processes (p. 63) is complementary to my own.

problem, for studying Chaucer's debt to the Italian poet does not depend upon determining definitively how Boccaccio treats women but rather upon engaging the *Decameron* in the broader context of medieval amatory literature.<sup>19</sup> For in medieval narrative of all kinds (including, in addition to the *Decameron* and the *Canterbury Tales*, both the *Roman de la Rose* and the *De Amore* of Andreas Capellanus), men act carnally, usually as if their lives depended on sexual success. Women seem, from a common misogynist perspective, the tempting cause of all this male anxiety, but the frequent Patristic association of man with "reason" and woman with "sensuality," though often related to an allegorical understanding of the Fall from Paradise, is seldom transferred wholesale into amatory narrative.<sup>20</sup> In fact, we often see, as, for example, in Chaucer's *Tale of Melibee*, the *Man of Law's Tale*, and the *Second Nun's Tale*, that *man* represents sensuality and error, while woman embodies reason, self-mastery, and the wisdom that inspires virtue and order. Women remind men of their better selves, and even, at times, make chaste brothers and friends out of sexual pursuers. These women, as they confront and heal men, summon the power of language and sometimes invoke what Boccaccio's Lauretta terms "biting" wit, an image that recalls the power of the saints as teeth that "cut men off from error," and soften them by biting and chewing, in Saint Augustine's exegesis of the Song of Songs.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Concerning issues of gender, feminism, voicing, and authorial intention in the *Decameron*, see Regina Psaki, "Women in the *Decameron*," in *Approaches to Teaching Boccaccio's Decameron*, ed. James H. McGregor (New York: Modern Language Association of America, 2000), pp. 79–86, which offers an important caveat, "No single pronouncement [about gender] is definitive, even when we might want it to be; each will be contradicted sooner or later, tacitly or explicitly" (p. 80). And see Psaki, "'Women Make All Things Lose Their Power': Woman's Knowledge, Men's Fear in the *Decameron* and the *Corbaccio*," *Heliotropia* 1.1 (2003): 26 December 2005 ([http://www.brown.edu/Departments/Italian\\_Studies/heliotropia/01-01/psaki.shtml](http://www.brown.edu/Departments/Italian_Studies/heliotropia/01-01/psaki.shtml)). On Boccaccio and women more generally, see the various listings in *Women in the Middle Ages: An Encyclopedia* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 2004), pp. 103–17.

<sup>20</sup> For an overview of readings of the Fall, see Pierre J. Payer, "The Fall, Original Sin, and Concupiscence," in *The Bridling of Desire: Views of Sex in the Latter Middle Ages* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993), pp. 42–60; on man and woman in relation to reason and sensuality, see Augustine, *The Trinity*, trans. Edmund Hill (New York: New City Press, 1991), pp. 322ff. (Book 12).

<sup>21</sup> "È il vero che, se per risposta si dice e il risponditore morda come cane, essendo come da cane prima stato morso non par da riprender come, se ciò avvenuto non fosse" [It is of course true, in the case of repartee, that when someone bites like a dog after having, so to speak, been bitten by a dog in the first place, his reaction does not seem as reprehensible as it would have been had he not been provoked] Branca, pp. 726–27; McWilliam, p. 452. Augustine writes that he contemplates the saints in the image of sheep, "more pleasantly" when he sees them as "dentes Ecclesiae . . . praecidere ab erroribus homines . . . emollita duritia, quasi demorsos mansosque" [the teeth of the

This wit, and all the arts of repartee and verbal combat, is identified as particularly suited to women throughout the *Decameron*. In addition to Lauretta, two other female narrators, Pampinea and Filomena, whom Lauretta cites with praise, also lament their contemporary sisters' deficiency in these important arts.<sup>22</sup> Pampinea, a powerful organizing figure in the introduction and the *brigata's* the first queen, describes concision and wit as beautiful adornments that function like "flowers in a green field" or "bright stars on a cloudless night." She recommends this skill specifically to women "in quanto piú alle donne che agli uomini il molto parlare e lungo, quando senza esso si possa far, si disdice" [for it is more unseemly for a woman to speak at inordinate length, when this can be avoided, than it is for a man].<sup>23</sup> Women have of late, Pampinea continues, neglected verbal arts in favor of decorating themselves with dress, a superficial adornment in contrast to the more meaningful and productive adornments of language.<sup>24</sup> These remarks on language and dress contrast ignorant, supercilious indulgence to a better form of adornment attained through wisdom and wit. In fact, we observe such relations between speech and virtue throughout the *Decameron* not only in women but in whoever speaks wisely and inspires goodness in others, a prevalent theme in the last day of storytelling, as displayed in the eloquent Titus and in Count Guy, who reminds the sexually enflamed King Charles of the importance of self-control.<sup>25</sup> As Victoria Kirkham has written, Boccaccio knew that "speech, the intellectual instrument by which man is distinguished from the beasts, comports a powerful ethical valence. What we say and how we say it is the measure of our humanity."<sup>26</sup> Regardless of the speaker's gender, all speech reflects morality,

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church . . . cutting off men from their errors . . . after their hardness has been softened as if by being bitten and chewed], *De Doctrina Christiana*, II, vi, PL 34, p. 38; translation from Saint Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, trans. D. W. Robertson Jr. (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1958), p. 37. References below to the *Filocolo* are to *Il Filocolo*, ed. Antonio Enzo Quaglio, vol. 1 of *Tutte le opere di Giovanni Boccaccio*, ed. Vittore Branca (Milan: Mondadori, 1964–83), excerpted in Corrales and Hamel, *Sources and Analogues*, to which I refer throughout this essay.

<sup>22</sup>See the nearly identical passages at 1, 10 and 6, 1, discussed below.

<sup>23</sup>Branca, p. 116; McWilliam, p. 63.

<sup>24</sup>Note also that in such *novelle* as 3, 4 and 7, 1 and throughout the eighth day, women use language to deceive, though often as the heroines of the story; the relationship between morality and language in these *novelle* needs to be studied independently.

<sup>25</sup>See *Decameron* 10, 8 and 6; see especially the king's reaction in 10, 6 (Branca, p. 1165), which recalls the healing moments of self-knowledge, shame, and reason that we have been observing in Boccaccio's men.

<sup>26</sup>Kirkham, "Sign of Reason," p. 175; see all of pp. 173–97, exploring the theme of communication in the *Decameron* in relation to "the philosophical teachings on human locution inherited by the later Middle Ages" (p. 174).

related not only to Christian ethics but also to a Classical sense of decorum as expressed in the rhetorical handbooks of Cicero and Quintilian and in their many medieval adapters and translators, including Brunetto Latini and Petrarch.<sup>27</sup> The frame narrative of the *Decameron*, therefore, constructs a rhetorical poetics that both informs the *novelle* themselves and provides for an interested reader like Chaucer the models and doctrines with which he can shape his own female speakers.

Another discourse relevant to interpreting both Boccaccio's and Chaucer's female speakers is the book of manners, such as *Le livre des trois vertus* (*Book of the Three Virtues, aka, The Treasury of the City of Ladies*) of Boccaccio's French disciple Christine de Pizan. As Christine guides married women through the dangerous waters of male aggression, she outlines how a chaperon must carefully guard a young married woman against the "divers semblans et manieres" [various signs and gestures] of male flirtation, "comme hommes scevent bien en tel cas" [as men well know how to do in such a case]. The situation is dangerous espe-

<sup>27</sup> On the influence of Cicero as Boccaccio would have received him, perhaps though Brunetto Latini's adaptations, see James Murphy, *Rhetoric in the Middle Ages* (Tempe: ACMRS, 2001), pp. 89–132, esp. p. 112 on *De Inventione* and the legal curriculum in Italy and pp. 10–15 for an outline of Cicero's rhetorical models. See also Murphy's "Cicero's Rhetoric in the Middle Ages," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 53 (1967): 334–41. One can multiply passages from classical rhetoric that point to decorum and the virtue of the speaker, but this passage from Quintilian is apt: "Nature, in the very gift to man by which she shows herself to have been particularly generous to him and particularly to have separated him from the other animals, Nature herself will prove to have been no parent but a stepmother if she designed the power of speech to be the companion of crime, the opponent of innocence and the enemy of truth" (*Institutio* XII, 1 1–2, quoted by M. Winterbottom, "Quintilian and Rhetoric," in *Empire and its Aftermath: Silver Latin II*, ed. T. A. Dorey [London and Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975], pp. 79–97; here 97). Despite the "mutilated" state of Quintilian's texts in the Middle Ages, Winterbottom reports (p. 94) that Petrarch found and glossed at least books 1 and 12 of the *Institutio*. See also Dominic A. LaRusso, "Rhetoric in the Italian Renaissance," and John O. Ward, "Renaissance Commentators on Ciceronian Rhetoric," in *Renaissance Eloquence: Studies in the Theory and Practice of Renaissance Rhetoric*, ed. James Murphy (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1983), pp. 37–55, 126–73. LaRusso (p. 40) quotes a critical summary of Italian Humanist thought from Nancy Stuever, *The Language of History in the Renaissance* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970) p. 116: "rhetoric was a coherent body of knowledge of human behavior with a special focus on the relation of discourse to action. For [the Humanists] rhetoric functioned as a psychology which stressed the sophisticated analysis of problems of will and choice, motivation and compulsion; which developed a concrete self-consciousness in the author of the relation of meaning to intention; and which placed a high value on a sense of *opportunit  (kairos)*, a grasp of the relation of choice to circumstance." On Boccaccio's prose style in relation to the *ars dictandi*, see Judith Serafini-Sauli, *Giovanni Boccaccio* (Boston: Twayne, 1982), pp. 88–94, who observes that in the *Decameron* "the proper or improper use of language . . . identifies persons and determines events" (p. 92).

cially when the wife “ne soit mie de tel savoir ne constance qu'elle puisse ou sache ou vueille resister aux amonnestemens de celui qui met toute peine [a l'attraire] a s'amour” [is so lacking in knowledge or constancy that she is unable, does not know how or does not wish to resist the appeals of the man who is trying his best to attract her].<sup>28</sup> A wise woman in waiting should guard her charge so as to fend off the entreaties of a suitor. Dances and social events, such as the one that proves nearly fatal for Dorigen, are not forbidden because social duty demands it, but they are recognized as danger zones.<sup>29</sup>

Christine focuses on the chaperon's watchful verbal art, not the wife's, but once the man has slipped through the defenses, she too must know the craft of fending him off. The strategy of denial recommended here does not contain any impossible tasks but rather proposes a constant refusal to see the suitor or to entertain his overtures. The wife must inform him time and again that she is sleeping or busy in order to douse his hopes: “Et ainsi lui face dire par pluseurs fois tant que par la continuation de tenir telz manieres longuement il aperçoive bien qu'il perdrait sa peine de plus y muser” [When she has told him this sort of thing several times and continues to take such an attitude over a long period, he may at last realize that he would be wasting his time to keep trying]. Of course, aware of the power of a playful word to sustain male hopes, Christine also recommends that the chaperon urge that she “se garde bien que de yeux, de parole, de ris ne de contenance quelconques ne lui face nul semblant par quoy le puist attraire ne lui donner aucune esperance” [be very careful that she does not, by any look in her eyes, or by speech, smile, or manner, give any indication to him by which she may lead him on or raise his hopes].<sup>30</sup>

Christine then takes the pleasure of quoting herself and includes an exemplary letter of advice from her *Livre du duc des vrais amans* (the *Book of the Duke of True Lovers*) sent by one *Sebile* advising her lady to maintain her honor, virtue, and discretion by resisting the allure of a flirtation. The letter (quoted here from the source text) reads in part:

“Ma dame, j'ay entendu aucunes nouvelles de vostre gouvernement teles que j'en suis dolente de tout mon cuer pour la paour que j'ay du decheement de

<sup>28</sup> Christine de Pizan, *Le livre des trois vertus*, ed. Charity Cannon Willard, with Eric Hicks (Paris: Librairie Honoré Champion, 1989), pp. 104–5; translation is from *The Treasure of the City of Ladies*, trans. Sarah Lawson (New York: Penguin, 1985), p. 95.

<sup>29</sup> See Willard, “*Le livre*,” p. 97; Lawson, p. 90.

<sup>30</sup> Willard, “*Le livre*,” p. 103; Lawson, p. 94.

vostre bon los; et sont teles, comme il me semble, que comme il soit de droit et raison que toute princesse et haulte dame . . . se doyent riuler . . . parlant a dongier, non trop accointable . . . ne croye n'adjouste foy a flatteurs ne a flatteuses, ains les congnoisce et chace de soy; ne croye de legier paroles raportees; n'ait coustume de souvant conseiller a estrange ne privé en lieu secret ne a part, mesmement a nul de ses gens ou de ses femmes, si que on ne puist jugier que plus sache de son secret l'une que l'autre, et ne die devant gens a personne quelconques, *en riant*, aucuns moz couvers que chacun n'entende, affin que les oyans ne supposent aucun nice secret entre eulx." (my emphasis)

[My lady, I have heard certain rumors touching your conduct which grieve me from the bottom of my heart because of the fear I have of the ruin of your good name, to the which, as it seems to me, they tend, for it is right and fitting for every princess and high-born lady . . . [to] regulate [her] conduct . . . [she should be] in speech restrained and not too familiar . . . not trusting in flatterers, but recognizing them, and driving them from her, not lightly believing gossip, not given to the habit of whispering either to stranger or to intimate friend in any secret or solitary place . . . [and] never saying *in jest* to anyone whomsoever, in the presence of others, aught which may not be understood of all, so that those hearing it may not imagine there to be some foolish secret between them.]<sup>31</sup>

Further, a noble lady should not appear "plus veult our parler d'amours" [more willing to listen to amorous discourse] than is her wont, because people will say she is in love.<sup>32</sup> Christine would have approved of Dorigen's denial of Aurelius and would have praised whatever attendant she may have had, until, however, some words "in play" [*en riant*] almost strip her of all she has. In Pisanian perspective, Dorigen's offer is a failure of status and station in a young, high-born, married woman.

Keeping in mind these various standards of manners, rhetoric, and virtue, specifically when defined as female practices and imperatives, let

<sup>31</sup> Christine de Pizan, *Le livre du duc des vrais amans*, ed. Thelma S. Fenster (Binghamton, N.Y.: MRTS, 1995), pp. 172–73, 174; translation (with my adjustments to suture the ellipses) from *The Book of the Duke of True Lovers*, trans. Alice Kemp-Welsh (London: Chatto and Windus, 1909), pp. 104–5. A more recent but very similar translation is *The Book of the Duke of True Lovers*, trans. Thelma Fenster (New York: Persea, 1991); see pp. 111–20 for the text of Sebile's letter.

<sup>32</sup> Christine de Pizan, "Le livre du duc" p. 174; Kemp-Welsh, p. 108. More exactly, as Sebile warns, when a lady shows such interest in love talk and then suddenly changes, then people will know that she was in love, for her every public move is monitored as a reflection of her social, ethical behavior.

us turn to the *novelle* of the *Decameron* and look more closely at how Boccaccio shapes women's language. Esther Zago has sensitively described the great power that Boccaccio attributes to his female characters in her study of the medically healing powers of the *Decameron* women who promote "healthy sexuality and secular morality" by "speak[ing] in self-defense [and] thus challenging male authority both in the private space of the home and in the public space of the court of law." This craft is the unique result of woman's particular "ability to diagnose the symptoms of lovesickness in themselves and others."<sup>33</sup> The *Decameron* is not a mirror for women like Christine's book, which, one could argue, tends more toward restriction than autonomy in an effort to impress virtue. But though Christine and Boccaccio may differ in their conception of who and what a woman's enemies are, the *Decameron* nonetheless places a similar premium on self-mastery and on rhetorical cultivation, and its women employ all manner of verbal craft in order to guarantee for themselves their own versions of safety, freedom, and control.

#### Crafty Women in the *Decameron* and One Other

In 1, 5, Fiammetta tells the story of the Marchesana di Monferrato, who stays home while her husband goes off to the Crusades, not completely unlike the masculine voyage of chivalric adventure Arveragus takes in Chaucer's tale. King Phillip hears that the two make, like Arveragus and Dorigen, an ideal match and that the lady's beauty is without compare: "non esser sotto le stelle una simile coppia a quella del marchese e della sua donna: però che, quanto tra' cavalieri era d'ogni virtù il marchese famoso, tanto la donna tra tutte l'altre donne del mondo era bellissima" [there was not a wedded couple under the sun to compare with the Marquis and his lady; for just as the Marquis was a paragon of all

<sup>33</sup> Esther Zago, "Women, Medicine, and the Law in Boccaccio's *Decameron*," in *Women Healers and Physicians: Climbing a Long Hill*, ed. Lilian R. Furst (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1997), pp. 64–78; here 76, 65, 67. Of the *novelle* I am here addressing, only 6, 7 is also studied by Zago, who also, in arguments that I find compatible to my own, addresses 2, 8; 10, 7; 4, 1; 4, 5; and 2, 2. Zago laments, understandably, that "these [positive] views could only prosper in the greenhouse of literary imagination" (p. 76) as Boccaccio's own work moves toward the extreme misogyny of the *Corbaccio*, but work in progress by Michaela Paasche Grudin promises to reread that text in light of a political allegory that has nothing to do with women; that idea was offered by Grudin's "Another Look at the Black Crow of Boccaccio's *Il Corbaccio*," Annual Meeting of the Medieval Association of the Pacific, San Francisco State University, March 12, 2005.

the knightly virtues, so the lady was more beautiful and worthy of esteem than any other woman in the world].<sup>34</sup> So he redirects and ceremoniously delays his departure in order to visit her, in an obvious and vulgar blunder. Being “savia e avveduta” and acting “come valorosa donna,” she promises to entertain the king with a banquet, in an act that a woman of her station should perform. But, being wise and well mannered, she senses why he has come and immediately takes action to protect herself. We can compare her awareness to the obliviousness of Dorigen, for though Aurelius looked at her so many times as a “man that asketh grace,” “nothyng wiste she of his entente”(V.958–59).

When at the banquet the Marchesana serves only chicken, variously dressed, and the king inquires, suggestively, whether there are any roosters in this region, she takes the occasion to cut his passion to the quick by answering, “no, ma le femine, quantunque in vestimenti e in onori alquanto dall’altre variino, tutte per ciò son fatte qui come altrove” [no, but our women, whilst they may differ slightly from each other in their rank and the style of their dress, are made no differently here than they are elsewhere],<sup>35</sup> an oblique but unambiguous notice that he should expect no frivolity, no “play” if you will, from her. The effect is much as in the (differently achieved) dénouement of *The Franklin’s Tale*, an instantaneous ignition of virtue, for at this point, “Il re, udite queste parole, raccolse bene la cagione del convito delle galline e la virtù nascosa nelle parole” [the king saw clearly the reason for the banquet of chickens and the virtue that lay concealed beneath her little homily] and, realizing that she could not be charmed and that he would not use force, “così come disavvedutamente acceso s’era di lei, saviamente s’era da spegnere per onor di lui il male concetto fuoco” [in the same way that he had foolishly become inflamed, so now he wisely decided that he was honor-bound to extinguish quickly the ill-conceived fires of his passion].<sup>36</sup> She felt no tedious despair at her man’s parting, and, however artful, her “no” is still clear and absolute. Accordingly, the king is transformed by her words, as an innate sense of shame and self-regulation is activated. The lady is finally merciful and wishes him well, per-

<sup>34</sup> Branca, p. 91, next quotation, p. 92; McWilliam, p. 49; the opening of the *Franklin’s Tale* stresses among other things Arveragus’s “worthynesse” and Dorigen’s great beauty.

<sup>35</sup> Branca, p. 93; McWilliam, p. 51.

<sup>36</sup> Branca, p. 94; McWilliam, p. 51. Migiel, “Rhetoric,” p. 39, will answer in the negative her own rhetorical question, “This is indisputably a pro-woman story, is it not?”

haps perceiving that he recognizes his error, for the king leaves quickly, Fiammetta tells us, to balance the shame of his having come at all (“acciò che il presto partirsi ricoprisse la sua disonesta venuta”), and the Brigata all praise the valor and the incisive chastisement of the triumphant lady (“Il valore e il leggiadro gastigamento della marchesana”).<sup>37</sup> Fiammetta’s goal in telling the story is, accordingly, to show “come e con opere e con parole una gentil donna sé da questo [an inappropriate love] guardasse e altrui ne rimovesse” [how through her words and actions a gentlewoman avoided this pitfall and guided her suitor clear of its dangers].<sup>38</sup> The rocks and their removal in Chaucer’s tale might seem the most dramatic image of all the stories at hand, but the removal of dangerous passion is the true magic of Boccaccio’s various *novelle* and of *The Franklin’s Tale* itself. Aurelius had asked Dorigen for “grace,” but the grace that he finally receives is actually of a higher order, of a kind that brings an emotional cleansing and a satisfaction that sexual “grace” cannot.

In Lauretta’s story (6, 3) we witness another woman who uses wit to chill the base advances of a man, Deigo della Ratta, marshal to King Robert of Naples, a man famous for an act of adulterous prostitution, worsened, if it can be made worse, by the fact that he welshed on the deal, paying in inferior coin, *popolini*, which he deceptively gilds or “decorates” (*dorare*). Critics of *The Franklin’s Tale* have argued that the men in the tale treat Dorigen as a commodity, trafficking in women, but that vocabulary is much better applied to Boccaccio’s story; the *novella* is low and raw, and Lauretta makes clear that the woman was forced by her husband into the night of prostitution “against her will” (“come che contro al piacer di lei fosse”).<sup>39</sup> It merits comparison to Chaucer’s story exactly because it is such an antiversión of the courtly *Franklin’s Tale*.

The crux of the story comes when the marshal, accompanied by an amoral archbishop who is, stunningly, a relative of the woman he had violated, eyes a woman in a public square, monna Nonna de’ Pulci; the bishop, essentially pimping, asks the woman if she likes this fellow and

<sup>37</sup> Branca, pp. 94, 95.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 90; McWilliam, p. 49. We have to acknowledge that the issue is slightly different from in Chaucer, because the question is here one of rank: a man of higher nobility breeds danger for a woman; “da questo” here means not only an adulterous love but an inappropriate one with a man of higher rank, who is likely to exploit the advantage. But the contrast with Dorigen nonetheless obtains, and rank plays its own important role in Chaucer’s tale as well.

<sup>39</sup> Branca, p. 728.

thinks she “can make a conquest of him” [Nonna, che ti par di costui? crederestil vincere?].<sup>40</sup> The vocabulary is well chosen, for conquer she does, but not in the sense intended by the men. This woman knows, despite the talk of her “conquering,” that she is a potential victim and must quickly find a way to win victory. She speaks bitingly, as Lauretta has recommended in her peroration, and cuts clearly to the heart of the matter: “Messere, e’ forse non vincerebbe me; ma vorrei buona moneta.” [In the unlikely event, my lord, of his making a conquest of me, I should want to be paid in good coin].<sup>41</sup> These words defeat the men, silencing and driving them away, without their being able even to look at one another: “senza guardar l’un l’altro vergognosi e taciti se n’andarono, senza piú quel giorno dirle alcuna cosa.” Thus, reports Lauretta with satisfaction, “essendo la giovane stata morsa, non le si disdisse il mordere altrui motteggiando” [since the girl was bitten first, it was not inappropriate that she should make an equally biting retort].<sup>42</sup> Significantly, Nonna is said to have been well known to the *brigata* as a “fresca e bella giovane e parlante e di gran cuore,” who sadly died in the recent pestilence.<sup>43</sup> By invoking the frame narrative of plague, Lauretta highlights the power of a woman, once “fresh and vital” to chasten and cleanse foul male lust, which serves throughout the *Decameron* as a plague of its own.<sup>44</sup>

Not one but two men are routed in 9, 1, where a widow undoes the desires of a pair of suitors who assail her after, as Filomena recounts, “unwisely on several occasions, she listened to them” [avendo ella a esse men saviamente piú volte gli orecchi porti]. Regrouping after this seemingly innocuous error and “wisely wishing to extricate herself and not being able to” [volendosi saviamente ritrarre e non potendo], she defeats the foolish pair with wit and with an impossible request, which serves here as remedy rather than, as in *The Franklin’s Tale*, as encouragement.<sup>45</sup> The widow devises a task that they will both fail at, even though it is not technically impossible, as she makes one suitor take the place of a dead body in a tomb with the other carrying the body away.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Branca, p. 729; McWilliam, p. 453

<sup>42</sup> Branca, p. 729; McWilliam, p. 454.

<sup>43</sup> Branca, p. 728.

<sup>44</sup> See Calabrese, “*Men and Sex*,” passim, and see Jessica Levenstein, “Out of Bounds: Passion and the Plague in Boccaccio’s *Decameron*,” *Italica* 73 (Autumn 1996): 313–35, focusing on these themes as they are manifested in Day Four in particular.

<sup>45</sup> Branca, p. 1034.

The fools try but fail to perform it fully, as the absurd graveyard procession is busted up by the police. When she then sends them packing—because they agreed to her terms, they do not argue—they leave her in peace, however ridiculous the task really was. Impossible tasks are supposed to be constructed to get rid of idiots, not encourage them with a project, and Francesca de' Lazarri successfully “rids herself of both [se gli tolse da dosso].”<sup>46</sup> All she did was listen, but women who wish to be left alone must be careful to a fault, for the male imagination can build a dream from very little.

In Filostrato's story on Day Six (6, 7), we hear of another woman who outwits men, not spurning suitors this time but confronting both her husband and a law that would condemn a wife for practicing sexual independence. Like 6, 3, this *novella* depicts male attempts to control women and valorizes a woman who successfully combats those restrictions through assertive wit. Filostrato begins:

Valorose donne, bella cosa è in ogni parte saper ben parlare, ma io la reputo bellissima quivi saperlo fare dove la necessità il richiede; il che sí ben seppe fare una gentil donna della quale intendo di ragionarvi, che non solamente festa e riso porse agli uditori, ma sé de' lacci di vituperosa morte disviluppò, come voi udirete.

[Worthy ladies, a capacity for saying the right things in the right place is all very well, but to be able to say them in a moment of dire necessity is, in my opinion, a truly rare accomplishment. With this ability, a certain noble woman of whom I propose to speak was so liberally endowed, that not only did she provide laughter and merriment to her listeners, but, as you shall presently hear, she disentangled herself from the meshes of an ignominious death.]<sup>47</sup>

The connections between this *novella* and *The Franklin's Tale* are oblique but significant. Madonna Filippa finds herself, like Dorigen, entrapped in a nexus of law and marital obligations on the one hand and, on the other, her own desires and obligations with a suitor. Her husband, Rinaldo, finds her in the arms of her lover Lazzarino and brings her up on a charge of adultery, punishable, ahistorically in the fictive world of the tale, with death. In *The Franklin's Tale*, the heroine faces death as well as a result of her (however unconsummated) relations with her suitor,

<sup>46</sup>Branca, p. 1041; McWilliam, p. 655

<sup>47</sup>Branca, p. 745; McWilliam p. 461–62.

perhaps to come by her own hand or by the hand of her husband, who swears her to silence. This threat of death, however differently manifested in each story, relates to the women's dual debt, both to their husbands and also to their suitors. Dorigen has made a pledge of truth to Aurelius for which she may have to die, and Filippa so loves her suitor that she would rather die than flee into exile and therefore prove herself unworthy of such a man (*negarsi degna di così fatto amante*), to whom she is bound "per buono e per perfetto amore."<sup>48</sup> In both stories women must struggle to integrate personal emotions and desires while confronting the strictures of "law," as expressed in either statute or contract, laboring to preserve the marriages that they want while also negotiating formal public bonds of obligation and "trouthe" that they have made independent of their husbands.<sup>49</sup> Madonna Filippa, for her part, routs patriarchy, husband, and law by employing, much like the Wife of Bath, a "who painted the lion?" perspective; that is, in this case, who made the law against adultery? The women whom it rules were not consulted when the law was forged, and thus it does not satisfy the requirements for communal good, as she tells the potestà, "le leggi deono esser comuni e fatte con consentimento di coloro a cui toccano."<sup>50</sup>

<sup>48</sup>Branca, p. 747.

<sup>49</sup>See the important study of "illicit consequence" in the chapter "Rash Promises," in Richard Firth Green, *A Crisis of Truth: Literature and Law in Ricardian England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), pp. 326–35: "Many medieval people might well have felt that an unmarried Dorigen would have been obliged to honor her oath," but "Dorigen's marital status, however, complicates the problem considerably," for promises constituted a "kind of private law," and many would have felt that it was "up to Dorigen and her husband . . . to try to resolve the conflicting obligations that bound her" (pp. 329, 332).

<sup>50</sup>Branca, p. 748. Kenneth Pennington, "A Note to *Decameron* 6:7: The Wit of Madonna Filippa," *Speculum* 52 (October 1977): 902–5, explores the legal tradition of *quod omnes tangit* as it pertains to her defense. Though Pennington discards the argument that Filippa's speech reflects classical models of rhetoric as found in Quintilian (see 902 n. 3 where he cites Carlo Muscetta, *Boccaccio* [Bari: Laterza, 1972], pp. 251, 303), the progress of her argument clearly reflects any number of such models; see, for example, Cicero, *De Inventione* I, VII, 9 (Cicéron, *De Inventio*, ed. G. Achard [Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1994], p. 64), laying out the structure of Invention, Arrangement, Expression, Memory, and Delivery. On Boccaccio's possession of Quintilian's *Institutio Oratoria* and use of it in *Genealogia Deorum Gentilium*, see Cornelia C. Coulter, "Boccaccio's Knowledge of Quintilian," *Speculum* 33 (1958): 490–96. Muscetta, p. 251, discusses the origins of the story: "Alla novella di monna Filippa non sono state ritrovate fonti, perché essa è nata da suggestioni quintilianee, da aggiungere agli insegnamenti che Boccaccio aveva ben serbati nella memoria, per quanto riguardava la caratterizzazione e localizzazione della *dicacitas*" [For the story of Filippa no sources have been found, because it was born from the tradition of Quintilian, joined to other particulars that Boccaccio had kept in mind in regard to the characterization and localization of *dicacitas*].

She then claims ownership and control over the “excess” beyond that which she renders to satisfy her husband, who admits, in fact, that he has no complaint about her abundant attention to his needs.<sup>51</sup>

Just as in 6, 3, here a woman succeeds through ready, calm, incisive, rational, and powerful speech. Filippa, whom all the town exclaims “was right and spoke well” (*gridarono la donna aver ragione e dire bene*), wins her case, with male forces stunned and in retreat: “Per la qual cosa Rinaldo, rimasto di così matta impresa confuso, si partí dal giudicio; e la donna lieta e libera, quasi dal fuoco risuscitata, alla sua casa se ne tornò gloriosa” [After making such a fool of himself, Rinaldo departed from the scene feeling quite mortified; and his wife, now a free and contented woman, having, so to speak, been resurrected from the flames, returned to her house in triumph].<sup>52</sup> As Roberta Morosini has argued, through a “dislocated” but purposeful display of logic and eloquence, Filippa soundly routs both jealous husband and unjust law while saving both her life and her marriage.<sup>53</sup>

<sup>51</sup> Migiel, “Rhetoric,” p. 121, dismisses the perceived victory, noting, by reference to contemporary law, that Madonna Filippa’s “arguments would have been considered specious in the fourteenth century.” Psaki, “Woman’s Knowledge,” convincingly studies the tale as one of Boccaccio’s frequent critiques of the “male desire for dominance” arising from projected fears of woman’s secret knowledge and power. Nella Giannetto, “Madonna Filippa tra ‘casus’ e ‘controversia,’” *Lettura della novella VI, 7 del Decameron*, *Studi sul Boccaccio* 32 (2004): 81–100, draws attention to the entire discourse of the heroine and away from the final moment of confrontation: “Ed è quanto mai scorretto ridurre il discorso di Filippa alla sua battuta finale, perchè le argomentazioni da lei svolte nella prima parte non sono di poco conto e fra l’altro esprimono una posizione assolutamente rivoluzionaria per il loro tempo, dando alle donne dignità di soggetti che possono e debbono contare quanto gli uomini, almeno nel caso dell’emanazione di una legge che riguardi anche loro” [It would be wrong to reduce the discourse of Filippa to her final battle alone, for the arguments that she develops in the first part of the story are not to be discounted; among other things, they express an absolutely revolutionary position for her time, giving to women the dignity of subjects that can and, in fact, ought to count as much as men, at least in the case of one particular law that directly concerns them] (p. 86). Filippa’s own drama and also its structural relation to the work as a whole, with passive Griselda as her antithesis, reflect, Giannetto argues, the complex structures of contradiction that dynamically drive the *Decameron*, themes Boccaccio possibly derived from texts in Latin juridical literature that depict the rhetorical arts and legalistic arguments of “controversia.”

<sup>52</sup> Branca, p. 749; McWilliam, p. 464.

<sup>53</sup> Roberta Morosini, “Bone Eloquence e mondo alla rovescia nel discorso sembrabile al la reisun nella novella di Madonna Filippa (*Decameron* VI.7),” *Italica* 77 no. 1 (2000): 1–13, studies the *novella* as an analogue to Marie de France’s *Fable* 47, *De equo vendito*, for both tales explore the power of “logica dislocata,” a rhetoric that appears reasonable but ingeniously masks a different reality. However, though Filippa rationalizes her adultery, her act of reasoning involves both a personal triumph over her husband and the proper modification of the indiscriminate statute against adultery (see pp. 4–5).

Of course not all of Boccaccio's women are models of rhetorical brilliance. And though we have seen a number of Boccaccian women whom Dorigen fails to emulate, she does successfully fulfill the model of another female speaker, one of Boccaccio's many Fiammettas, the heroine of the *Elegy* that bears her name.<sup>54</sup> Fiammetta, a married woman abandoned by her lover, rails against him for some eighty pages and even falsely accuses him of rape. This may not seem much like *The Franklin's Tale*, yet the similarity between the two female speakers lies in the bathos and excess of their monologues, which flirt with suicide with little real result, foiled in Fiammetta's case when, on the way to hurl herself from a precipice, her skirt gets caught on a stray piece of lumber. In one of Boccaccio's deflatingly ironic touches, she reports that her laments are often so loud that they wake up her husband.<sup>55</sup> She piles up historical analogues to her own woe and contemplates models, such as Dido's, for her own ever-impending suicide. Her laments defy paraphrase, but even a short excerpt reveals what they have in common with those of Dorigen; each discourse, however supposedly passionate, proceeds in a certain cataloguing and accretive way; the goal in both cases seems to be pure compilation. These excerpts from Fiammetta's rejection of poison and from her survey of those men and women, including at one point Hecuba, whose sorrows, though substantial, cannot compete with her own, represent her self-aggrandizing style well:

“Vennermi poi nel pensiero li velenosi sughi, li quali per addietro a Socrate e a Sofonisba e ad Annibale e a molti altri prencipi l'ultimo giorno segnarono, e questi assai a' miei piaceri si confecero; ma veggendo che a cercare d'averli tempo si convenia interporre, e dubitando non in quel mezzo si mutasse il mio proponimento, di cercare altra maniera imaginai.”

[Then I thought of poisonous drinks which in the end had brought an end to the days of Socrates, Sophonisba, Hannibal, and of many other princes, and these means suited my tastes well, but because I realized it was necessary to have time to obtain them, and believing that in the meantime my resolution might waver as I was searching, I tried to devise another way.]<sup>56</sup>

<sup>54</sup>Citations are to *Elegia di Madonna Fiammetta* in *Opere di Giovanni Boccaccio*, ed. Cesare Segre (Milan: Mursia, 1978), pp. 943–1080. Translations are from *The Elegy of Lady Fiammetta*, ed. and trans. Maria Causa-Steindler and Thomas Mauch (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), which is based in part on Segre's edition.

<sup>55</sup>Segre, p. 1036; Causa-Steindler, p. 105.

<sup>56</sup>Segre, p. 1048; Causa-Steindler, p. 120.

“Dopo tutti questi, quasi da se medesimi riservati, come molto gravi mi si fanno sentire i guai d’Isifile, di Medea, d’Oenone e d’Adriana, le lagrime delle quali e i dolori assai con le mie simiglianti le giudico; però che ciascuna di queste, dal suo amante ingannata, così come io, sparse lagrime, gittò sospiri, e amarissime pene senza frutto sostenne; le quali, avvegna che, come è detto, si come io si dolessero, pure ebbero termine con giusta vendetta le lagrime loro, la qual cosa ancora non hanno le mie. . . . Sì che, ogni cosa pensata, io sola tra le misere mi trovo ottenere il principato, e più non posso.”

[After all these {Sophonisba, Cornelia Cleopatra, Ulysses, and others} the tribulations of Hypsipyle, Medea, Oenone, and Ariadne strike me as if they were to be set apart from the rest for their great severity, and I find their tears and pains very similar to mine because each one was betrayed by her lover, as I was, and each wept, sighed, and suffered bitter and fruitless pain; but, as I have said, even though they suffered as they did, their tears ended with a fair vengeance, which mine do not have yet. . . . Therefore, all things considered, I alone find myself achieving first place among suffering women, and I can do no more.]<sup>57</sup>

Fiammetta’s monologues, like Dorigen’s, reveal a presumptuous self-promotion into Classical and epic history.<sup>58</sup> They spill forth learning that serves no social, communal, or spiritual end but rather only inflates the puny self as if its amatory woes were of paramount importance in the sweep of human history. Compare the content and texture of Dorigen’s catalogue in this brief excerpt (V.1443–56):

“What seith Omer of goode Penalopee?  
 Al Grece knoweth of hire chastitee.  
 Pardee, of Laodomya is written thus,

<sup>57</sup> Segre, p. 1076; Causa-Steindler, p. 154.

<sup>58</sup> On Fiammetta’s use (and misuse) of classical models, see Suzanne Hagedorn, “Abandoned Women and the Dynamics of Reader Response,” in *Abandoned Women: Rewriting the Classics in Dante, Boccaccio, and Chaucer* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004), pp. 102–29; and Janet L. Smarr, “Boccaccio’s *Elegia* on the Use of the Classics,” *Italian Culture* 11 (1993): 127–34. Fiammetta, writes Smarr, p. 132, “seeks explicitly the glory of seeing herself the most wretched of all,” while she “miss[es] the obvious element of moral and social criticism implicit in these examples” (p. 133). Renato Barilli, “La retorica nella narrative del Boccaccio: L’*“Elegia di Madonna Fiammetta,”* *Quaderni d’italianistica* 6, no. 2 (1985): 241–48, recognizes the bathetic, bourgeois character of her mythic complaints and tiresome self-inflation, which nonetheless serve Boccaccio’s ethical goals to move, to teach, and to delight through exposing Fiammetta’s shame and dishonor.

That whan at Troie was slayn Protheselaus,  
 Ne lenger wolde she lyve after his day.  
 The same of noble Porcia telle I may;  
 Withoute Brutus koude she nat lyve,  
 To whom she hadde al hool hir herte yive.  
 The parfit wyfhod of Arthemesie  
 Honored is thurgh al the Barbarie.  
 O Teuta, queene, thy wyfly chastitee  
 To alle wyves may a mirour bee.  
 The same thyng I seye of Bilyea,  
 Of Rodogone, and eek Valeria.”

We are compelled here to agree with Jamie Fumo’s mordant characterization of the exempla as “increasingly forced” and with Knight’s observation that the catalogue trails off easily into a series of “etcetera’s.”<sup>59</sup> By having Dorigen hyper-trope her trauma, Chaucer disables or at least seriously compromises our tolerance and emotional engagement with her, and at this point in the narrative she is in danger of becoming the object of satire.

Among the women in Boccaccio that we have seen, therefore, Fiammetta provides the closest analogue to Dorigen and her expansive rhetorical displays. But Chaucer’s satire strikes me in places as less broad and more subtle than Boccaccio’s, and, without attempting a full psychological analysis of Dorigen’s motives, I would like to return to the critical exchange with Aurelius and speculate about what she might desire from him, in this, the very event that inspires the long rhetorical displays that follow. Dorigen misses a chance to distinguish herself as a potent female speaker, in the analogous contexts I have been exploring, by offering Aurelius hope, a hope that may be veiled in a wifely concern for her Arveragus’s return, but which nonetheless may also represent her need to have a man of worth, one not unlike her husband in many respects (and who can dance as well), at the ready. Aurelius is “yong, strong, virtuous, and riche, and wys, / And wel biloved, and holden in gret prys” plus “Oon of the best faringe man on lyve”(V.933–34, 932). The Franklin makes him just as attractive as Arveragus, and we are certainly supposed to recognize his appeal, even if Dorigen suppresses it. As the Miller reports, the man close to hand has an advantage over

<sup>59</sup> Jamie Fumo, “Aurelius’ Prayer, *Franklin’s Tale* 1031–79: Sources and Analogues,” *Neophilologus* 88 (2004): 623–35; here 626. Knight, “Rhetoric and Poetry,” p. 27.

the one who has gone far away: "Alwey the nye slye / Maketh the ferre leeve to be looth" (I.3393–94).<sup>60</sup> Arveragus had won Dorigen with "many a labour, many a greet emprise" (V.7332), and by extension she makes the same demands on Aurelius: for the unspoken import of the contract is "show me how much you love me," "show me your worth." Courtly service compels him to obey, as Dorigen replicates, perhaps even unconsciously, the same process that attained her husband. Why, for instance, does she speak to Aurelius in "play"? She has refused quite strenuously to play up to this point in the tale, despite all that her friends have done. For their part they "*pleye* hem al the longe day" after leaving the beach "for to *playen* somewher elles" as they all do their best to make merry "save Dorigen alone, / Which made alwey hir compleint and hir mone" (V.905, 897, 919–20). She has moped for 175 lines and now, when faced with an offer of adultery, she begins to play? We have to face the possibility that she simply may be enjoying the attention.

### Analogues Revisited and Conclusions

We have been listening to female voices exclusive of the apparent analogues of *The Franklin's Tale* in order to expand the context for interpreting Dorigen's words and actions. But I want to summarize and to end the essay by turning our attention to Menedon's story and to *Decameron* 10, 5, looking specifically at the issue of female agency at two critical moments in *The Franklin's Tale's* closest analogues: the moment of the promise, which I have just glossed in part as courtship *redux*, and also the final release of the heroine from her pledge. As for the first, in Boccaccio's stories the intentions of both wives are unambiguous. In Emilia's version in the *Decameron*, Dianora "desires to rid herself of [Ansaldo] once and for all by requesting him to do something for her that was both bizarre and as she thought impossible" [con una nuova e al suo giudicio impossibil domanda si pensò di volerosi torre da dosso]. Her motive is clear, and Ansaldo knows that she did this "per torlo dalla sua speranza" [to dash his hopes].<sup>61</sup> She also threatens Ansaldo's go-between with exposing his suit to her male kinfolk, employing a traditional method of defense against unwanted sexual aggression. In Menedon's

<sup>60</sup>Morgan, "Boccaccio's *Filocolo*," while locating Aurelius as the locus of sin in the tale, nonetheless remarks on the similarities of the courtships, a device to "fix in our minds a sense of the moral equality in the making of the two promises" (p. 292).

<sup>61</sup>McWilliam, p. 727; Branca, pp. 1150, 51.

story, the lady employs a strategy akin to that recommended by Christine de Pizan, in the hope that her indifference sends her suitor the message: “Poi che questi s’avedrà che da me né buona risposta né buona atto puote avere, forse elli si rimarrà d’amarmi e di darmi questi stimoli” [Once this man realizes that he can obtain no favorable response or good act from me, perhaps he will stop loving me and bothering me].<sup>62</sup> She almost tells her husband about it but fears, wisely, that she may create a feud or unjustly implicate herself, though she, like her *Decameron* counterpart, does finally append a threat to her impossible task, telling Tarolfo that she *will* inform her husband if he keeps pestering her after failing to produce the garden in winter. She certainly considers the task she invents a device to get rid of him, with no implication of flirtation, conscious or otherwise, detectable in her words “Questa è cosa impossibile: io mi leverò costui da dosso per questa maniera” [this is something impossible: I shall rid myself of him in this way]. Tarolfo, for his part, understands the strategy as a form of rejection: “egli conoscesse bene perché la donna questo gli domandava” [he understood perfectly why the lady had requested it].<sup>63</sup>

Both Boccaccian women are clearly trying to send someone packing. Dorigen’s tone, however, fluctuates; her motivations remain suspect, and the Franklin certainly does not explicitly frame her actions as crafted to rid herself of Aurelius. Though she has no clear motive, the result is tangible, and her dangerous play abuses the affections of a man by doing the single most dangerous thing a wife can do with an unwanted suitor. She gives him hope. As Ovid famously notes and as Boccaccio explicitly states in the *Filicolo*, men live on hope, however oblique and ridiculous. When the *donna* in the *Filicolo* tells herself that the garden mission will save her from further harassment, Menedon observes that this is but foolish optimism on her part, however clear she thought her refusal: “Ma già per tutto questo Tarolfo di ciò non si rimanea, seguendo d’Ovidio gli amaestramenti, il quale dice l’uomo non lasciare per durezza della donna di non perseverare, però che per continuanza la molle acqua fora la dura pietra” [But through all this Tarolfo still did not stop, following the teachings of Ovid, who said that a man should not stop persevering because of a lady’s hardness, since by persistence soft water works its way through hard rock].<sup>64</sup> If this applies to Boccac-

<sup>62</sup> *Sources and Analogues*, pp. 221, 220.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 223, 222.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 221, 220; note 25, p. 221, cites *Ars Amatoria* 1, 475–76, and *Epistulae ex Ponto* 4.10.5.

cio's story, where the "no" was earnest, it applies even more so to Chaucer's, where the "no" is wrapped up in play.

Turning to the scenes of final resolution in the versions, we see in Menedon's tale how the *donna*, preparing to keep her bargain, "adorned herself and made herself beautiful" [ornatasi e fattasi bella], arriving at Tarolfo's home "painted with shame" [di vergogna dipinta].<sup>65</sup> These details depict the *donna* as an assertive and bold agent, perhaps undone by the magic she failed to anticipate, but meeting the moment with power and grace, standing tall and beautiful, not unlike the biblical Judith and very much like the well-born and virtuous woman she is. She cannot control the blush of shame, a disarming, deeply humanizing image, but she can summon up the civil dignity and personal grace to fulfill her ill-conceived obligation.<sup>66</sup> In the corresponding scene in Chaucer's version, we see no such personal preparation by the "half mad" Dorigen, and the text highlights, instead, the specifically male agency that is working out the problems of the tale: Arveragus himself summons an entourage for his wife, commanding them, "Gooth forth anon with Dorigen." Aurelius, when deciding that "fro his lust yet were hym levere abyde," does consider Dorigen and her lamentation for a line and a half, but thinks of Arveragus for three, deeply moved by this "worthy knight, / That bad hire holden al that she had hight" (V.1517–18). This man's actions are dictated not by Dorigen but by another man.<sup>67</sup> Accordingly, *The Franklin's* summation, after warning wives to remember Dorigen and "be war of hire beheeste," highlights this purified, nonsexual form of competition that resolves, and will continue to resolve, the conflicts of the tale. "Thus can a squire doon a gentil dede," says the Franklin, "As wel as kan a knight, withouten drede (V.1543–44), a narrative sentiment echoed later in the tale itself when the clerk displays his own, very self-conscious *gentillesse*.<sup>68</sup> With all of Dorigen's wit and energy de-

<sup>65</sup> *Sources and Analogues*, pp. 230, 231.

<sup>66</sup> In a more skeptical reading of the gendered social relationships in this episode, Ginsberg, "niente che c'è," argues that the story as a whole, and in particular Menedon's *questione* and Fiammetta's pro-husband adjudication of it, reveals Menedon's own wish "to preserve and justify masculine predominance over the maidens and wives who threaten it" (p. 401).

<sup>67</sup> Taylor, "Uncommon Voice," p. 71, addresses well the social competition that motivates Aurelius but judges him more severely than I; Aurelius, she writes, "coarsens the spirit of inward nobility by adapting aristocratic forms to his opportunistic motives," as he displays throughout the tale, p. 72, "persistently contractual thinking" and "self-interested opportunism."

<sup>68</sup> Concerning the attribution of these lines and for the argument that they rightly belong to the Franklin and not to Aurelius, see Paul Franklin Baum, "Notes on Chaucer," *MLN* 32 (1917): 377. In a scene that redramatizes Aurelius's compassion for

voted either to reckless “play” or to long, unproductive displays of earnest, it is left, ironically, to the forces of patriarchy, embodied in the dynamic of male competition, to resolve the tale’s central conflicts.

Compare also the climactic moment in the *Decameron* version. After receiving Dianora and hearing of Gilberto’s generosity, Ansaldo refuses to take his prize, as “il suo fervore in compassione cominciò a cambiare” [his ardor began to turn to compassion], and “spento del cuore il concupiscibile amore” [his heart was purged of the lustful passion] he had harbored for the lady,” leaving only an “honest charity” for her [“onesta carità”].<sup>69</sup> Once Ansaldo is cured and comes to his senses, releasing her from her bond, Dianora tells him, in essence, that she knew he had it in him, though her register is loftier and more eloquent: “Niuna cosa mi poté mai far credere, avendo riguardo a’ vostri costumi, che altro mi dovesse seguir della mia venuta che quello che io veggio che voi ne fate; di che io vi sarò sempre obligata” [Nothing could ever make me believe, in view of your impeccable manners, that my coming to your house would have any other sequel than the one which I see you have made of it, for which I shall always remain in your debt].<sup>70</sup> Chaucer gives no such confident, mature, active speech to Dorigen at the corresponding point in his tale, and, accordingly, Aurelius departs without forging a future relationship of brotherhood with either Dorigen or with Arveragus; he has acted well but gives no indication that he wants to be part of the family. We see, then, both in the assigning of the task and in the critical moment of final confrontation, that Chaucer has crafted Dorigen as weaker and less stable than her Boccaccian counterparts. The rhetorical products of this young mind generate, but can never resolve, the sexual, emotional, and legal conflicts of the tale.

What may we finally conclude from these disjunctions? Clearly, from all the texts at hand, both the hard and the “soft” analogues, we see that Chaucer, like Boccaccio and Christine, explores how women’s language can harm or can heal. But though Chaucer knew the *Filicolo* and explicitly based Dorigen on Boccaccio’s character, and assuming for a moment that he knew the *Decameron*, he ultimately chose not to embody

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Dorigen and his desire to respond to Arveragus’s gentility, the clerk follows suit and frees Aurelius himself from his debt: “Leeve brother, / Everich of you dide gentilly til oother. / Thou art a squier, and he is a knight; / But God forbede, for his blisful myght, / But if a clerk koude doon a gentil dede / As well as any of yow, it is no drede!” (V.1607–12).

<sup>69</sup>Branca, pp. 1154, 55; McWilliam, p. 730.

<sup>70</sup>Branca, p. 1154; McWilliam, p. 730.

the positive rhetorical models he found in those texts in creating his Dorigen. In *The Franklin's Tale* he has labored to distance himself from the scenario, so frequent in Boccaccio, in which wives successfully rout the advances of unwanted suitors who could compromise their morals and their marriages. And even with both hard and soft analogues left aside, Chaucer himself was certainly aware of the specific power of woman's language, which he incarnates so frequently in the *Canterbury Tales* in such characters as the Wife of Bath, Prudence, and St. Cecelia.<sup>71</sup> He has made Dorigen a different kind of speaker, a different agent, a different woman, one who, alone, cannot heal. The reasons Chaucer choose to incarnate in Dorigen not the language of craft, insight, and success but the language of desire and disruptive danger must lie in part in the larger social and rhetorical ethics of the *Canterbury Tales*. Throughout the *Tales*, Chaucer studies the languages not only of *caritas* but also of treachery, graft, seduction, adultery, abuse, and greed. Dorigen will never rank near the Pardoner or the Summoner on a moral continuum, but if Chaucer does not encode vice in her speech, he does encode danger and the inflammation of anxious desire in herself, her neighbor, and her husband. These anxieties rage until a movement of healing, also characteristically Chaucerian, occurs in the tale, arising ironically, as I have argued, from the tensions of male competition. Of course Chaucer's *narrative* motivation reflects a convention well expressed in an adage employed by Pandarus in the *Troilus*, "And next the derke nyght the glade morwe."<sup>72</sup> That is, without Dorigen's disruption or her failure to heal the lovesick Aurelius, the movement of grace and gentillesse, so precious to the Franklin, and, in a less-socially conditioned way, to Chaucer, could never occur.<sup>73</sup> But to understand this movement of grace, we have to understand the matter from which Chaucer shaped

<sup>71</sup>I would like to add Griselda to this list, but we know her origins. On Prudence's powerful, guiding speech in particular, see Wallace, "Chaucerian Polity," 211–46 (in his chapter "Household Rhetoric"); throughout this chapter and the next, Wallace, focusing on various *Tales* that are set in "a household dominated by a powerful, irascible, and violent male," explores how "those located or trapped in such discursive space" must "find a language that will hold off, divert, or dissipate the immediate threat of masculine violence" (p. 212). Working from Wallace and others, Monica McAlpine, "Criseyde's Prudence," *SAC* 25 (2003): 199–224, argues that Criseyde as well "displays many of the characteristics these scholars associate with a female-gendered prudence" (p. 209).

<sup>72</sup>*Troilus and Criseyde* I, 951.

<sup>73</sup>On the Franklin's social status and ambitions, see the discussion and bibliography in Paul Strohm, *Social Chaucer* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989), pp. 105–9.

Dorigen, and we have to understand her words and desires in the Boccaccian context from which she emerges, at Chaucer's hand, into *The Franklin's Tale*. Put another way, because of the choices before Chaucer, based on his reading and his comprehensive embrace of Boccaccio as a storehouse of rhetorical models, we see his construction of Dorigen more clearly when she is placed in direct juxtaposition to the paradigms that he finally eschewed when making her.

I would not claim that the Boccaccian context, aided by Christine de Pizan, is the only context or the finest context in which to view Dorigen, but I would argue that it is an important context and one that compels us to reconsider what I have depicted as both a victim and a hero-centered critical approach. And I hope to have shown that an exculpatory assessment of Dorigen has isolated Chaucer's character from the moral and rhetorical worlds of her origins, to which I have attempted to return her. Dorigen is a voice; she has no *culpa* to excuse, but to understand what she is and what she is not demands an interrogation of her speech acts as social, ethical, and moral human performances. The situation recalls an event narrated by Boccaccio's friend Petrarch. In his letter to Pulice di Vicenza, the poet records a tense debate with an aged scholar who objects to his criticism of the revered Cicero, in whom Petrarch has detected fickleness and error: "More gently, I beg of you," pleads the old man, "more gently with my Cicero" [Parcius, oro, parcius de Cicerone meo] and "Alas! Alas! Is my beloved Cicero accused of wrong doing?" [Heu michi, ergo Cicero meus arguitur?].<sup>74</sup> In studying Dorigen, as in studying all of Chaucer's women and men, we have to resist the impulse to overprotect those characters whose struggles and concerns seem to reflect our own. Doing this may require us to go a little *less* gently with Dorigen than might be comfortable.

<sup>74</sup> *Ad Familiares*, xxiv, 2, Francesco Petrarca, *Opere, Le Familiari*, vol. 4, ed. Umberto Bosco (Florence: G. C. Sansoni, 1942), p. 223; translation from *Petrarch: The First Modern Scholar and Man of Letters*, ed. James Harvey Robinson (New York: Greenwood, 1969) (reprint of G. P. Putnam's, 1919), p. 245, with adjustment.