FRANKLIN’S TALE

The Portrait, Prologue and Tale of the Franklin
The portrait of the Franklin from the General Prologue

where he is shown as a generous man who enjoys the good things of life. He travels in the company of a rich attorney, the Man of Law.

A FRANKÉLIN was in his company. White was his beard as is the daisy. Of his complexion he was sanguine. Well loved he by the morrow a sop in wine. To livèn in delight was ever his won, For he was Epicurus's own son That held opinion that plain delight Was very felicity perfite. A householder and that a great was he; Saint Julian he was in his country. His bread, his ale, was always after one. A better envinèd man was never none. Withouten bakèd meat was never his house Of fish and flesh, and that so plenteous It snowèd in his house of meat and drink Of allé dainties that men could bethink. After the sundry seasons of the year So changèd he his meat and his supper. Full many a fat partridge had he in mew And many a bream and many a luce in stew. Woe was his cook but if his saucè were Poignant and sharp, and ready all his gear. His table dormant in his hall alway Stood ready covered all the longè day.

1 333: Complexion ... sanguine: probably means (1) he had a ruddy face and (2) he was of "sanguine humor", i.e. outgoing and optimistic because of the predominance of blood in his system.

2 336-8: Epicurus was supposed to have taught that utmost pleasure was the greatest good (hence "epicure").

3 340: St Julian was the patron saint of hospitality

4 351-2: His cook would regret it if his sauce was not sharp ....
Introduction to the Franklin’s Tale

The Franklin’s Tale has been taken by many critics to be the final and admirable contribution to the Marriage Group of tales — this tale and the preceding tales of the Wife, the Clerk and the Merchant. The Wife’s tale insists on female dominance, the Clerk’s shows what can happen if male dominance becomes tyrannical, and the Merchant’s is a tale of a marriage born in the stupidity and self-indulgence of one partner, and continued in the adultery and deceit of the other. The Franklin advocates tolerance and forebearance on both sides of marriage, a willingness to do each other’s will, and to give up the hopeless notion that you can always make your will prevail. Even if you could, it would spell death to any hope of love:

When mastery comes, the God of love anon
Beateth his wings, and farewell, he is gone

But that is not the only trouble a marriage may have to face. The marriage partners in The Franklin’s Tale have settled for mutual love and forebearance, but then the wife’s truth to her marriage promise is tested by the persistence of a young squire who falls in love with her and gets a bad case of “hereos,” an affliction that befalls young men who fall hopelessly in love. It includes an inability to talk to the beloved, as well as a strong tendency to write poetry and to take to bed for long periods at a time, sick with love longing. When the young man finally does approach the lady, she rejects his advances, but to soften the blow she lightly makes a rash promise to grant him his wish if he removes all the rocks around the coast which threaten the

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1. 359-60: sheriff: “shire reeve,” King’s representative in a shire, i.e. county. counter: overseer of taxes for the treasury. vavasour: wealthy gentleman, possibly also a family name.
safe return of her husband. When he seems to accomplish this by magic, she now has to face the "truth", the answer to the question: Which shall she keep, the "troth" she has pledged to her husband in marriage or the troth she has so lightly pledged to Aurelius to breach that marriage? "Truth is the highest thing that man may keep," says her husband when she tells him her dilemma, and he sends her on her way to keep her rash promise to the love-sick squire. Just like that. The disturbing question as to which "troth / truth" takes precedence over which, is not discussed, but brushed aside by the narrator (1493-98).

When she meets the squire on her way to keep the tryst, her words unite three major topics of the tale: marriage, truth, submission. "Where are you going?" he asks:

Unto the garden, as my husband bade,
My truthè for to hold, alas! alas!

The squire, impressed by the fidelity of husband and wife to their word, releases her from her promise; now he has to keep truth with the magician to whom he has promised a sum that he cannot immediately pay. But in return for his generosity to the wife, he is forgiven his debt also.

For the Franklin, the generosity of all parties, and their fidelity to their word is a display of gentilesse or "gentleness," the kind of magnanimous behavior that was supposed to go with being born into the gentry, a topic on which Chaucer held forth through the mouth of the hag in The Wife of Bath's Tale and in his own ballade called Gentilesse. Indeed, gentilesse rivals truth for frequency of occurrence in this tale of the Franklin. While all the "gentle" people display gentilesse, the magician, who is not a born patrician, shows gentilesse also in a prominent way. He illustrates in his action what the old hag in the Wife's tale had insisted on: that gentilesse is not a matter of birth only, but of moral quality.

The Franklin, a country gentleman, is very concerned about being a gentleman, but he professes not to be well educated in Rhetoric, that is, in the art of speaking eloquently. He says he does not really know how to use the "colors" of rhetoric, the arts and tricks of presenting oneself in words: he only knows how to tell a plain, unadorned tale. This is Chaucer's little joke. The Franklin's Tale is told with as much skill as any other in the collection, and in fact displays a good many of the "colors" of rhetoric, which Chaucer knew very well how to use, even if his imaginary Franklin says he does not. For the Franklin's very protestation of literary incompetence was itself a rhetorical trope or "color" known as the "modesty topos." His little pun on color rhetorical and color literal is another "color." And so on throughout the tale:
Dorigen's list of virtuous maidens and wives (1364 ff) is a very obvious rhetorical flourish, and is continued to such lengths as to make one feel that one is supposed to be amused. Chaucer is here probably mocking one aspect of rhetoric (the catalogue) as he does with another in The Nun's Priest's Tale, while showing that he knows very well indeed how to use it skilfully.

The story ends with another rhetorical trope, a demande, a question to the reader about love, somewhat like those in The Knight's Tale and The Wife of Bath's Tale. Here the demande is: Which of all the characters who kept a promise or forgave a debt was the most generous? Chaucer wisely leaves the answer to the reader.

Some linguistic notes for Franklin’s Tale

**Word Stress:** It is fairly clear that some words were stressed in the original as we would no longer stress them: sicknéss to rhyme fully with distress (915-6). philosópher to rhyme with coffer (1560/1).

Sometimes indeed the same word occurs with different stress in different lines: cólours, colóurs (723-4-6); pénance (1238), penánce (1082); cértain and certáin (1568 / 719).

**Rhyme:** This is sometimes closely related to word stress as the preceding section indicates. Stable rhymes with unreasonable (871-2), and tables with delitables (899-900) because they probably had a more French pronunciation than we give them. (See notes to the text). In this version of the tale some other rhymes do not work fully as they would have in the original Middle English as in lines 1145-50. And a rhyme between yowthè and allowe thee (675/6) may have been a stretch even in Chaucer’s day. As youth and allow thee it does not even come close to rhyme in modern English.

**Grammar:** so loath him was, how loath her was: we would now say “so loath he was, or she was.” In Chaucer’s day the phrases meant literally: “so hateful (to) him or her it was”
The Link to the Tale of the Squire

The Franklin interrupts the tale of the Squire

"In faith, Squire, thou hast thee well y-quit done well
And gentilly. your intelligence
I praisé well thy wit," I declare
Quod the Franklin. "Considering thy youth, In my judgement
So feelingly thou speakest, sir, I allow thee," satisfaction
As to my doom, there is none that is here satisfaction
Of eloquencè that shall be thy peer, satisfaction
If that thou live. God givè thee good chance.

And in virtúe send thee continuance, I had rather
For of thy speechè I have great dainty. I had rather
I have a son, and by the Trinity, satisfaction
I had lever than twenty pound worth land,
Though it right now were fallen in my hand satisfaction
He were a man of such discretion I had rather
As that you be. Fie on possession, satisfaction
But if a man be virtuous withall. satisfaction
I have my sonnè snibbèd, and yet shall, satisfaction
For he to virtue listeth not intend,
But for to play at dice and to dispend spend
And lose all that he hath, is his usage. spend
And he had lever talken with a page spend
Than to commune with any gentle wight spend
Where he might learnè gentilesse aright." to be a gentleman

The Franklin in turn is interrupted by the Host

"Straw for thy gentilesse," quod our Host. you know well
"What! Frankelin, pardee sir, well thou wost your intelligence
That each of you must tellen at the least your intelligence
A tale or two, or breaken his behest." his promise
"That know I well, sir," quod the Franklin. his promise
"I pray you haveth me not in disdain,

1 673-4: "You have acquitted yourself well, like a gentleman." The y- on y-quit is a grammatical sign of the past participle. The meaning the same with or without the y-.

2 675-6: The original rhyme was yowthe / allowe thee.

3 694: For the concept of gentle / gentil and gentleness / gentilesse", see Introduction above.
Though to this man I speak a word or two."
"Tell on thy tale withouten wordés mo'." ¹
"Gladly, sir Host," quod he, "I will obey
Unto your will. Now hearken what I say.

_I will you not contráry in no wise,_
As far as that my wittés will suffice.
I pray to God that it may pleasan you.
Then wot I well that it is good enow." ²

Prologue to the Franklin's Tale

These oldé gentle Bretons in their days
Of diverse áventurés maden lays ²
Rimèd in their oldé Breton tongue;
Which layés with their instruments they sung
Or elsé readen them for their pleasánce.
And one of them have I in rémembránce
Which I will say with good will as I can.

A modest disclaimer by the Franklin: I am not a polished speaker

But, sirs, because I am a burel man,
At my beginning fírst I you beseech
Have me excuséd of my rudé speech.
I learnèd never rhetoric certáín.³

I slept never on the Mount of Parnasso,
Nor learnèd Marcus Tullius Cicero.
Colours ne know I none, withouten dread,
But such colóúrs as growen in the mead
Or elsé such as men dye or paint.
Colors of rhetoric be to me quaint.
My spirits feeleth not of such mattér.

¹ 701: "Go on with your story without any more delay."

² 710: "They composed poems (lays) about various events (aventures)." Bretons were and are people of Brittany in France, sometimes called Armorica or Little Britain in contrast to Great Britain.

³ 719: Rhetoric, one of the Seven Liberal Arts, taught skill in writing and speaking. The "colors" of rhetoric were the stylistic "tricks" e.g. a modest disclaimer at the beginning (like the Franklin's), puns like that on "colors," rhetorical questions, exclamations, exempla, elaborate similes, etc. Many of the "colors" are displayed in this tale.
But if you list, my talë you shall hear.

The Franklin's Tale

A Knight falls in love with a very highborn lady well above his rank who nevertheless accepts him

In Armorik, that callèd is Britâin, Armorica, Brittany

There was a knight that loved and did his pain took pains
To serve a lady in his bestè wise.

And many a labour, many a great emprise enterprise, task
He for his lady wrought, ere she were won; performed, task
For she was one the fairest under sun,

And eke thereto come of so high kindred also / noble family
That well unneths durst this knight for dread scarcely dared
Tell her his woe, his pain, and his distress.

But at the last she for his worthiness, especially / humility
And namely for his meek obeïsance

Has such a pity caught of his penánce, pain
That privily she fell of his accord secretly
To take him for her husband and her lord,
Of such lordship as men have o'er their wives.

They make a special agreement

And for to lead the more in bliss their lives

Of his free will he swore her as a knight
That ne'er in all his life he day nor night Ne should upon him take no mastery show
Against her will, nor kith her jealousy,
But her obey and follow her will in all,

As any lover to his lady shall —
Save that the name of sovereignty, sake of his position
That would he have, for shame of his degree.
She thankèd him, and with great humbleness

1 734-7: "She was the most beautiful women on earth, and of such an exalted family, that this knight hardly dared to tell her how he ached with love for her."

2 744-8: And to lead even happier lives, of his free will he swore to her, as a knight, that he would never throughout his life, day or night, try to be master against her will, or show jealousy.
...
She said: "Sir, since of your gentilesse
You proffer me to have so large a rein,
Ne woldé never God bitwixt us twain,¹
As in my guilt, were either war or strife.
Sir, I will be your humble, truë wife —
Have here my truth — till that mine heartè burst."

Thus been they both in quiet and in rest.

A comment on the qualities of genuine love & the need for patience

For one thing, sirs, safely dare I say:
That friendês ever each other must obey
If they will longè holden company.
Love will not be constrained by mastery.

When mastery comes, the God of Love anon
Beath his wings and farewell — he is gone!
Love is a thing as any spirit free:
Women of kind desiren liberty,
And not to be constrainèd as a thrall —
And so do men, if I sooth sayen shall.
Look who that is most patïent in love:
He is at his advantage all above.
Patience is a high virtíue, certain,
For it vanquisheth (as these clerkès sayn)

All that rigor never should attain.
For every word men may not chide or 'plain.
Lerneth to suffer, or else, so may I go,
You shall it learn whether you will or no,
For in this world, certain, there no wight is

That he ne does or says sometime amiss.
Ire, sickness, or constellatïon,
Wine, woe, or changing of complexïon
Causeth full oft to do amiss or speaken.
On every wrong a man may not be wreaken.

After the timé must be temperance
To every wight that can on governance.²
And therefore has this wisè worthy knight
To live in easè sufferance her behight,

¹ 756-7: "God forbid that there should ever be, through my fault, quarreling or fighting between us."

² 785-6: "Everyone who knows anything about self control must show tolerance according to the occasion."
And she to him full wisly 'gan to swear
That never should there be default in her.

A paradox

Here may men see a humble wise accord:
Thus hath she take her servant and her lord—
Servant in love and lord in marriage.
Then was he both in lordship and servâge.

Servâgé? Nay, but in lordship above,
Since he has both his lady and his love—
His lady, certês, and his wife also,
The which that law of love accordeth to.¹

After they have been happily married for some time, the husband
goes off to seek knightly honor

And when he was in this prosperity,
Home with his wife he goes to his country
Not far from Pedmark, there his dwelling was,
Where as he lives in bliss and in soláce.
Who couldê tell, but he had wedded be,
The joy, the ease and the prosperity

That is bitwixt a husband and his wife?
A year and more lasted his blissful life
Till that the knight of which I speak of thus—
That of Kairrûd was cleped Arveragus—
Shope him to go and dwell a year or twain
In Engeland that cleped was eke Britain
To seek in armês worship and honôur
(For all his lust he set in such labouër)
And dwellêd there two years — the book says thus.

Lamenting the absence of her husband, Dorigen is comforted by her friends

¹ 791-798: Chaucer is here playing with another rhetorical color, the paradox. According to one medieval code of love (literary), a man’s beloved was his “mistress”, i.e. he did what she said, he was her servant—"in servage." After marriage, he was her lord and she his lady. Legally he was "master," "lord." Since people often married partners chosen for them, a spouse might not be one's chosen "love." Dorigen and Arveragus are fortunate: they are spouses and lovers at once, an ideal arrangement according to another code of love—"the which that law of love accordeth to."
Now will I stint of this Arveragus
And speak I will of Dorigen his wife,
That loves her husband as her heart's life.
For his absèncè weepeth she and sigheth
As do these noble wivès when them liketh.
She mourneth, waketh, waileth, fasteth, 'plaineth;
(Com)plains
Desire of his presènce her so distraineth
That all this widè world she set at nought.
Her friendès, which that knew her heavy thought,
Comfort her in all that ever they may.
They preachen her, they tell her night and day
That causeless she slays herself, alas —
And every comfort possible in this case
They do to her with all their busyness —
All for to make her leave her heavyness.

By process, as you knowen everyone,

Men may so long graven in a stone
Till some figure therein emprinted be.
So long have they comfórted her, till she
Receivèd hath, by hope and by reason,
Th'emprinting of their consolation,

Through which her great sorrow 'gan assuage —
She may not always duren in such rage.
And eke Arveragus in all this care
Has sent her letters home of his welfáre
And that he will come hastily again,
Or elsè had this sorrow her heartè slain.
Her friendès saw her sorrow 'gan to slake,
And prayèd her on knees, for Godè's sake,
To come and roamen in their company
Away to drive her darkè fantasy;

And finally she granted that request,
For well she saw that it was for the best.
Now stood her castle fastè by the sea,
And often with her friendès walketh she
Her to disport upon the bank on high

Where as she many a ship and bargè saw
Sailing their course where as them listè go,
But then was that a parcel of her woe,
For to herself full oft, "Alas!" said she,
"Is there no ship of so many as I see

Will bringen home my lord? Then were mine heart
Concerned about the safe return of her husband along the rocky coast,
Dorigen wonders why God creates such dangers

Another time there would she sit and think
And cast her eyen downward from the brink —
But when she saw the grisly rockès black,

For very fear so would her heartë quake
That on her feet she might her not sustain.
Then would she sit adown upon the green
And piteously into the sea behold,
And say right thus, with sorrowful sighès cold:

"Eternal God, that through thy purveyance
Leadest the world by certain governance,
In idle, as men say, you nothing make.
But Lord, these grisly fiendly rockès black,
That seemen rather a foul confusion

Of work, than any fair creation
Of such a perfect wisê God and a stable,
Why have you wrought this work unreasonâble?
For by this work — south, north, nor west nor east —
There n’is y-fostred man nor bird nor beast.

It doth no good, to my wit, but annoyeth.
See you not, Lord, how mankind it destroyeth?
A hundred thousand bodies of mankind
Have rockès slain, all be they not in mind,
Which mankind is so fair part of thy work

That thou it madest like to thine own mark.
Then seemèd it you had great charity
Toward mankind. But how then may it be
That you such meanès make it to destroy,
Which meanès do no good, but ever annoy?

I wot well clerks will sayen as them lest
By arguments that all is for the best,
Though I ne can the causes not y-know,
But thilkê God that made the wind to blow,

\[1\] 871-2: *stable / unreasonable*: the rhyme presupposes a somewhat French pronunciation for these words in Middle English with a stress on the last syllable of *unreasonable*.

\[2\] 885-6: "I know well that scholars will say, as they like to do, and produce arguments (to prove), that everything that happens is for the best."
As keep my lord! This my conclusion.

To clerks let I all disputation —
But would God that all these rockès black
Were sunken into hellè for his sake!
These rockès slay mine heartè for the fear!”
Thus would she say with many a piteous tear.

Her friends take her to a dance in a lovely garden

Her friendès saw that it was no disport
To roamen by the sea, but discomfòrt,
And shopen for to playen somewhere else.
They leaden her by rivers and by wells,
And eke in other places délitàbles;
They dauncen and they play at chess and tables.
So on a day, right in the morrowtide,
Unto a garden that was there beside
In which that they had made their ordinance
Of vítaille, and of other purveyance,
They go and play them all the longè day.
And this was on the sixthè morrow of May,
Which May had painted with its softè showers
This garden full of leavès and of flowers;
And craft of mannè's hand so curiously
Arrayèd had this garden truly
That never was there garden of such price
But if it were the very Paradise.
The odour of flowers and the freshè sight
Would have makèd any heartè light
That ever was born, but if too great sickness
Or too great sorrow held it in distress,
So full it was of beauty with pleasânce.
At after-dinner they began to dance
And sing also, save Dorigen alone,
Which made always her cómplaint and her moan,
For she ne saw him on the dancè go
That was her husband and her love also.
But natheless she must a time abide,
And with good hopè let her sorrow slide.

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1 899-900: places delitables / tables: Not only does the adjective delitables come after the noun places, but it is pluralized, French fashion. It is also stressed in French fashion: délitàbles.
A young man falls secretly and painfully in love with Dorigen

Upon this dance, amongst other men, 
Dancéd a squire before Dorigen
That fresher was and jollier of array,
As to my doom, than is the month of May. He singeth, danceth, passing any man
That is or was since that the world began.
Therewith he was, if men him should describe, 
One of the best faring man alive.
Young, strong, right virtuous, and rich, and wise, 
And well-beloved, and holden in great prize.
And shortly, if the sooth I tellen shall, 
Unwitting of this Dorigen at all,
This lusty squire, servant to Venus — ¹
Which that y-cleped was Aurelius — 
Had loved her best of any creature
Two years and more, as was his àventure;
But never durst he tellen her his grievance.
Withouten cup he drank all his penance.²
He was despairéd — nothing durst he say,
Save in his songés somewhat would he wray
His woe, as in a general cómplaining.
He said he loved, and was beloved no thing,
Of whiché matter made he many lays,
Songs, complaints, roundels, virelays,
How that he durst not his sorrow tell,
But languished as a fury does in hell.
And die he must, he said, as did Êchó
For Nárcissus that durst not tell her woe.
In other manner than you hear me say
Ne durst he not to her his woe bewray,
Save that peráventure sometimes at dances
Where youngé folké keep their observánces
It may well be he lookéd on her face
In such a wise as man that asketh grace —
But nothing wisté she of his intent.

¹ Venus is the goddess of love, hence a "servant of Venus" is a lover.

² 942: *Penance*, normally a word used in religious contexts, is a word frequently used in the Middle Ages for the pain of unsatisfied love. Hence the line seems to mean "He drank the pains of love to the dregs" (without a measuring cup). *Penánce / grievánce*, like some other words in Chaucer, probably had a French stress an the last syllable.
When the lover finally speaks, his advance is not welcomed

960 Natheless, it happened ere they thencë went,
Because that he was her neigheboûr
And was a man of worship and honouûr,
And had y-knowên him of timë yore,
They fell in speech, and forthë more and more
965 Unto his purpose drew Aurelius,
And when he saw his time he saidë thus:
"Madame," quod he, "by God that this world made,
So that I wist it might your heartë glad,¹
I would that day that your Arveragus

970 Went o'er the sea that I, Aurelius,
Had went where never I should have come again!
For well I wot my service is in vain —
My guerdon is but bursting of mine heart.
Madame, rueth upon my painës smart,
975 For with a word you may me slay or save!
Here at your feet God would that I were grave!
I have as now no leisure more to say —²
Have mercy, sweet, or you will do me die!"
She gan to look upon Aurelius:

980 "Is this your will?" quod she, "and say you thus?
Never erst," quod she, "ne wist I what you meant.
But now, Aurelius, I knowë your intent,
By thilkë God that gave me soul and life,
Ne shall I never be an untrue wife
985 In word nor work. As far as I have wit,
I will be his to whom that I am knit —
Take this for final answer as of me."

Attempting to soften the blow, Dorigen makes a tactical error, but
this is small comfort to the disappointed lover

But after that in playë thus said she:
"Aurelius," quod she, "by highë God above,
990 Yet would I grantë you to be your love,
Since I you see so piteously complain.

¹ 968-72: This passage makes much more sense without line 968, whether "So that" means "If" or "Since": "If (Since) I knew it might gladden your heart."

² 977: A very odd line with which to finish such a passionate outburst.
Look what day that endalong Britáin
You remove all the rockès, stone by stone,
That they ne lettè ship nor boat to gon —
I say, when you have made the coast so clean
Of rockês that there is no stone y-seen,
Then will I love you best of any man —
Have here my truth, in all that ever I can.
For well I wot that it shall ne'er betide.
Let such follies out of your hearté slide!
What dainty should a man have in his life
For to go love another mannês wife
That hath her body when so that him liketh!"
Aurelius full often sorè sigheth.
"Is there no other grace in you?" quod he.
"No, by that Lord," quod she, "that maked me."
Woe was Aurelius when that he this heard,
And with a sorrowful heart he thus answered.
"Madame," quod he, "this were an impossible!
Then must I die of sudden death horrible!"
And with that word he turnèd him anon.
Then came her other friendês many a one,
And in the alleys roamèd up and down,
And nothing wist of this conclusion.
But suddenly began the revel new
Till that the brightè sun had lost his hue,
For the horizon had reft the sun his light —
This is as much to say as it was night —
And home they go in joy and in soláce,
Save only wretch Aurelius, alas.
He to his house is gone with sorrowful heart.
He sees he may not from his death astart:
Him seemèd that he felt his heartè cold.
Up to the heavens he his hands 'gan hold,
And on his barè knees he set him down
And in his raving said his orisoun.
For very woe out of his wit he braid.

*Aurelius prays to the gods for a miracle -- a special tide to cover the coastal rocks*

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1 1005-06: I follow Manly-Rickert’s suggestion in putting these 2 lines here rather than after 998.
He n’istè what he spoke, but thus he said —
With piteous heart his ’plaint hath he begun

1030 Unto the gods, and first unto the sun.
   He said, "Apollo, god and governor
Of every plant and herb and tree and flower,
That givest after thy declination
To each of them its time and its season

1035 As thine harbérow changeth, low or high: ¹
Lord Phoebus, cast thy merciable eye
On wretch Aurelius which that am but lorn!
Lo, Lord, my lady hath my death y-sworn
Withouten guilt, but thy benignity
Upon my deadly heart have some pity.
For well I wot, Lord Phoebus, if you lest,
You may me helpen — save my lady — best.
Now voucheth safe that I may you devise
How that I may be helped, and in what wise.

1040 Your blissful sister, Lucina the sheen,
That of the sea is chief goddess and queen
(Though Neptunus have deity in the sea,
Yet empèress aboven him is she)
You know well, Lord, that — right as her desire
Is to be quicked and lighted of your fire,
For which she followeth you full busily —
Right so the sea desireth naturally
To follow her, as she that is goddess
Both in the sea and rivers more and less.

1045 Wherefore, Lord Phoebus, this is my request:
Do this miracle — or do mine heartè burst —
That now next at this opposition,
Which in the sign shall be of the Lion,
As prayeth her so great a flood to bring
That fivè fathoms at least it overspring
The highest rock in Armoric Britáin
And let this flood endure yearès twain.
Then certès to my lady may I say,
‘Holdeth your hest, the rockès be away!’

¹ 1031-54: Chaucer liked to show off his considerable astronomical knowledge. Here he shows that he knows all about the relationship among the sun, the moon and the tides. In the following section (1055 ff) Aurelius is asking that the laws of nature be suspended so that the sea can cover the rocks for two years. For a full discussion of the astrophysics involved see J.D. North, *Chaucer's Universe* pp. 423 ff.
1065 Lord Phoebus, do this miracle for me!
Pray her she go no faster course then ye.
I say this: pray your sister that she go
No faster course than you these yearês two.
Then shall she be e'en at the full alway,
"e'en" = uniformly

1070 And spring-flood lastè bothè night and day.
And but she vouchésafe in such mannér
To grantè me my sovereign lady dear,
Pray her to sinken every rock adown
Into her owne darkè region

1075 Under the ground where Pluto dwelleth in,
Or never more shall I my lady win.
Thy temple in Delphos will I barefoot seek.
Lord Phoebus, see the tearês on my cheek,
And of my pain have some compassion."

1080 And with that word in swoon he fell adown,
And longê time he lay forth in a trance.
His brother, which that knew of his penánce,
Up caught him, and to bed he hath him brought.
Despairèd in this torment and this thought

1085 Let I this woeful creåturè lie —
Choose he for me whether he will live or die.

The husband returns safely

Arveragus with health and great honoúr,
As he that was of chivalry the flower,
Is comen home, and other worthy men.

1090 Oh, blissful art thou now, thou Dorigen,
That hast thy lusty husband in thine arms,
The freshè knight, the worthy man of arms.
That loveth thee as his own heartê's life!
No thing list him to been imaginative

1095 If any wight had spoke while he was out
To her of love; he had of it no doubt.
He not entendeth to no such mattér,¹
But danceth, jousteth, maketh her good cheer.

The lover's pain

¹ 1094-97: "It did not even occur to him that anyone had been making advances to his wife while he was away." The passage says much the same thing twice.
And thus in joy and bliss I let them dwell,
And of the sick Aurelius will I tell.
In labour and in torment furious
Two years and more lay wretch Aurelius,
Ere any foot he might on earth go.
Nor comfort in this time ne had he none,
Save of his brother, which that was a clerk.
He knew of all this woe and all this work,
For to no other creature, certain,
Of this matter he durst no word sayn.
Under his breast he bore it more secretly
Than ever did Pamphilus for Galatheet.
His breast was whole without for to seen,
But in his heart aye was the arrow keen:
And well you know that of a sursanure
In surgery is perilous the cure,
But men might touch the arrow or come thereby.

A possible remedy: magic

His brother wept and wailed privily,
Till at the last him fell in remembrance
That while he was at Orleäns in France —
As young clerks that been likerous
to readen artes that been curious,
Seek in every halk and every herne
Particular sciences for to learn —
He him remembered that, upon a day,
At Orleans in a study a book he saw
Of magic natural, his fellow,
That was that time a bachelor of law
(Al were he there to learn another craft)
Had privily upon his desk y-left.

1 1110: Characters in a medieval love poem.

2 1113-15: "You know that a wound only superficially healed (a sursanure) is very difficult to treat, unless you can get at the arrow" (buried in the flesh).

3 1125: Magic natural was felt to be distinct from "black magic" in which diabolical forces were invoked. "Natural magic," on the other hand, used observations of the planets and stars, and knowledge of their "influence" on human affairs to make predictions. The brother seems to feel that an astrologer practising "magic natural" who was also a tregetour, a magician who produced illusions, would be the perfect one for this job, "a piece of sheer ignorance on the brother's part" according to North, p. 427.
Which book spoke much of th’operatïons
touching the eight and twenty mansïons daily positions
That longen to the moon, and such folly belong to
As in our dayës is not worth a fly
(For Holy Church’s faith in our belief allows no
Nor suffers no illusion us to grieve).

And when this book was in his rémembránce,
Anon for joy his heartë ‘gan to dance At once
And to himself he saidé privily:
"My brother shall be warished hastily!
cured soon
For I am siker that there be sciénces sure / skills
By which men maken diverse “ápparénces,” illusions
Such as these subtle tregetourës play.

And in the hallë rowen up and down;
Some time hath seemed to come a grim lion; magicians
Some timë flowers spring as in a mead, meadow
Some time a vine, and grapës white and red,
Some time a castle all of lime and stone,

And when them likëd, voided it anon —
Thus seemëd it to every mannë’s sight.
Now then conclude I thus, that if I might
At Orleans some old fellow y-find fellow student
That had these moonë’s mansïons in mind,

Or other magic natural above,
(See 1125, note)
He should well make my brother have his love.
For with an “ápparence” a clerk may make magic illusion
To mannë’s sight that all the rockës black
taken away
Of Britain were y-voided every one,

And shippës by the brinkë come and gon,
And in such form endure a week or two.
Then were my brother warished of his woe!
Then must she needës holden her behest,
Or else he shall shame her at the least."

The possibility of success rouses Aurelius enough to go with his brother
to Orleans where a magician meets them “by chance”

What should I make a longer tale of this?
Unto his brother’s bed he comen is,
And such comfort he gave him for to gon
To Orleans, that up he starts anon
And on his way forward then is he fare,
he has set out

1170 In hope for to be lissèd of his care.
relieved

When they were come almost to that city,
But if it were a furlong two or three,
A young clerk roaming by himself they met,
Which that in Latin thriftily them gret,
courteously greeted

1175 And after that he said a wonder thing:
"I know," quod he, "the cause of your coming."
And ere they further any footè went,
He told them all that was in their intent.
This Breton clerk him askèd of fellows
asked about

1180 The which that he had known in olden days,
And he him answered that they deadè were —
Down off his horse Aurelius lights anon,
dismounts
And with this magician forth is he gone

1185 Home to his house, and made them well at ease.
Them lackèd no vitaille that might them please.
So well arrayèd house as there was one
as this one was
Aurelius in his life saw never none.

The magician displays some of his skills

He showed him ere he wentè to supplér

1190 Forests, parkès full of wilde deer.
stags
There saw he hartès with their hornès high,
The greatest that ever were seen with eye;
He saw of them an hundred slain with hounds,
And some with arrows bled of bitter wounds.
removed

1195 He saw, when voided were these wilde deer,
These falconers upon a fair rivér,
That with their hawkès have the heron slain.
Then saw he knightès jousting in a plain.
And after this he did him such pleasànce,

1200 That he him showed his lady on a dance,
On which himself he dancèd — as him thought,
And when this master that this magic wrought
Saw it was time, he clapped his handès two,
And farewell! All our revel was ago.
gone

1205 And yet removed they never out of the house
While they saw all this sighté marvelous,
But in his study, there as his bookés be,
They sitten still, and no wight but they three.  
To him this master callèd his squire

And said him thus: "Is ready our suppér?
Almost an hour it is, I undertake,
Since I you bade our supper for to make,
When that these worthy men wenten with me
Into my study there as my bookés be."

"Sir," quod this squire, "when that it liketh you,
It is all ready, though you will right now."
"Go we then sup," quod he, "as for the best;
These amorous folk some time must have their rest."

_They agree quickly on the magician’s fee_

At after-supper fell they in treaty
What summè should this master’s guerdon be
To remove all the rockés of Britáin,
And eke from Gironde to the mouth of Seine.
He made it strange, and swore, so God him save,¹
Less than a thousand pounds he would not have,
Nor gladly for that sum he would not gon.²
Aurelius with blissful heart anon
Answered thus: "Fie on a thousand pound!
This widé world, which that men say is round,
I would it give, if I were lord of it.
This bargain is full drive, for we been knit.
You shall be payèd truly, by my truth.
But look now, for no negligence nor sloth,
You tarry us here no longer than tomorrow."
"Nay," quod this clerk, "have here my faith to borrow."
To bed is gone Aurelius when him lest,
And well nigh all that night he had his rest,
What for his labour and his hope of bliss,
His woeful heart of penance had a liss.

_They return to Brittany. December weather_

¹ 1223: "He drove a hard bargain, and swore that as sure as he hoped to be saved ..."
² 1224-5: Scholars who think that the clerk's fee is steep "could do worse than themselves attempt the computational part" of his work. (North, 153)
Upon the morrow, when that it was day
To Brittany they took the righté way,
Aurelius and this magicián beside,
And been descended where they would abide.¹
And this was, as these bookés me remember,
The coldé frosty season of December.

Phoebus waxed old and huéd like latten,
That in his hoté declination
Shone as the burnéd gold with streamés bright.
But now in Capricorn adown he light,
Where as he shone full pale, I dare well sayn. ²

The bitter frostés with the sleet and rain
Destroyéd hath the green in every yard.
Janus sits by the fire with double beard
And drinketh of his bugle horn the wine,
Before him stands brawn of the tuskéd swine,

Aurelius in all that ever he can
Doth to this master cheer and reverence,
And prayeth him to do his diligence
To bringen him out of his painés smart,
Or with a sword that he would slit his heart.

The magician’s preparations and the result

This subtle clerk such ruth had of this man
That night and day he sped him that he can
To wait a time of his conclusïon —
This is to sayn, to make illusïon
By such an "áppearance" or jugglery
(I can no termés of astrology)³
That she and every wight should ween and say
That of Britáin the rockés were away,

¹ 1242: "And they dismounted where they intended to stay", i.e. when they reached their destination.

² 1245-9: The sun which had sent out streams of burning gold during the summer (in his hot declination) has grown feeble and brass-colored and now shines weakly in Capricorn (close to winter solstice).

³ 1266: That the narrator knows more "terms of astrology" than most of his audience is very clear from the passages that soon follow. According to North not one of the astronomical terms here used is misplaced or inappropriate. It is not necessary to understand these terms to get most of the point.
FRANKLIN’S TALE

1270 So at the last he hath his time y-found
To make his japes and his wretchedness
Of such a superstitious cursedness.
His tables Tolletanés forth he brought
Full well corrected. Nor there lackéd nought,

1275 Neither his cóllect nor his éxpanse years,
Neither his rootés, nor his other gears,
As been his centres and his arguments,
And his proportionals convenient,
For his equations in every thing.

1280 And by his eighthé sphere in his working
He knew full well how far Alnath was shove
From the head of thilké fixed Aries above
That in the ninthé sphere considered is —
Full subtly he calculéd all this.

1285 When he had found his firstè mansion,
He knew the remnant by proportion,
And knew the rising of his moonè well,
And in whose face and term, and every deal,
And knew full well the moonè’s mansion

1290 Accordant to his operation,
And knew also his other observánces
For such illusions and such mischances
As heathen folké used in thilké days.¹
For which no longer makéd he delays,

1295 But, through his magic, for a week or tway
It seemed that all the rockés were away. ²

Aurelius’s gratitude to the magician

Aurelius, which that yet despairéd is
Whe’r he shall have his love or fare amiss.³

¹ 1292-3: This and lines 1125-34 above imply that some astrology was not considered legitimate, and the narrator—who knows so much about it— is now trying to distance himself.

² 1294-6: A report in the New York Times for March 7, 2000 claims that this phenomenon may actually have occurred on Dec 19, 1340, around the time of Chaucer’s birth.

³ 1297-8: "Aurelius, desperate (to know) whether (Whe’r) he will get his lover or miss out ..."
Awaiteth night and day on this miracle.

1300 And when he knew that there was no obstacle,
That voided were these rockés every one,
Down to his master's feet he fell anon
And said, "I, woeful wretch Aurelius,
Thank you, lord, and lady mine Venus,
That me have holpen from my carés cold!"

*His demand to Dorigen*

And to the temple his way forth hath he hold,
Where as he knew he should his lady see.
And when he saw his time, anon-right he
With dreadful heart and with full humble cheer
Saluted has his sovereign lady dear:
"My righté lady," quod this woeful man,
"Whom I most dread and love as best I can,
And lothest were of all this world displease,
Ne're it that I for you have such dis-ease
That I must die here at your feet anon,
Nought would I tell how me is woe-begone.
But certês either must I die or 'plain.
You slay me guiltéless for very pain.
But of my death though that you have no ruth,
Aviseth you ere that you break your truth.
Repenteth you, 'fore thilké God above,
Ere you me slay because that I you love.
For, Madame, well you wot what you have hight
(Not that I challenge any thing of right
Of you, my sovereign lady, but your grace).
But in a garden yond at such a place,
You wot right well what you behighten me,
And in mine hand your truthé plighted ye
To love me best. God wot you saido so,
All be that I unworthy am thereto.
Madame, I speak it for the honour of you
More than to save mine hearté's life right now:
I have done so as you commanded me,
And if you vouchsafe, you may go see, if you please
Do as you list, have your behest in mind, as you wish / promise
For quick or dead right there you shall me find, alive or dead
In you lies all to do me live or die, cause me to
But well I wot the rockés been away."

Dorigen’s dismay

He takes his leave and she astonished stood.

In all her face there n’as a drop of blood, wasn’t a drop
She wendé never have come in such a trap, never thought
"Alas," quod she, "that ever this should hap, happen
For wend I never by possibility
That such a monster or marvel mighté be!

It is against the process of natúre."

And home she goes a sorrowful créature;
For very fear unnethè may she go, scarcely walk
She weepeth, waileth all a day or two,
And swooneth that it ruth was to see, pitiful to see

But why it was, to no wight told it she, to nobody
For out of town was gone Arveragus.
But to herself she spoke and saidé thus,
With facé pale and with full sorrowful cheer
In her complaint, as you shall after hear:

She will die rather than be unfaithful

"Alas," quod she, "on thee, Fortúne, I ’plain, complain
That unaware hast wrapped me in thy chain, I know no help
From which t’escapè wot I no succoúr
Save only death or elsé dishonoúr — I must
One of these two behooveth me to choose.

But natheless yet have I lever lose had rather
My life than of my body to have a shame, (good) name
Or know myselfen false, or lose my name; indeed
And with my death I may be quit, ywis.
Has there not many a noble wife ere this,
And many a maid y-slain herself, alas,
Rather than with her body do trespass?  
Yes, certès, lo, these stories bear witness.¹

She cites many models of wifely chastity from classical history and legend

When thirty tyrants full of cursedness
Had slain Phidón in Athens at the feast,

They commanded his daughters for t’arrest,
And bringen them before them in despite
All naked, to fulfill their foul delight;
And in their father’s blood they made them dance
Upon the pavement — God give them mischance!

For which these woeful maidens, full of dread,
Rather than they would lose their maidenhead,
They privily been start into a well
And drowned themselvès, as the bookès tell.
They of Messina let enquire and seek

Of Lacedaemon fifty maidens eke,
On which they woulden do their lechery,
But there was none of all that company²
That she n’as slain, and with a good intent
Chose rather for to die than to assent

To be oppressed of her maidenhead.
Why should I then to dien be in dread?
Lo, eke, the tyrant Aristoclides
That loved a maiden hight Stymphalides,
When that her father slain was on a night,

Unto Diana’s temple goes she right
And hent the image in her handès two,
From which imáge would she never go.
No wight ne might her hands of it arace,
Till she was slain right in the selfé place.

¹1366 ff: The following list of over 20 wives, maidens or widows who destroyed themselves rather than be sexually dishonored is an unusually extended list of exempla, one of the "colors" of rhetoric that the Franklin said he knew nothing about. The details of the cases adduced need not concern us. They are all taken from the same anti-matrimonial book by St Jerome that the Wife of Bath was at pains to refute in parts of her Prologue.

² 1382-5: "But there was not one of that group of maidens who did not die gladly rather than agree to be robbed of her virginity."
1395 Now since that maidens hadden such despite
disdain
To been defoulèd with man's foul delight,
Well ought a wife rather herselfen slay
Than be defoulèd, as it thinketh me.

What shall I say of Hasdrubal's wife

1400 That at Cartháge bereft herself her life?
For when she saw that Romans won the town,
She took her children all and skipped adown
Into the fire, and chose rather to die
Than any Roman did her villainy.

1405 Hath not Lucrece y-slain herself, alas,
killed
At Rome when that she oppressèd was
raped
Of Tarquin, for her thought it was a shame
By Tarquin
To liven when that she had lost her name?
The seven maidens of Milesia also

1410 Have slain themselves for very dread and woe
Rather than folk of Gaul them should oppress.
More then a thousand stories, as I guess,
Could I now tell as touching this mattér.
When Habradate was slain, his wife so dear

1415 Herselfen slew, and let her blood to glide
In Habradate's woundès deep and wide,
And said, 'My body at the leaste way
There shall no wight defoulen, if I may!'
nobody

What should I more examples hereof sayn?

1420 Since that so many have themselven slain
Well rather than they would defoulèd be,
I will conclude that it is bet for me
better
To slay myself than be defoulèd thus.

1425 Or rather slay myself in some mannér —
As did Democionès's daughter dear,
Because that she would not defoulèd be.
O Cedasus, it is full great pity
To readen how thy daughters died, alas,

1430 That slew themselves for such a manner case!
or worse
As great a pity was it, or well more,

The Theban maiden that for Nichanor
Herselfen slew right for such manner woe.  
Another Theban maiden did right so

1435 For one of Macedon had her oppressed,  
She with her death her maidenhead redressed.  
What shall I say of Niceratê’s wife  
That for such case bereft herself her life?  
How true eke was to Alcibiades

1440 His love, that rather for to dien chose  
Than for to suffer his body unburied be?  
Lo, which a wife was Alcestis," quod she.  
"What says Homer of good Penelope?  
All Greecë knoweth of her chastity.

1445 Pardee, of Laodomia is written thus,  
That when at Troy was slain Protheselaus,  
No longer would she live after his day.  
The same of noble Portia tell I may:  
Withouten Brutus couldë she not liven,

1450 To whom she had all whole her heartê given.  
The perfect wifehood of Arthemesie  
Honoured is through all the Barbary.  
O Teuta queen, thy wifely chastity  
To allê wivês may a mirror be!

1455 The samë thing I say of Bilyea,  
Of Rodogone, and eke Valeria."

_Dorigen informs her husband of her plight_

Thus 'plainêd Dorigen a day or two,  
Purposing ever that she wouldë die.  
But natheless upon the thirdë night

1460 Home came Arveragus, this worthy knight,  
And askêd her why that she wept so sore.  
And she gan weepen ever longer the more —  
"Alas!" quod she, "that ever I was born!  
Thus have I said," quod she, "thus have I sworn."

1465 And told him all as you have heard before;  
It needeth not rehearse it you no more.  
This husband with glad cheer in friendly wise
FRANKLIN'S TALE

Answered and said as I shall you devise:

*His unusual response*

"Is there ought elsè, Dorigen, but this?"

1470 "Nay, nay," quod she, "God help me so as wis,
This is too much, and it were Godè's will."

"Yea, wife," quod he, "let sleepeen that is still.
It may be well paraunter yet today.
You shall your truthè holden, by my fay,
I had well lever y-stickèd for to be,
For very love which that I to you have,
But if you should your truthè keep and save.
Truth is the highest thing that man may keep."

1480 But with that word he burst anon to weep,
And said: "I you forbid, up pain of death,
That never while thee lasteth life nor breath,
To no wight tell thou of this áventure.
As I may best I will my woe endure.

1485 Nor make no countenance of heaviness,
That folk of you may deemen harm or guess."

And forth he cleped a squire and a maid:
"Go forth anon with Dorigen," he said,
"And bringeth her to such a place anon."

1490 They took their leave, and on their way they gon.
But they ne wistè why she thither went:
He would to no wight tellen his intent.
Peráventure a heap of you, ywis,
Will holden him a lewèd man in this,
That he will put his wife in jeopardy.

1495 Hearken the tale ere you upon her cry.
She may have better fortune than you seemeth,
And when that you have heard the talé, deemeth.

---

1 1475-8: "For as sure as I hope God will have mercy on me -- because of the deep love I have for you I had rather be stabbed than that you should fail to keep your promise."
This squire which that hight Aurelius,
On Dorigen that was so amorous,
Of áventurè happened her to meet
Amid the town, right in the quickest street,
As she was bound to go the way forth right
Toward the garden there as she had hight.
And he was to the garden-ward also,
For well he spied when she wouldè go
Out of her house to any manner place.
But thus they met of áventure or grace,
And he saluteth her with glad intent,
And askèd of her whitherward she went.
And she answerèd half as she were mad:
"Unto the garden as my husband bade,
My truthè for to hold — alas! alas!"

Impressed, Aurelius finally does the honorable thing

Aurelius gan wonder on this case,
And in his heart had great compassion
Of her and of her lamentation,
And of Arveragus, the worthy knight,
That bade her holden all that she had hight,
So loath him was his wife should break her truth.
And in his heart he caught of this great ruth,
Considering the best on every side
That from his lust yet were him lever abide
That since I see his greatè gentilesse
To you, and eke I see well your distress
That him were lever have shame — and that were ruth —

1 1522-4: "That he would rather desist from satisfying his lust than commit such a low offence against decency and honor." The terms *churlish, franchise, gentilesse* are probably laden with class-conscious rather than moral connotation.

2 1529-30: "That he would rather (lever) be shamed—and that would be a pity (ruth)—than that you should break your word to me."
1530 Than you to me should break ē thus your truth,  
I have well lever ever to suffer woe  
Than I depart the love betwixt you two.  
I you release, Madame, into your hand,  
Quit every serement and every bond  
That you have made to me as herebeforn,  
Since thilkē time in which that you were born.  
My truth I plight,  
Of no behest.  And here I take my leave,  
As of the truest and the bestē wife  
That ever yet I knew in all my life.  
But every wife beware of her behest.  
On Dorigen remember at the least.  
Thus can a squire do a gentle deed  
As well as can a knight, withouten dread.”  
She thanketh him upon her knees all bare  
And home unto her husband is she fare,  
And told him all as you have heard me said.  
And be you siker, he was so well apaid  
That it were impossible me to write.  
What should I longer of this case endite?  
Arveragus and Dorigen his wife  
In sovereign blissé leaden forth their life —  
Never eft ne was there anger them between.  
He cherished her as though she were a queen,  
And she to him was true for evermore.  
Of these two folk you get of me no more.

The magician’s generous response to Aurelius

Aurelius, that his cost has all forlorn,  
Curses the time that ever he was born.  
"Alas!" quod he, "alas that I behight  
Of puréd gold a thousand pound of weight  
Unto this philosopher.  How shall I do?  
I see no more but that I am foredo.  
My heritagē must I needēs sell

1 1537-8: "I pledge my word, I shall never reproach you for (not fulfilling) a promise (behest)."
And be a beggar. Here I may not dwell
But I of him may get a better grace.
But natheless I will of him assay
At certain dayés year by year to pay
And thank him of his greaté courtesy.

My truthé will I keep, I will not lie.
With hearté sore he goes unto his coffer,
And broughté gold unto this philosópher
The value of five hundred pounds, I guess,
And him beseecheth of his gentilesse
To grant him dayés of the remenant,
And said: "Master, I dare well make avaunt
I failéd never of my truth as yet,
For sikerly my debté shall be quit
Towardés you, however that I fare
To go abeggéd in my kirtle bare;
But would you vouchésafe upon surety
Two years or three for to respiten me,
Then were I well. For elsé must I sell
My heritage. There is no more to tell."

This philosopher soberly answered
And saidé thus when he these wordés heard:
"Have I not holden covenant unto thee?"
"Yea, certés well and truly," quod he.
"Hast thou not had thy lady as thee liketh?"
"No! No!" quod he. And sorrowfully he sigheth.
"What was the causé? Tell me if thou can."
Aurelius his tale anon began,
And told him all as you have heard before;
It needeth not to you rehaerse it more.

He said: "Arveragus — of gentilesse —
Had lever die in sorrow and distress
Than that his wife were of her truthé false."
The sorrow of Dorigen he told him als' —
How loath her was to be a wicked wife,
And that she lever had lost that day her life,
And that her truth she swore through innocence;
She ne’er erst had heard speak of ‘apparence’.
"That made me have of her so great pity.
And right as freely as he sent her me,
1605 As freely sent I her to him again.
This all and some. There is no more to sayn."
This philosópher answered, "Levê brother,
Ever each of you did gently to the other.
Thou art a squire, and he is a knight;
1610 But God forbiddé, for His blissful might,
But if a clerk could do a gentle deed
As well as any of you, it is no dread.
Sir, I release thee of thy thousand pound,
As thou right now were cropped out of the ground
1615 Ne ne’er ere now ne haddest knowen me.
For sir, I will not take a penny of thee
For all my craft, nor naught for my travail.
Thou hast y-payéd well for my vitaille;
It is enough. And farewell, have good day” —
1620 And took his horse and forth he goes his way.

Demande d’amour

Lordings, this question will I askè now:
Which was the mosté free, as thinketh you?
Now telleth me, ere that you further wend.
I can no more, my tale is at an end.

1 1622-3: The demande is a question about love put to the readers of some poems or sections of poems.