

THE *GENTIL* EXAMPLE:
THEMATIC PARALLELS IN FROISSART'S *CHRONIQUES* AND CHAUCER'S
FRANKLIN'S TALE

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ABSTRACT

My project is founded on an inter-genre, comparative approach between Chaucer's *Franklin's Tale* from the Canterbury collection, and Jean Froissart's *Chroniques*, the innovative and epic account of French history in the thirteenth century. I have adopted a method of thematic comparison between the two in an effort to illuminate parallels of example and authorial intent in the works of these almost exactly contemporaneous authors. My thesis therefore becomes a selective examination of the ethical functions of their literature.

Twentieth century scholarship focusing on the similarities between Geoffrey Chaucer and Jean Froissart has left little doubt that the two shared numerous sources and analogues in selections of their poetry, were at least aware of each other personally, and were born into similar social backgrounds. What remains to be done, and what has received little critical attention in the decades since serious work began on the similarities between them, is a study of the ideological values that Chaucer and Froissart shared, specifically evidenced in their writing. The ideas they wanted to promote, the contemporary moral and social debates they engaged in, are equally as fascinating as the similarities in their love poetry. I intend to go beyond the biographical and source study that has dominated discussion on Chaucer and Froissart and embark on a project of tracing thematic parallels in two of their works, specifically focusing on the issue that I find most obvious between them: the desire to create and record literary discussions of ethical behaviour.

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Introduction

Twentieth century scholarship focusing on the similarities between Geoffrey Chaucer and Jean Froissart has left little doubt that the two shared numerous sources and analogues in selections of their poetry, were at least aware of each other personally, and were born into similar social backgrounds. Studies of their dream poetry, specifically by Haldeen Braddy, have produced rich comparisons between the two, and sparked subsequent discussions such as whether the literary influence was mutual, and which poetic influences the two had in common. So much is clear. What remains to be done, and what has received little critical attention in the decades since serious work began on the similarities between them, is a study of the ideological values that Chaucer and Froissart shared, specifically evidenced in their writing. The ideas they wanted to promote, the contemporary moral and social debates they engaged in, are equally as fascinating as the similarities in their love poetry. I intend to go beyond the biographical and source study that has dominated discussion on Chaucer and Froissart and embark on a project of tracing thematic parallels in two of their works, specifically focusing on the issue that I find most obvious between them: the desire to create and record literary discussions of ethical behaviour. My thesis therefore becomes a selective examination of the ethical functions of their literature. In short, I believe that adopting a thematic treatment of comparison between Chaucer's *Franklin's Tale* and Froissart's *Chroniques* can illustrate, in a concise and manageable framework, some of their authors' under-investigated commonalities.

I have come to the decision of using Chaucer and Froissart as the authors around whom to center my study not only because of their biographical similarities, though these are many and striking. The two also have ideological similarities that I wanted to explore; the ethical intentions

I saw in their texts were worthy of investigation. Also, I wanted to participate in the inter-genre body of criticism of the medieval period evident in works like Benson's and Leyerle's *Chivalric Literature*, where valuable information on the era can be learned from comparative study of genres such as history and romance. Froissart, however, was not alone in writing historical chronicles during the period, nor is it necessarily most convenient to compare an English work with one written in French. It could be argued that Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae* is at least as informative on social history and pageantry of the medieval era as Froissart's *Chroniques* (though later writer William of Newburg, author of *The History of English Affairs*, would call Monmouth's work too fantastical to be taken as a work of history, naming it "a laughable web of fiction" (Davenport 93). History writers such as William of Malmesbury and Henry of Huntingdon modelled their chronicles on Bede's *History of the English Church and People*, and "were serious attempts to give an account of English history from the time of Bede" to the mid-twelfth century (97). Wace's french translation of Monmouth, the *Roman de Brut* of 1155, became enormously important in the tradition of English history writing; Davenport states that "alongside the use of that material by the next generation and by subsequent writers of French prose romance, the tradition of writing chronicles of the whole of British history often took Wace as a base, as in the verse *Chronicle* of Robert Mannyng in the early fourteenth century" (104). Nor is Chaucer is not the only option in choosing a poet of the middle English period; his contemporaries are also excellent objects of study. Burrow names Chaucer along with Gower, Langland and the Gawain-poet as the most important and influential poets of the Ricardian era (*Ricardian Poetry* 1) and certainly there can be much to learn from each of these in terms of inter-genre comparisons. After consideration, however, I return to Froissart and Chaucer because, first, they were both poets. I like Froissart's *Chroniques* chiefly

because of the great innovation he brought to history writing, which may only have come of a mind capable of producing poetry: he included gripping dialogue, well-placed informants and eye-witness accounts in his history. There is an appreciable attempt at historical method observable in the *Chroniques*, with Froissart carefully specifying history he has witnessed versus episodes that have been reported to him. In short, the immediacy of Froissart's history and his talent for making his audience feel involved in his narrative links him to what I observe in Chaucer, particularly in *The Franklin's Tale*, where the central decision on which character acted most generously is left to the audience.

With respect to any debate over nobility and ethical behaviour, then, the most directly helpful of Chaucer's works is *The Franklin's Tale* from the *Canterbury* collection; it is canonical, thematically centred, and in late twentieth and early twenty-first century medieval criticism, growing in popularity among the collection of *Tales*. Its situation as one of the Marriage Group of tales ensures that it continues to fascinate, especially considering modern preoccupations with new definitions of the marital relationship, and Chaucer's suggestion within the story of an equitable distribution of power within marriage remains tantalizing. It is for this reason as well that I choose *The Franklin's Tale* in place of *The Wife's Tale*, though the latter also provides an excellent study in the subject of *gentillesse* that I will treat it in my chapter concerning *gentillesse* and chivalry. The marriage of Dorigen and Arveragus in *The Franklin's Tale*, however, melds well with the subject of marriage as a framework in which to observe *gentillesse* in action, therefore it is more immediately relevant to my project than the lessons of the Wife. As well, *The Franklin's Tale* is more useful for my purposes here because of its direct, personal involvement of its audience in forming and recognizing the values Chaucer wants to discuss. Selecting Froissart's most obviously relevant text is less difficult; though he was a

prolific love poet, the social commentary found in *Les Chroniques*, the masterwork that secured his fame, is unquestionably his most helpful contribution to the discussion of ethical concerns he shares with Chaucer. Restricting myself to these works, then, I will trace significant similarities between the discussion on nobility as expounded by Chaucer's Franklin, and instances in the *Chroniques* of debate over, or authorial pronouncement on, correct action. Specifically, I will focus on the theme of *gentillesse* as expounded in what is regarded by many as its *locus classicus* in the *Canterbury Tales*, namely *The Franklin's Tale*. Over the years several pivotal studies have addressed the prevalence of the *gentillesse* theme in the tale; Lindsay Mann's 1966 article ("Gentillesse' and the Franklin's Tale") is often cited as being foremost among these, and was influential because she tracked the movement of *gentillesse* from a courtly origin to a religious one, while Gerhard Joseph's study of the same year envisioned the Christian symbolism of the tale as indicating the incumbency of Christian grace in its pagan setting. More recently, A.J. Minnis's essay demonstrating a "chain reaction of *gentillesse*" (227) comes close to my theory of the authors' encouragement to their audiences to emulate *gentil* action, while Valerie Allen's 1989 article locating the inspiration of *gentillesse* as heavenly, and citing the virtue itself as being attainable to all ranks of people rather than only to the nobility, will prove useful as well. To locate *gentillesse* in Froissart's works, I will address his *Chroniques*, regarded as the definitive commemoration of knighthood since at least Johan Huizinga's classic cultural panorama *The Waning of the Middle Ages*. This thematic emphasis entails bridging a gulf between genres, the Breton *lai* (a verse tale with supernatural elements) and the prose chronicle; however, the consistency of theme is rendered more striking thereby. Therefore, I have identified particularly relevant themes that emerge in the works; where these themes intersect, I investigate.

The choice of editions on which to base this comparison involves a predictable contrast: while any discussion of *The Franklin's Tale* necessarily relies on *The Riverside Chaucer*, there is no authoritative modern edition of Froissart's *Chroniques*. Therefore, citations from Kervyn deLettenhove's nineteenth-century edition will be supplemented by reference to Geoffrey Brereton's idiomatic, accurate translation of selections, and, where that selection is wanting, with the sixteenth-century translation by Lord Berners. Brereton in particular captures the idiomatic flavour, and much of the humour, of the original. Moreover, Brereton provides a lengthy, learned introduction to his version that I have found invaluable, both as an overview of Froissart's literary accomplishment in creating the *Chroniques*, and as a guide to its breakdown of chapters and topics. I will draw particularly from Froissart's descriptions of the Hundred Years War and the dynastic claims of Edward III, with some attention paid to his illuminating idyll at the court of the count of Foix. Throughout the thesis I will refer to Froissart's original work as his *Chroniques*; my numerous direct references to the text will always be to Brereton's translation. Longer excerpts from the *Chroniques* will be provided from deLettenhove's French version, followed by Brereton's English translation. Where Brereton uses material from the *seconde rédaction* of the *Chroniques* (Froissart wrote two versions) I will specify quotations as such.

Logically, the subject of my thesis calls for an introduction to Chaucer and Froissart as authors and as historical contemporaries, partly biographical and partly literary. My first chapter will therefore be an historical overview meant to introduce them and establish their proven connections to one another, with selected bibliographical information and a description of their positions in the changing feudal society of the fourteenth century. Proceeding from this will be a formal chapter-length introduction to the texts I have chosen, outlining the structure of each and

listing some salient sources and analogues that are helpful in studying them. Chapter Three begins my comparison of thematic similarities and delves into the most striking similarity between the two works: the authors' shared goal of providing advice to the princely station. The chapter is foundational both in cementing the commonalities between authorial intentions, and in identifying their very similar courtly audiences. Since the cultural base of courtly society in the fourteenth century is the chivalric code that nobles were expected to subscribe to and uphold, Chapter Four provides a discussion of the definition of chivalry as it applies to the texts, in addition to showing evidence of the use each author made of the chivalric ideal. More importantly, Chapter Four differentiates between chivalry and the touchstone subject of *gentillesse* observable in *The Franklin's Tale* and the *Chroniques*; the chapter therefore details what *gentillesse* is, why it is important, how it applies to both authors, and where it is located in the works. I will spend some time outlining the theory that an example of noble behaviour can find its *locus* first in God, and then in the kingly or knightly class, and follow what can be described as a "trickle-down" progress through the medieval societal hierarchy. Chapter Five continues the line of thought begun in the Advisors to Princes chapter; if both authors position themselves to advise the noble estate, and both spend considerable time illustrating the desirability of retaining a chivalric ideal, they must logically think of themselves as authoritative, to some extent. The chapter will explore the nature of authority in the texts, where it can be found and how it is personified, comprised of an inquiry into the examples and treatment of textual and historical sources of instruction or mentorship in both works. Questions of authority are conventionally linked in the medieval period to the nature of the marital relationship, and here again we find material in both texts demonstrating the authors' intent to paint an ideal model of marriage. As a theme, however, marriage is important in studying the ethical

similarities between Chaucer and Froissart because it provides a situational framework in which to examine their interpersonal treatment of *gentillesse*; in other words, discussing the *gentil* dynamic in marriage allows us to see the concept in action, and gauge its effectiveness in creating an improved system of social relations between people.

Through my examination of the themes as they appear in the texts, I hope to establish that there exist further, vital commonalities between the two authors. First, I believe that the direction of Chaucer's and Froissart's treatment of these themes points to a shared conclusion: they saw great benefit in using their established, authoritative positions to instruct the noble class to specific ends. On their agenda was an experiment in the promotion and practice of *gentillesse*, within societal strata, between them, and within intimate individual relationships. Also, and importantly, it will become evident that both authors use their texts as structures in which to promote their ethical experiment; they create frameworks that allow for and exemplify the *gentil* possibility in place of autocracy or rigid dictatorial pressure. I intend to venture beyond simply discussing the presence of *gentillesse* in the works, therefore, and postulate that both authors textually imply the usefulness of its application in social relations.

Chapter One

Historical Overview

Introduction

Earlier criticism tended to treat Chaucer's French influences as the introductory notes in a progression of increasingly important textual manifestations in his project of creating an English cultural construction; twentieth century scholarship depicted Chaucer's canon as becoming more insular in its development of a Middle English literary foundation, progressing from French sources to Italian ones on his journey to the final creation of a recognizably English sphere of writing. Such critical approaches are now outdated; as Ruth Evans comments, "the assumptions behind these now outmoded models are various: an obsession with evolutionary periodization, cultural stereotyping, (French 'artifice' giving way to earthy English 'realism'), and the mapping of Chaucer's professional trajectory onto his literary one, from French-speaking courtier, to diplomatic courier in Italy, to civil servant [in England]" (14). Still, new interest in his Latin and Italian sources have created the interesting dilemma pointed out by Helen Phillips, that "[r]ecent criticism that has demonstrated the depth of Chaucer's engagement with Italy and Italian literature, notably in the work of Wallace and Harvey, has had the indirect effect of leaving intact [the] older impression, that French influence was conventional and courtly, less adventurous and inspirational" (295). William Calin agrees that Chaucerian sourcing of French texts was understudied by earlier critics: "...the foundations laid by Kittredge, Lowes and their contemporaries were not built upon as much as they could have been" he writes, adding that "even when Jean de Meun, Machaut, and Froissart are recognized, the esthetic problem remains,

a tendency to assume that the Frenchmen had less to contribute than Ovid, Boccaccio, and Petrarch, therefore Chaucer borrowed less from them..." ("Machaut's Legacy," 30). In fact, contemporary and earlier French authors massively influenced Chaucer's writing; moreover, Europe in the fourteenth century was so geopolitically different from the one we recognize now that attempting to narrow Chaucer's work into single categories of national literature is virtually impossible to do. Adding to this impossibility is the breadth of intertextuality in Chaucer's poetry, consistently drawing from the works of multiple authors from various regions. His French sources, however, are pervasive and of vital importance in the development of his writing, and one of these was indisputably Jean Froissart.

Recent works have effectively over-insulated Froissart as a patriarch of the French cultural heritage, carefully protecting his legacy from being interpreted as a contemporary side-note to Chaucer's genius. The result can be a scholarly space between the two, resistant to direct thematic or cultural comparisons of their work, in an attempt to protect certain beliefs about the literary inheritances of nations that were nowhere near emergence at the time the authors wrote. They were, however, close chronological contemporaries. They did share similarities in their social backgrounds, and the fourteenth century Europe they wrote in was more of a collection of heavily interconnected kingdoms and principalities than strictly divided countries, thereby creating the potential for further shared concerns between them. A biographical treatment of their lives and stations, therefore, as well as a sketch of the connections between their works, is warranted as an introduction to further discussion of thematic commonalities in their writing. As such, my first chapter will introduce Chaucer and Froissart by situating their literal and biographical proximity to one another, as foreground for the ideological commonalities I will examine later. I must note that excellent biographical treatments of both Chaucer and Froissart

are available through the online Oxford Dictionary of National Biography; these can be read as preliminary introductions to the authors' lives, major works, and placement in medieval society at birth.

Historical Overview

“We are all,” Bishop Thomas Brinton said in the 1370’s, “the mystical members of a single body” (Strohm, *Cambridge 2*). In claiming this, the Bishop encapsulated the essence of a societal view founded on received hierarchical structures established in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, but expanding outwards to illuminate and embrace an emergent limb of the ‘body’ that was comprised of people caught between the broadly categorized, traditionally tripartite formation of ruling princes, ecclesiastics and peasantry. What the Bishop was acknowledging, and what would be recognized more formally later in the fifteenth century, was a middle grouping of gently-born knights and lesser aristocrats, citizens, burgesses and franklins, who generally did not possess the economic security of income-generating lands and the rents they produced, but were socially situated just below the *de jure* ruling aristocratic class. As Strohm notes in his essay “The Social and Literary Scene in England”,

Many knights and esquires ... earned their status through civil and administrative tasks which we might consider essentially ‘middle class’. While not *gentil*, citizens and burgesses were eligible to serve their cities and shires ... the ultimate standard for inclusion in these middle groupings would seem not to be rank or title, but simply civil importance and responsibility, however defined. (3)

It is to this rising middle stratum of society that Geoffrey Chaucer and, in a different way, Jean Froissart can be considered to belong.

Drawing on a tradition of societal description originating from Plutarch and used in the twelfth century by John of Salisbury (Strohm, *Social* 4), Bishop Brinton's mystical 'body' devoted special attention to the new fourth estate to which Chaucer belonged. Though somewhat predictable in situating kings and princes at the body's "head", with the clergy forming its "ears", for example, Brinton is innovative in placing citizens and burgesses at the body's heart, with "merchants and devoted craftsmen" forming the left hand across from the warrior knights, involved in active military service, on the right (4). What seem to be social class groupings that are neither at the head nor the foot of the body are, appropriately, situated in the middle; Brinton therefore highlights the increasing importance of what can be considered this middle class, or fourth estate, in medieval culture while lending it legitimacy as a vital and, indeed, honoured part of the whole.

As son to an established London vintner, Chaucer may have remained part of the "left hand" merchant class, had his father not also served as deputy chief butler, among other positions, to Edward III. As such, Chaucer was raised in a solidly middle class environment with a tradition of service to the crown that he would uphold from his teenage years to the end of his life. Moreover, the necessity of his service to the crown is emphasized as vital in providing for his standard of living; not possessed of lands and independent income, Chaucer was reliant for the duration of his life on annuities granted to him by three successive royal administrations. As Strohm notes, "he seems to have been rather good at what he did; while not lavishly rewarded, he enjoyed frequent appointments and re-appointments while weathering the extreme and sometimes dangerous factional vicissitudes of his day" (*Cambridge*, 4). It is clearly evident that he was fluently versed in continental culture, languages and customs, as he was repeatedly sent on envoys representing the interests of the English crown. In the only known reference to

Chaucer in his entire oeuvre, Froissart himself lists Chaucer as part of a diplomatic mission to France in 1377, to negotiate a marriage between Richard II of England and the Princess Marie (Braddy 63).

Chaucer's civil career was the material pillar and enabler of his literary endeavours. What can be determined from this is that his position in society did not depend to any extent on his poetic ambitions or accomplishments, nor was he reliant on these for the status and royal acknowledgement he managed to acquire. If his position as a lower member of the non-landed gentry made him reliant for his economic maintenance on continued royal favour, there must also have been some freedom in being able to pursue his poetry largely in private, and strictly on his own terms. His continued immersion in court life and consequent contact with many of the highly placed figures of his time combined with his experiences traveling as an envoy of the English king, making him comfortable in socially illustrious environments and able to negotiate with contemporaries and superiors. These traits in turn helped him hone his poetic skills, particularly with regards to his audience. Chaucer's European, and specifically French, sensibilities allowed him to acquire and maintain an appreciative audience for his work, whether written or delivered verbally. The constant exchange of culture, ideas and, importantly, literary traditions between England and France (though the latter most commonly originated in France and travelled to England) meant that Chaucer's varied experiences could only prove helpful to his poetic career.

The courtly and poetic career of Jean Froissart is considerably different from that of Chaucer, though chronologically and to some extent literarily they are almost exact contemporaries (Butterfield, "Nationhood" 58). Froissart was approximately 24 years old when he was sent, on the recommendation of the count of Hainault, to serve the count's niece, Queen

Philippa of England, in whose service he remained until her death in 1369 (Figg 5). Quite contrary to the primacy of civil service observable in Chaucer's experiences at court, Froissart was initially valued for his refined poetic mastery of the fusion of romance and dream established by Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun, as well as Guillaume de Machaut, whose work would prove hugely influential to Froissart's oeuvre and would appreciably influence Chaucer's. It is almost assuredly because of this noted poetic talent that he initially gained the attention of the count of Hainault, and earned the protection of his daughter. Though he was officially retained in Philippa's train as her secretary, he seems to have been valued much more as a poet, versed as he was in the "skilled discipline, the polished speech, the elegance and flexibility of Romance metres" (Figg 5) popular with the members of her French-speaking train.

It is during this time, from 1361 to 1369, that most scholars agree Chaucer and Froissart would have been most likely to have met and established an acquaintance with each other. The closeness of their friendship is still open to interpretation; aside from his one mention of Chaucer as part of the diplomatic envoy of 1377, Froissart does not write of him. Though he clearly read and was influenced by Froissart's work, no surviving text of Chaucer's includes the name of Froissart. However, John Fyler makes the very cogent point that

Chaucer never mentions Boccaccio either, nor does Froissart name Machaut. The most important poetic influence is the one either taken for granted or suppressed in the struggle to establish an independent poetic authority. But whatever the extent of their personal acquaintance, and despite the fact that their acquaintance certainly came to an end in 1369, Froissart and Chaucer offer us an exceedingly interesting comparison throughout their literary careers. (196)

Still, scholarly opinion as to the closeness of the personal relationship between the two writers varies. With regards to Richard II's marriage negotiations of 1377, Haldeen Braddy maintains that Froissart was "closely acquainted with all three of the English commissioners – Chaucer, Sir Richard Stury, and Sir Guichard d'Angle – and his personal friendship with these English members would naturally have increased his own interest in the negotiations" (65–6). Geoffrey Brereton is more circumspect in his estimation of the degree of their connection, based on the fact that no correspondence between them has survived, if it ever existed. Brereton does mention that Froissart was a member of the English party that attended the wedding of Lionel, Duke of Clarence, to Violante Visconti in Milan, and that Chaucer was

...in the same retinue. Petrarch, considerably senior to both of them, was an honoured guest at the feasts. There is no record that any of them exchanged a word or made the slightest personal impression on the others Since court circles were restricted, [Froissart] may well have been acquainted with [Chaucer] in 1368, but it would only have been as a young official. Neither had yet written their important works. (11)

Without question, Froissart's most important work, and the masterpiece for which his fame was secured long after the style of his verse romances had lost popularity, was his massive *Chroniques*. Many of the stylistic poetic affiliations he had in common with Chaucer end in approximately his mid-thirties, when the death of Queen Philippa largely abolished the favoured position he had enjoyed as a poetic courtier. After this date it seems evident that he gave up writing lays, ballads, and songs and dedicated himself to recording the major events that occurred in western Europe from a few decades before his birth until the end of the record in 1400. His pioneering journalistic style in the *Chroniques* however, results in a narrative that is

remarkably informative about the interrelationships, wars and social exchanges between the members of the ruling class of the realms of western Europe in the late fourteenth century.

It is likely that Froissart's experiences travelling with members of Queen Philippa's court broadened his world view, just as had Chaucer's; another similarity between the two is that by all surviving accounts, Froissart was born into the emergent middle class in his native Hainault in the Netherlands. Brereton indicates that Froissart's family were "business-people, with a strong interest in moneylending" (10). Unlike Chaucer, he was not involved in any sort of civil service and relied instead on a succession of aristocratic patrons for his material security. If we return to Bishop Brinton's metaphorical classification of societal strata using the mystical body, Froissart's birth would situate him on the left hand, among merchants and burgesses. Just as Chaucer found upward mobility in diligent civil service, however, Froissart's talent attracted the attention of wealthy, landed aristocrats, under whose protection he lived and wrote for the duration of his literary career. Both writers, then, improved their societal placement through talent and labour. Both were born to successful merchants and through exertion and effort, earned opportunities for travel and experience within the sanctums of the ruling class.

No matter the degree of personal familiarity between them, it has been established that Chaucer was reading Froissart's poetry quite carefully in the 1360s, and that it was an important source for at least some of his early work. The literary links between the two are easiest to trace at the beginning of their respective careers, when Chaucer was occupied with what critics now consider his dream-vision poetry and Froissart was in the midst of writing courtly love lyrics and poems in fixed verse. In her book specifically dedicated to Froissart's poetry, Kristen Mossler Figg holds that his "historical role as a poet is at least as important in English literature as in French" (4). Froissart's historical role as a chronicler has earned him a permanent place in

medieval literary scholarship; Figg's statement indicates her belief that his poetic contributions have been traditionally overlooked. Indeed, Figg devotes some energy in her study to arguing that one common – and unjustified – treatment of Froissart in twentieth century scholarship has been to read him as a footnote to Chaucer. There are specific instances of Chaucer borrowing directly from Froissart, none more famous than his use of Froissart's *Le Paradys d'Amour* in the *Book of the Duchess*. The best known examples of Chaucer's use of the *Paradys* come from his use of the frame narrative to support the dream vision of the poem, a technique also used extensively by Machaut, and which I will examine presently. Figg also highlights another instance, less well known, which has been proven unequivocally to originate with Froissart:

In another section of the *Book of the Duchess* ... one finds a reference to a minor god named "Enclimpostair," a supposed son of Morpheus who, in all of medieval literature appears only in this work and Froissart's *Le Paradys*. The history of attempts to discover a source or etymology for this name has been traced by Normand Cartier, who concludes that Froissart himself probably concocted it, combining the words "enclin" and "postere" to come up with something meaning "lean-back" or "lazy-bones". (9)

Chaucer's use of Froissart's character is entertaining and unique; Figg uses the example to illustrate the rarity of detecting an instance of borrowing which is largely unquestioned, based on surviving medieval sources.

Figg states, rightly, that it is hard to separate from the greater tradition of the French school of poetry, influences and sources in Chaucer's work that can be directly attributed to Froissart. Froissart himself was thoroughly immersed in the French school and the influence of such giants as Guillaume de Machaut and Jean de Meun is palpable in his work. Figg uses her

study to emphasize Froissart's mastery of poetic verse, that he was in his own right a poet deserving of study and examination, and she is in agreement with Peter Dembowski that

[S]uch examination requires the abandonment of a purely evolutionary view of literary history which would ... try to place Froissart on a line between earlier French literature and the works of Chaucer. Instead, Froissart becomes the ideal subject for those who hope to understand the poetic movement [that he was part of]. (23)

Considering that Froissart was so intricately entwined with the French poetic tradition as to nearly become a case study in understanding it, and in view of the serious significance of his influence on Chaucer, it is clear that reading Froissart as a supporting beam of Chaucer's oeuvre is ridiculous. Rather, reflection on the non-existence of strict national divisions of geography and culture in the late medieval period should help us remember that England and France, and the literary traditions that came of both, drew from a shared pool of heritage and talent, rendering chronological or cultural separation wasteful and pointless.

Ardis Butterfield condemns the fallacy of imposing a linear chronology of influences on Chaucerian and Froissartian scholarship. One of her goals in her article "Chaucer's French Inheritance" is to expose the deep roots of the French tradition that surrounded and nourished Chaucer; she argues convincingly that French as a language and culture, but most importantly as a literary influence, was so pervasive in Chaucer's England that it formed part of his daily existence: both his domestic and professional lives were spent negotiating between English and French. Chaucer did marry a French-speaking countrywoman of Froissart's – Philippa de Roet – and it is beyond question that he was fluent in French and read extensively and carefully from

French lays and poems. The presumption that Chaucer used and then starkly abandoned French influences, therefore, or even that he “evolved” away from them, is untenable.

With regards to source criticism, Butterfield cites an increased need for flexibility as a necessary component in the study of textual interaction and source work. She is engaging when she questions the “tactics of source criticism” that involve “a kind of weighing exercise ... subtract *Il Filostrato* from *Troilus* and you will end up with the ‘true’ Chaucer” (“French Inheritance” 26). Subtract *Le Paradys D’Amour* from the *Book of the Duchess*, one might extrapolate, and you will still have three poems by Machaut (*Le Jugement du Roy de Behaigne*, *La Fonteinne Amoureuse*, and *Le Remede de Fortune*) and Guillaume de Lorris’s version of the *Roman de la Rose*. If it is accepted that French literary traditions seriously shaped the development of a recognizably English literature, then defining a “true” Chaucerian voice and separating it from his French influences may be a useless and wasting proposition. Instead we may be safer accepting that the true Chaucer was partly French, and enriched a budding English literature with French inspirations.

In his groundbreaking book *Chaucer and the French Love Poets*, James Wimsatt provides a clear delineation of Chaucer’s actual borrowing from Froissart’s *Paradys*: it is Froissart’s use of a frame story to embrace his narrative to which Chaucer is primarily indebted. Wimsatt’s analysis is succinct and worth repeating here:

In both *Paradys* and the *Duchess* the poet is troubled with insomnia and melancholy thoughts, which cause and ensue from his sleeplessness; the thoughts are occasioned by the poet’s love and his frustration in pursuit of his love. Each poet prays for sleep to Juno and Morpheus, offering gifts; he thereupon goes to sleep, and is subsequently convinced that he would not have slept if it had not

been for these prayers. Each has a dream which he believes is meaningful, and is awakened by a happening in the dream Each poet, as soon as he wakes up, consciously notes that he is in his own bed, and each closes on a professional note with a statement about the poetic material which the dream has provided. (124)

This much is uncontested. The dimension that Wimsatt adds to Chaucer source criticism that is truly fascinating is the suggestion that Chaucer in fact influenced Froissart in return. The premise itself is not without precedent; Wimsatt notes that several scholars have previously cited chronological anomalies in dating Froissart's *Paradys* which, they argued, proved he borrowed material from Chaucer's *Book of the Duchess*. Wimsatt concludes that further study shows "the weight of evidence overwhelmingly favours the priority of Froissart's poem" (120), but he does use the episode to introduce his own theory of Froissartian source-work on Chaucer: Wimsatt claims it is much more plausible that Froissart's poem *Le Dit du Bleu Chevalier* was written after the *Book of the Duchess*, and that Froissart modelled sections of the *Bleu Chevalier* on Chaucer's poem. He cites "Froissart's failure to name his *Bleu [C]hevalier* in his list of works in the *Joli [B]uissou de [J]onece*" (132) of 1373, which lists the other titles of his oeuvre, as support for his theory, along with the narrator's use of Socrates in both poems as a model of strength and judgement.

John Fyler seriously questions the viability of Wimsatt's theory; he professes himself "much more persuaded by Susan Crane's argument that the *Bleu Chevalier* predates the *Book of the Duchess* and may have influenced it" (198). More damning to Wimsatt's contention, however, is William Calin's claim that Froissart may never have read English at all: "we have no data in *Les Chroniques* or the poetic corpus to indicate that Froissart learned to speak and read in English" (*French Tradition*, 198). There is the slim possibility that one of their mutual

acquaintances may have translated a work of Chaucer's from English to French before giving it to Froissart (Sir Richard Stury, perhaps), but here we are on uncertain ground rife with false possibilities; lacking historical documentation, Froissart's English capabilities may never be proven, and so Wimsatt's theory remains, at best, impossible to corroborate.

Summary

There are some facts that can be proven, based on the literary borrowings of Chaucer from Froissart, that directly inform the discussion of their mutual concern for their societies and the thematic subjects from which they draw, albeit separately. The pervasiveness of French poetic culture in England can be said to have created the poetic Chaucer as much as his English heritage did, and it certainly was responsible for much of his inspiration throughout his career. Both authors carefully read the thirteenth century *Roman de la Rose*, Lorris's and de Meun's versions, as well as poems by Machaut and others, and followed numerous traditions established in these works. If their works are sufficiently similar in use of classical and French sources to have modern scholars questioning who actually influenced whom, my theory that they reacted similarly to later events of their time, and that their common interests manifested themselves in their later masterpieces (*Les Chroniques*, the *Canterbury Tales*) cannot be without foundation. The parallels between the two poets and their works are undeniable, compelling, and demand further study; logically, then, an introduction to the works I have identified as being particularly informative in my investigation of Chaucer and Froissart's literary similarities is called for here. I will therefore devote my next chapter to textual introductions of *The Franklin's Tale* and the *Chroniques*.

Chapter Two

Introduction to the Texts

For Geoffrey Brereton, Froissart's *Chroniques* "reveal the same kind of human and social curiosity which underlies the *Canterbury Tales*" (9). As a foundation in my thematic comparison of the *Chroniques* and *The Franklin's Tale*, the "human and social curiosity" that Brereton identifies can help to illuminate the usefulness of investigating Chaucer's and Froissart's analogous treatments of similar topoi and social phenomena. This chapter will serve as a general introduction to Chaucer's *Franklin's Tale* and Froissart's *Chroniques*, with attention paid to the plot or chapter structures of each, as well as providing information on sources and analogues each author used, in preparation for the more specifically thematic comparisons of later chapters.

The Franklin's Tale

Structurally as part of the *Canterbury* collection *The Franklin's Tale* is situated in Fragment V, Group F of the tales, after *The Squire's Tale*. Benson estimates the date of its creation as between 1392 to 1395 (*Riverside*, xxix). The plot of the tale centres on the moral dilemma created and resolved within the confines of a nobly-born love triangle; the tale is told by a Franklin, one of the *gentils* on the Canterbury pilgrimage and an established member of the lower echelons of the ruling class. In his tale, the Franklin describes a knight, Arveragus, in love with his wife, Dorigen, and living happily in "Armorik" (Armorica, an ancient name for Brittany) on the rocky coast. Arveragus wins Dorigen after performing many knightly labours to win her attention and gain the respect of her family, and has the wisdom to promise her that he will never resort to autocratic rule over her in marriage; in return, Dorigen promises not to abuse

his trust and never to give him reason to complain of her. The two endeavour to live happily in Arveragus's castle until he feels the itch to pursue knightly adventures in England, "to seke ein armes worshipe and honour" (l. 811), and departs from Armorik by ship. Dorigen misses him gravely, and while surveying the jagged rocks of the coast (over which he must cross on his return) she develops a fear that he will wreck on them and die before he sees her again.

Meanwhile Aurelius, a squire, falls secretly in love with her. When Aurelius declares himself to her, Dorigen is horrified at the thought of being unfaithful to her husband. In a gentle effort to diffuse his attentions and allay her fears, she claims that the day he can make the rocks of the coast disappear (and thereby ensure Arveragus's safe passage) she will yield to him. As Dorigen intends, Aurelius recognizes that the task of making the rocks disappear is impossible, and after beseeching various pagan gods to perform the miracle for him, he takes comfort from his brother, a clerk, who is concerned for Aurelius's health.

Arveragus returns home safely, and reunites happily with his wife. Aurelius is not ready to give up the challenge of winning Dorigen, though, and he and his brother contrive to meet with a magician who promises that for a rather princely sum, he will make the rocks disappear. Aurelius agrees to pay whatever price is needed, and the magician works his magic illusions on the coast. When Aurelius shows Dorigen that the rocks appear to be gone, she is utterly dismayed; she returns to Arveragus and spends time agonizing over the promise she made before finally confiding in him and revealing that she pledged herself to Aurelius if he could work the miracle that seemed to have been created. It is at this point in the tale that the moral dilemmas, all of them, become clear. Arveragus comforts his wife and tells her she must honour the bargain she made, before sending her off to Aurelius. His sole requirement is that she never let anyone discover what she has done. Weeping, Dorigen meets Aurelius in the garden where they met, and

her misery and Arveragus's honour in insisting she fulfil her pledge melt his heart; he sends her back to her husband, relieving her of her promise to him. Aurelius in his turn admits to the magician that he cannot pay him and has not gained his lady. In danger of beggaring himself and losing his patrimony, Aurelius promises to pay the magician over a course of years. The magician, however, moved by the noble behaviour of both Arveragus and Aurelius, forgives the debt owed and frees Aurelius from the crushing financial obligation. In the end the Franklin implies that the *gentillesse* shown originally by the knight travels down through the levels of society to the squire and magician, and due their reciprocal kindness to each other, all characters become free of the dilemma.

Critically, most recent treatments of the tale spend some time discussing key elements that are considered central to the narrative. The relationship of words to action in the tale has been considered important, and is treated by Paul Beekman Taylor ("Chaucer's Chain of Love") and Michaela Paasche Grudin ("Chaucer and the Politics of Discourse"), among others. Appreciating psychological realism in place of situational realism is central in understanding the tale, in order that readers not become fixated on calculating the likelihood of a husband encouraging his wife to commit adultery. This is consistent with its genre, declared at the outset by the Franklin as being a Breton *lai* that unfolds in pagan antiquity. As such, the story is free of Christian fixations such as a single godhead and the adulterous aspect of Arveragus pushing Dorigen into Aurelius's arms. The Franklin's identification of the tale as a *lai* signifies more than merely the easing of restrictions on the storyline; in order to fully appreciate the tale and its themes, it is necessary to acknowledge the significance of magic within it. The Franklin uses the spectre of magic and magical illusions to propel his plot; Chaucer uses magic to accomplish considerably weightier goals. As Sweeney has pointed out, magic was used as a favoured vehicle

in the romances to introduce and examine issues that contemporary audiences may otherwise have found unpalatable. An example of this is the fact that Arveragus, the able and passionate knight, is left vulnerable to the machinations of those socially inferior to him, and so, for that matter, is Dorigen. Knopp adds to the debate on magic and comments on the location and questionable nature of morality within the tale; discussing the powers of the magician and his impact on his fellow characters, she theorizes about the impact of magic on morality, stating: "...the relationship of art to morality is problematic not primarily because art is a limited vehicle for moral transformation, but because the real power and pleasure of the illusionist have nothing to do with morality. His goal is simply to compel belief" (347). As such, the status of the magical clerk within the tale becomes much more important than simply that of a supporting cast member. The clerk and his illusions, and the ramifications of these on the characters in the story, speak to the importance of magic in medieval romance; the tale is worthy of further study because the traditional emphasis on marital equality is no longer the tale's most obvious critical point of entry.

In addition to the critical treatments mentioned above, some interesting facts about the tale's sources and analogues are worth attention, concisely categorized by Cooper. Its closest analogues are "two versions of a single story by Boccaccio, one in the *Filocolo* and one in the *Decameron*" (233). She continues:

In both Boccaccio's stories, a knight persists in pressing his attentions on another knight's wife until she decides to get rid of him by demanding of him that he produce a blossoming garden in January. With the help of a magician, the lover accomplishes this, and the lady comes to visit it. Unable to hide her distress from her husband, she tells him everything, and he commands her to fulfill her promise.

The lover is so moved by the husband's reaction that he releases her, and the magician in turn refuses payment. (233)

Cooper describes several differences, notably that Chaucer includes in his story Dorigen's love for her husband, and his complete return of that love. Most important is that in place of the *gentillesse* that acts as the prime motivating factor in Chaucer's version, Boccaccio's "husband of the *Filocolo* reckons that the lover deserves his reward for his labours, and in the *Decameron* he is afraid of what the magician might do to them if he forbids his wife to fulfill her part of the bargain" (234). Arveragus and Dorigen's marriage as a partnership of equals "is influenced by the *Roman de la Rose*, where Ami, the Friend, argues that the servant-lover should not turn into the tyrant-husband, and that the woman must be free if love is to stay alive" (234). Finally, Dorigen makes a complaint against the dangers posed by the rocks, questioning the divine wisdom of their presence, which most critics cite as being based on Boethius. In her complaint, which centres on the question of whether she should better commit suicide than commit adultery, she recites a long list of women and girls who chose to die rather than lose their chastity. Jerome's *Adversus Jovinianum* is acknowledged as the source for the complaint; Cooper emphasizes that "Jerome's only good women were dead ones, who ha[d] removed themselves from the world as soon as opportunity offered" (234). James Sledd's influential article on Dorigen's complaint held that she listed examples from the classical world randomly, based on her hysterical distress, while Donald C. Baker creates three clear and logical divisions of women that Dorigen progressively names on her list (those who commit suicide before being raped, those who do so after, and those who are renowned for their chastity, 62). Warren Smith dedicates considerable attention to Dorigen's complaint and claims that Dorigen can also be considered to embrace an Augustinian approach to the subject of marriage. Smith credits

Dorigen with accomplishing her own solution to her problem: “Dorigen’s Lament reveals her struggling toward a resolution of her dilemma which will keep her from suicide and preserve both her ‘trothe’ and her fidelity to her husband” (389). According to Smith, Dorigen ultimately reveals, through the sympathy she evinces towards the dead victims of her lament, a much more humane and empathetic understanding of moral dilemma than does Jerome.

As Chaucer’s testament to the capacity of altruistic generosity – or attitude of *gentillesse* – to resolve conflict, *The Franklin’s Tale* is very valuable as a mirror of medieval thought. The human curiosity that may compel modern readers to pay attention to *The Franklin’s Tale* lies partly in the fascination of reading a medieval story that encourages some form of equality in love between genders; on a certain level, the tale does advise that happiness in marriage depends on freedom and equality between marital partners. As a tale of the *Canterbury* collection, it continues to receive serious critical attention, and has inspired insight into Chaucer’s innovative use of medieval and classical sources.

Froissart’s Chroniques

Structurally dissecting Froissart’s *Chroniques* based on plotlines would take more space than could possibly be allocated here; as they are chronicles and not tales, there are no analogues or sources to track down. It is useful, however, to briefly describe the four-book structure. Froissart composed his *Chroniques* in four books, starting in 1322 and ending in 1400. I agree with Brereton’s overall view of Froissart as not only the first great war journalist but as a gifted narrator possessed of the ability to relate the social importance of the events he witnessed, along with their historical importance. In Book One of the *Chroniques*, Froissart covers the years 1322–1377. He describes several major battles of the Hundred Years War, including the accession of Edward III and Edward’s death on June 21, 1377. Obviously, Froissart was not born

at the time of the events of Book One; he drew from a relatively unknown chronicle by Jean le Bel, a knight, soldier, and countryman, as he was a member of the entourage of John of Hainault, which survives in a “single, anonymous manuscript” with its narrative ending in 1360–61 (Brereton 13). Froissart acknowledges Le Bel as his source and praises him as a gallant knight possessed of courage and admirable narrative talent. After Book One, however, Froissart needs no other sources and is the sole narrator of his chronicles. Book Two covers the years 1376–85, and includes descriptions of the Great Schism of the church and the Peasants’ Revolt in England. Book Three is particularly fascinating, covering the years 1386–88, as Froissart uses it to describe his voyage to the court of Gaston Phoebus in Bearn, as well as Richard II’s dynastic struggles with his uncles in England. Book Four covers the years 1389–1400, and is relatively long, describing Froissart’s return to England in his later years and the undoing of Richard II; it ends with the accession of Henry Bolingbroke as Henry IV.

Brereton rightly praises Froissart not only for the respectability of his massive undertaking in recording so much history with so few resources, but also for the innovations he brought to the occupation of chronicling itself: “[h]is overriding preoccupation was to present the factual truth, but his talent – developing as he grew older – was for passages ... of exciting and continuous narrative” (16). Froissart created something new by combining memoir, institutional record, and romance with his own ingenuity; “the result was a new kind of chronicle, combining the virtues and defects of the individual eye-witness and the all-seeing eye” (16). He was entrenched in the ruling class of his time and had highly-placed connections who acted as sources; “Froissart saw the writer’s identity as expressed by his social relationships with magnates and their courtiers from all over Europe...” writes Butterfield. She continues:

Perhaps because of his Hainault (as opposed to English or French) background, Froissart was able to find a style of writing, especially in his *Chroniques*, that was able to modulate with ease between the different interests of the European aristocracy. The *Chroniques* create a world and tone that, while they do not omit differences and antagonisms, masterfully coordinate them in the interest of creating a vast, all-embracing narrative of and for high society. (“Nationhood,” 58)

It is obvious that Froissart’s literary subjects were also his audience; what is impressive about his *Chroniques* is that he undertook to record events as he understood them, while taking care to prevent his narrative from sliding too far away from objectivity or allowing himself to engage in emotional partisanship. At numerous points in the *Chroniques*, Froissart is called upon to record unpopular acts committed by men he respected and admired; his attempt at impartiality is innovative for his time, but also ensures that his history will continue to be studied and valued as a piece of early journalism.

Summary

The similarities between Chaucer and Froissart as medieval authors extend beyond their largely comparable social status and analogous historical placement; they exhibit a shared curiosity about the cultural and literary traditions of western Europe that becomes apparent in their works. It is clear that their audiences, as well as the subjects of their writing in *The Franklin’s Tale* and the *Chroniques*, are drawn from the ruling class. In fact Chaucer and Froissart share an interest in writing for, and attracting the attention of (or patronage of, in Froissart’s case) the nobility. I argue that one identifiable goal behind the writing of each work is to impart advice and provide appropriate moral example to those in a position to rule. The next

phase of my project therefore becomes an investigation, based on my chosen texts, of Chaucer's and Froissart's advice to the princely estate.

Chapter Three

The Advisors to Princes

Introduction

To examine Chaucer's and Froissart's treatment of gentility in *The Franklin's Tale* and the *Chroniques*, I must complete appropriate groundwork to be able to evaluate their commonalities. One of my goals is to investigate the ways in which they use their texts as frameworks to experiment with, and promote, the idea of gentility. I will therefore establish the social identity of the audience they were writing for, as well as the type of writing they engaged in: first the court-poet tradition they inherited, then their evolution away from love poetry, as their audience began demanding literature with broader topics and aristocratic interest veered towards the consumption and collection of history writing. I will then study the idea of literarily furnishing examples of ethical behaviour, and locate examples of this in the texts. It will become clear that the texts demonstrate the authors' curiosity about the literary transmission of traditions and values, leading to the conclusion that they use the works to impart advice to the ruling estate.

The Advisors to Princes

No matter the disparity between their careers and eventual social standing in their respective societies, with Chaucer drawing his material livelihood from distinguished civil service and Froissart favouring more traditional poet-patron relationships, it cannot be disputed that both began their literary journeys in much the same fashion. Lillian Bisson summarizes Chaucer's poetic endeavours by stating that they "began at court, where writing verse for oral

delivery to divert a social elite was an expected skill for a promising courtier. He functioned in a fluid social environment in which aristocratic patrons and their retainers periodically reassessed their ties” (24). The similarity between this and Froissart’s debut is clear, and though Froissart remained more or less faithful to the courtly model of remuneration as reward for literary efforts expended, it would be naive to underestimate Chaucer’s courtly attachments or the impact his audience had on his writing. In general, the court poet model of literary output remained intact throughout the fourteenth century, but the *substance* of poetic compositions, and the regard in which poets were held by their courtly audiences, underwent a wave of change. During the high middle ages the position of the court-pleasing storytelling minstrel was established and secure; by the fourteenth century the profession of the court poet materialized, and the subject of romantic love emerged as his major topos and inspiration. During this time, however, the attitude of the poet’s audience began to evolve; the subject of love was not exclusionary or dependent on acquired expertise, and though specific methods of transmission may have required some education to compose (Froissart’s structured ballades, virelays and rondeaux being obvious examples), the poetic subject of love was one that the court poet’s audience could appreciate and contribute to. It is precisely this audience interaction that proved the catalyst for the transformation of the court poet’s role, and the gradual lessening of the esteem he had traditionally enjoyed. Bisson characterizes the transformation of audience attitude by claiming that courtly “auditors considered themselves – at least potentially – as fellow artists. Because of the aristocracy’s new role in shaping literary tastes and in actually producing their own literary works, the poet-performer lost much of his mystique” (24). Richard Firth Green identifies the transformation as a shift from a “literature of performance” to a “literature of participation” (111), emphasising the emerging importance of audience in poetic works of western Europe

during the fourteenth century. Considering the changing role of the court poet, and the loss of esteem normally paid him due to the increasing infringement by a confident aristocratic audience on the literary territory of romantic love, the question that materialized was what direction the poet should take to reclaim his eroding place of privilege. What was the court poet to do? To answer this question, I will examine the changes that affected poetic intentions and themes in the fourteenth century by focusing on Chaucer's and Froissart's reactions to them, first through selected critical views and then through an analysis of selections of the texts themselves.

An observable result of both *The Franklin's Tale* and the *Chroniques* is that the authors partook in a genre that can be considered "advice to princes"; they distinguished themselves and wrote themselves into the required reading lists of the aristocracy of the late medieval and early modern periods by offering literary edification to rulers. As such, they parlayed their education and superior poetic skills in creating a niche for themselves that was relatively secure from the predations of the courtly audience; romantic love poetry may have become an interactive sport, but writing advice for princes was considered a more precarious proposition, dependent on experience, subtlety, and a certain amount of credibility in order to be considered authoritative. By the end of the fourteenth century both Chaucer and Froissart had established reputations founded on their expertise in the transmission of noble concepts and exemplary action through literature.

Though the interaction of audience, poet and text can be thought of as an extension of the traditional auditory role, and a concomitant lessening of the role of poet-entertainer, in fact poets of the later middle ages were accustomed to audience participation and wove it into their poetic storytelling. Bisson cites Chaucer's "ironically detached, self-mocking stance" (24) as at least

partly finding its locus in his audience's increased participation, resulting in the encouragement and furtherance of that participation to effect some edifying goal. Interestingly, Bisson notes that

[t]he open-endedness of many Chaucerian works and his tendency to leave his audience with a question like the one at the end of *The Franklin's Tale* reflect this ... and highlight the involvement that a medieval poet expected from his audience. This highly interactive relationship between poet-performer and his attending audience supports the recent critical emphasis on a community of readers' / auditors' role in creating a text's meaning. Thus in addition to diverting his auditors, the poet engaged his audience in a process of forming and sharing common values. (25)

The Franklin's Tale, then, is an excellent example of poetic reaction and interaction with an audience, but it is also more than that. Because the subject matter of the tale involves both romantic love and ethical dilemmas, and because it ends with an open question to its audience (whether the Franklin's pilgrims or Chaucer's readers), it can be considered an instance where the older poetic tradition of reciting romance stories intersects with the later medieval idea of edification through poetry. Bisson's "court poet" of the high middle ages "who composed and recited love poems and recounted stories of knightly romance and adventure" (24) is clearly identifiable in the Franklin, as is Chaucer's goal in using the entertainment thus afforded to engage his audience in recognizing values that he considered worthy of emulation. Chaucer is particularly clever to draw his Franklin's story from the genre of romance to pique his audience's attention; Philips states that French romance in particular "was the dominant influence on medieval European secular writing [I]t was a central force in the cultural world of European aristocracy, reflecting and promoting that class's values and self-image" (300) and the stories of

major works of French romance from the thirteenth century (the *Roman de Troie*, the *Roman de la Rose*) though no longer contemporary, had thoroughly filtered down through the strata of Chaucer's society and would have been familiar to the Franklin's listeners. Chaucer uses the romance genre, with its potential to mix "internal conflicts and complexities" (300) to throw into relief social differences between the Franklin's protagonists in its examination of *gentil* behaviour. The social status of the Franklin himself has been a subject of critical interest; "like Chaucer himself a knight of the shire ... [the Franklin] is hardly a member of the knightly class. It is therefore appropriate that class tensions over the status of knighthood and its claims to *gentillesse* are apparent from the very beginning of the Franklin's performance" (Sherman 107). Investigating the historical as well as social context of the tale, Sherman further invokes class differences when he states that Dorigen's "beauty and lineage ... place her in a superior social position to Arveragus" but that once he has won her his martial responsibilities as a participant in the culture of chivalry require that he involve Dorigen in his knightly world: he insists that she fulfill her promise to the squire because "being true to one's word was a central element in the chevalier's code" (108). Sherman questions whether the ultimate solution to the tale's dilemma "even begin[s] to consider Dorigen's perspective" (108) and Philips echoes his concern with Dorigen's status at the end of the tale, reminding readers that medieval audiences would have understood the tale, and the chivalric tradition it invokes, much differently than modern ones:

Any reader familiar with the world of romances would accept that, in leaving Dorigen 'to seke in armes worshipe and honour' (l. 811), Arveragus acts honourably. Modern readers might criticize him; almost certainly a misreading in terms of romance tradition and its usual assumptions, and the episode's role in the tale. The tension between that modern, critical approach (pro-wife) and the

privileging of masculine military honour usual in romances (pro-glory) was not, however, always repressed in the history of romance; it surfaced in some early French romances, notably Chretien de Troyes's *Yvain* (c. 1177). (301)

Using the romance genre as it was understood by his audience allowed Chaucer to play on themes of social difference within the chivalric class, both within the tale and in the person of the Franklin who tells it. Possibly he thought that the Franklin's status as a lower-born member of the *gentil* class would allow him to bridge the gap between Knight and Host, for example, and include all the pilgrims, no matter their social position, in his final *demande* at the tale's end; the *demande* also, however, provides an example of audience interaction working at multiple levels through the tale, and Chaucer's effectiveness at establishing and maintaining audience interest in the essentially ethical questions he raises.

With regards to the social context of *The Franklin's Tale*, I wish to mention the character of the Franklin for one further reason. The Franklin opens the tale by characterizing it as a Breton *lai*, begging the question of why Chaucer wants to associate his Franklin with the Breton *lai* tradition. Archibald points out that “[s]ome critics have argued that the Franklin is an old-fashioned person who tells an old-fashioned story. Hume claims that Chaucer was nervous about responses to a story of potential adultery and magic, and diverted possible criticism by introducing his tale as a Breton lay, and also setting it in a pagan context” (68). Archibald finds both these views “implausible” (68), as Chaucer consistently subverted his audience's expectations of genre in the *Canterbury Tales*, and *The Franklin's Tale* should be considered no exception. She quotes John Finlayson's definition of a Breton *lai* as:

...a short narrative poem, characterized by a concentration on simplicity of action, and divisible into two essentially different types: the principal type of *lay* is

essentially a short romance which usually involves some supernatural element;
the other an ordeal tale which generally involved improbable coincidences. (56)

Archibald is not entirely satisfied with Finlayson's definition, however, and adds another element that I find convincing: many Breton *lais* included some form of adultery. Given his penchant for contradictions within genres, I agree with Archibald that it seems more characteristic for Chaucer to "introduce his story as a French-style Breton lay, a genre known to his audience which aroused expectations of a *malmarieé* and her search for love outside marriage, [and then] turn those generic expectations inside-out by telling a story of a very happily married woman ... who finds herself obliged to sleep with [an admirer] at her own husband's urging" (68). I enjoy Archibald's assertion not only because it helps shed light on *The Franklin's Tale* as a Breton *lai*, but because she establishes that Chaucer's audience was very familiar with the Breton *lai* tradition, so familiar that they would recognize and enjoy his subversion of one characteristic of the genre. This audience recognition and comfort supports the success of his interaction with his listeners (and putative readers), and clarifies his encouragement to them to participate in his poetry. Naming the tale's genre at its outset is not only safely within the conventions of the Breton *lai*, it also establishes what its audience can expect from it (the supernatural, romance, knightly endeavours, adultery) so that when an unexpected element arises (an ethical question the audience is asked to partake in, and ponder) the starkness of this contrast is clearer. Chaucer's audience, and the Franklin's, is wholly involved in the tale from the outset, and is ready to examine its notable divergences from type.

Chaucer's Italian influences, as well as his French ones, propelled him towards a vision of the author as creating more than advanced textual minstrelsy or serving as court bard. Influenced already by the French poetic tradition, he was introduced to the Italian humanist

movement during two trips to Italy, and as Bisson states, his journeys “enlarged the scope of his materials and his vision of the poet’s function. Being a court entertainer and a moral counsellor must have seemed limited and inadequate to him after his encounter with the exalted vision of ... contemporary Italians like Dante, Petrarch and Boccaccio” (25). Bisson summarizes that Dante’s vision of the poet’s role as being prophetic was a concept Chaucer certainly was exposed to but did not entirely share. As his writing matured, however, she claims that he “certainly saw himself as more than a court entertainer: his concept of his audience expands to include the unseen readers who turn the pages of his manuscripts” (40) which meshes nicely with the question to his audience at the end of *The Franklin’s Tale*. Further, it indicates that though he did not feel justified that his writing was sufficiently inspired as to possess a prophetic quality, he did feel that involving his audience in questions of moral dilemma, and providing superior examples of moral behaviour, were worthy poetic functions.

Froissart’s reasons for writing his *Chroniques*, and the path he followed before arriving at the decision to create a written record of events in western Europe, reveal themselves to be similar to Chaucer’s. In *Poets and Princepleasers*, Richard Firth Green quotes C.S. Lewis in his identification of three motivational factors that influenced medieval authors to write history, with the third being

...to entertain our imagination, to gratify our curiosity, and to discharge a debt we owe to our ancestors ... [Lewis] then adds a fourth, which he finds articulated in the preface to Froissart’s chronicles – to furnish “ensample”: by this he [Froissart] does not mean those “lessons of history” which can be drawn from the success or failure of previous statesmanship or strategy. He means that by reading of valiant deeds “the prewe and hardy may have ensample to encourage them”. (137)

Furnishing “ensample”, then, may be interpreted as providing inspiration to the nobility to emulate, and encourage, “valiant deeds”. By any standard, C.S. Lewis has identified in Froissart the intention to create “advice to princes” writing, first because it upholds and encourages the “prewe and hardy”, and secondly because of the specificity in naming “valiant deeds” that are worthy of repetition.

Froissart himself iterates the desire that his work will outlive him and provide inspiration to successive generations in his prologue to Book Three. Here he investigates “the problematic nature of the transmission (or transmissibility) from one generation to the next of power, nobility, and chivalry” (Ainsworth 17) which itself clearly supports the desire to literarily issue advice to those in a position to rule. In a recent discussion of this prologue, Ainsworth translates the relevant sentence thus

For well I know that, when I am dead and rotten in the grave, this noble and lofty history will be noised both far and wide, and all noble and valiant men derive pleasure and profit therefrom... (16)

from deLettenhove’s original:

...car bien sçay que ou temps advenir, quant je serai mort et pourry, ceste noble et haulte histoire sera en grant cours, et y prendront tous nobles et vaillans homes plaisance et augmentation de bien. (deLettenhove, tome 11, 2)

As they do in C.S. Lewis’s observation, two tenets emerge here as vital and connected: the importance of providing inspiration to valiant action that survives temporal mortality, and the high rank of the audience targeted by such inspiration – in other words, members of the ruling class. In terms of what that may have meant to Froissart as an author, Ainsworth remarks that

increasingly in the *Chroniques*, and especially in the last two books, the writer's fate seems to be realized as a "self-conscious preserver of the past and [a] guarantor of tradition" (17).

If we are to consider him the "guarantor" of a tradition founded on ideas of chivalry, noble action and inherited power, Froissart encounters some challenges in describing his "voyage to Bearn" in the third book of the *Chroniques*. In order to trace some of the fascinating narrative problems he encounters, we must first establish that in describing part of Froissart's intention in writing the *Chroniques* as his concern with ensuring the continuance of a chivalric society, we do not necessarily differentiate him from later advisors such as Machiavelli, who traded in what can be anachronistically termed Realpolitik. Froissart's ideal of the transmission to nobility of examples of "valiant" conduct is based on a vision of society that is not itself idyllic. In fact, the *Chroniques* themselves give readers a view of the fourteenth century that is far from anything noble or chivalric. Geoffrey Brereton writes unflinchingly of Froissart's descriptions:

[I]n reading Froissart with one's mind free of Victorian preoccupations of "very perfect gentle knights" (who were Arthurian rather than Chaucerian) ... one's first impression is of crudely savage small wars and private feuds in emergent nations not far removed from tribalism The savagery of fourteenth-century Europe was tempered and sometimes controlled by a tradition of order and culture. Its guardians were precisely the same knightly class which on occasion massacred its prisoners and tortured its enemies in public.... (18-19)

He continues: "It is hardly cynical to say that this was chivalry in Froissart's day ... an observance of rules among an international stratum of society through fear of the penalties of infringement" (19).

Given this tumultuous state of affairs, Froissart's wish to transmit a model of behaviour to serve as inspiration for successive generations of rulers becomes more clear: he was not in fact living in a chivalric society that had to be passed on, perfect and intact, to its inheritors. He was trying to expand on ideas of beneficent and generous behaviour, which for my purposes I will call "chivalric", in order to improve the state of his society for the better. Brereton finally encapsulates this point when he states

of course [chivalry] had its forms which were highly important because *the image they helped to create promoted the knightly ideal*. Men sometimes behaved 'chivalrously' or 'courteously' with no thought of self-interest *This was the ideal pattern*, rare enough to be singled out for special mention, and not of course without influence on lesser men. (20; italics mine)

Specific instances of the ideal, then, acted as rays of light in Froissart's narrative and were deliberately included in the hopes of inspiring like behaviour in others. He was not the guarantor of an honourable chivalric tradition so much as he was a self-motivated record keeper possessed of the intelligence to identify and isolate instances of behaviour that he considered beneficial to his society. In recording these instances, at some points stepping outside his narrative and specifically highlighting them to ensure they would be recognized as admirable, he argues his case that they should be emulated.

It is safe to argue that Froissart was certainly an admirer of chivalry and a promoter of chivalric values, but the evidence of his writing suggests he did not believe he was living in a society whose members routinely manifested those values. Rather, he used his *Chroniques* to ensure that the examples of chivalric virtue he witnessed were recorded, in order that they could transmit to successive members of his society a model of behaviour superior to ones they may

otherwise (and quite likely would have) engaged in. Given that Froissart recognized the era in which he wrote as being capricious at best and usually quite dangerous, it now becomes possible to address an episode from his “voyage to Bearn” chapter in Book Three.

Reading Froissart’s descriptions of fourteenth century warfare is necessary in preparation for this chapter because though his journey can be read as an extended investigative vacation, his interviews with various interlocutors reveal serious undercurrents at the court and in the family of his host Gaston Phoebus, count of Foix. Froissart describes Phoebus in this way:

De toutes choses il estoit si parfait et tant apris que on ne le pavoit trop loer

Saige chevalier estoit et de haulte emprinse, et pourveu de bon conseil.

(deLettenhove, tome 11, 86)

...so accomplished in every way that it would be impossible to praise him too highly ... he was a shrewd nobleman, bold in action and sound in judgement.

(Brereton 264)

Several other ebullient descriptions of him indicate Froissart’s belief that Phoebus approached, as closely as any other character in the *Chroniques*, the embodiment of the chivalric ideal. The idea that Phoebus *approached* ideals of chivalry is important; Froissart’s own narrative describes Phoebus’s murder of his only legitimate son, and several other instances in the Bearn chapter that occur under Phoebus’s aegis dramatically break from the model of chivalric ideology. The divisiveness Froissart recognizes in larger society (isolated examples of altruism intermingled with barbarity) finds its parallel in Count Phoebus’s character. Peter Ainsworth identifies this mix of cruelty and goodness and formulates a theory that it is “perhaps because of Johan Huizinga’s enduring influence, [that] the darker notes in Froissart’s work (stories of parricide, spirit possession, and political assassination, among other fare) have all too often been associated

with the alleged waning of the Middle Ages” (28). If by “waning” of the middle ages Ainsworth partially implies a perception of the decline of chivalric values as practiced by the nobility, I would argue that Froissart’s descriptions of unruly lawlessness, even and especially on the part of the nobility, defeat the idea that he believed he was observing an era in moral decline:

Froissart recognized his contemporaries as already being prone to cruelty and error. What can be argued is that Froissart was sufficiently sophisticated as to accept the flaws in his contemporaries and his society while writing them into his narrative, with the faith that his readers would possess similar sophistication – enough, in fact, to read through the obvious faults and recognize the virtue in the examples he chose to use. By trusting his readership as he does, Froissart shares in Chaucer’s method of involving his audience in his text. Though Froissart’s usage involves audience interaction that is more contemplative than Chaucer’s, his faith that the layers of his narrative will be understood by an aristocratic audience implies a similar connection with them.

As the target of Froissart’s and Chaucer’s intended edification and literary provision of “ensample”, their reading audience demands consideration. Green devotes a chapter of *Poets and Princepleasers* to the cogent point that reading audiences of the later medieval period seem largely to have lost the fervency of their interest in romances, visions, and songs of love. Replacing romance on aristocratic reading lists was historical writing; introducing this point, Green states that “a utilitarian view of the written word was in fact by no means uncommon and that the aristocracy in general showed a surprising degree of respect for the practical value of literature” (135). Literary authorities were respected, and Green succeeds unequivocally in making clear that Froissart’s *Chroniques* earned their place alongside Livy and Suetonius in the libraries of late medieval aristocrats and royalty, and not merely to add prestige or ornamentation: “three of Edward IV’s history books needed rebinding in 1480 (a fact which

suggests that they had been well used) and in 1481 Louis XI paid over 6 livres for the covering of his volumes of Froissart, the which he has had re-covered” (136). Froissart was not only read, then, but valued enough to warrant care and some expense to maintain. As well, the fact that Green includes mention of the “volumes of Froissart” after listing Edward IV’s history books indicates that it was the *Chroniques*, and not Froissart’s numerous romance works, that were recovered. (Green’s fifth chapter of *Poets and Princepleasers* is particularly informative about medieval guides for those in authority, including, importantly, the *Secretum Secretorum*, the *Book of Noblesse*, and Sir Gilbert Haye’s *Buke of Governaunce of Princis*).

If it is true that neither Chaucer nor Froissart are thought to have deliberately composed any of their complete works as intended handbooks for rulers, it is also true that evidence of their intentions to educate rulers can be found in abundance in their texts. Froissart favours the technique of periodically distancing himself from his running narrative to speak directly to his readers, and it cannot be disputed that he imagines a readership that stands to profit from his advice. In Book Four of the *Chroniques*, he describes the downfall and abdication of Richard II after the Duke of Lancaster, Henry Bolingbroke, has been recalled to England by Englishmen tired of Richard’s increasingly treacherous reign, but particularly by the Londoners, who reserve special hatred for Richard after the unpopular (and ill-advised) tax policies and trading restrictions he placed on them.

At immediate stake in this episode is Richard’s life: Lancaster has imprisoned him with twelve of his knights in the Tower of London, and while the city seethes around him he names his four principal advisors,

...ainsi que celluy qui avoit espérance de avoir délivrance de là et aler ent quitte
et passer pour ceulx qui le plus conseillié l’avoient, ainsi que autrefois on l’avoit

quitté et que ceulx par lequel conseil il avoit mésusé, estoient demourés en la peine. (deLettenhove, tome 16, 193)

...evidently hoping that this would provide a way out and he would be acquitted at the expense of his chief counsellors. (Brereton 456)

Ensuring that Richard and his knights could witness, the enraged Londoners tie the unfortunate four to horses, drag them in consecutive order through London to Cheapside, “et là sus ung estal de poissonier on leur trencha les testes” (deLettenhove, tome 16, 196; “and there, on a fishmonger’s slab, their heads [are] cut off” Brereton 457). Richard is left trembling in the Tower, awaiting the outcome of negotiations between Lancaster and the Londoners as to what his fate should be. At this point Froissart relates the advice his remaining knights and counsellors give him:

Sire, il se fault reconforter. Nous veons bien que de ce monde il n’est plus rien pour nous et que les fortunes sont moult merveilleuses et tournent à la fois autant bien sus les roys et sus les princes que sus les povres gens. (de Lettenhove, tome 16, 197)

Sire ... you must take heart. We know, and you know, that this world is vanity and its chances and changes are unpredictable. Fortune sometimes runs against kings and princes as well as against humble people. (Brereton 458)

In a bid to save their lives, Richard’s counsellors advise him to abdicate the throne and accept imprisonment or exile, and Lancaster is sent for to hear his concession speech.

The actions of Richard II, and the contempt in which he was held by his subjects, is itself informative in studying Froissart’s treatment of him and the use Froissart made of his example in advising rulers. Christopher Fletcher devotes much attention to contemporary characterizations

of Richard II; “Amongst English kings” Fletcher writes, “Richard II enjoys, with the dishonourable exception of Edward II, perhaps the most unmanly reputation of the later Middle Ages” (3). Fletcher examines whether Richard deserved the reputation he carried into history, and what exactly constituted “manliness” in the fourteenth century. Particularly with regards to Froissart, who most critics acknowledge was a great admirer of the Black Prince (Richard’s father), Fletcher’s article is informative:

For his most recent biographer [according to Fletcher, Richard Saul] the king remains a “slightly epicene” character, who was judged severely by his contemporaries perhaps because “the chroniclers were measuring him against the manliness of his father, who, in his prime, had been an exceptionally vigorous man” [A]rchbishop of Canterbury, Thomas Arundel ... argued that Richard behaved like a boy (*puer*) and thus ought not to rule. Henry of Lancaster, on the other hand, who had just toppled Richard from the throne, was a man (*vir*) and therein lay his right to govern. This was despite the fact that both Richard and Henry were 32 years of age. (4-5)

The chroniclers who measured Richard against the Black Prince certainly included Froissart, who had documented the extraordinary victories and battles of the Prince during the Hundred Years’ War. Further, the idea of earning the throne through manly exertions would have appealed to Froissart who wrote in his Prologue to the *Chroniques* that “faits d’armes qui si chièrement sont comparés, doivent estre donnés et loyaument départis à ceulx qui par proesce y travaillent” (deLettenhove, tome 2, 5; “deeds of arms, in which distinction is so dearly bought, should be faithfully credited to those whose valour has achieved them” Brereton 38). The idea of valorous deeds deserving merit has a prominent place in Froissart’s thought; though it is perhaps

stretching the idea to include the toppling of kings and establishment of new monarchical regimes as being merely “valorous deeds”, it is clear that Froissart admired the temerity and courage Lancaster displayed in his seizure of the throne. This despite the fact that Froissart had been a beneficiary of Richard II’s largesse, as he describes in Book Four when he states that as a former clerk of Queen Philippa, Richard II welcomed him to court during his last visit to England in his later years. Froissart himself goes so far as to record the doubts cast on Richard’s parentage due to his unmanly behaviour. Describing the “concession” discussion between Lancaster and Richard in his Tower cell, Froissart credits Lancaster as claiming

...tant que commune renommée court parmy Angleterre et ailleurs que vous ne fustes oncques fils au prince de Galles, mais d’un clerc ou d’un chanoine ... [d]u premier on ne scet que dire, mais de vous, pour tant que on a veu-vos meurs et conditions trop contraires et différentes aux vaillances et prouesses du prince....
(deLettenhove, tome 16, 200)

...the rumour is, throughout England and beyond, that you are not the son of the Prince of Wales....[A]bout you, whose habits and character are so different from the warlike nature of the Prince, it is said that your father was a clerk or canon.
(Brereton 460).

Clearly, if Froissart had felt that Richard II’s actions were demonstrably king-like and therefore the assumption about his lineage unfair, he would not have written this episode into his permanent record of events. We must therefore take into consideration the example Froissart wanted to make of Richard for the edification of future rulers: a cautionary tale, and an example of the consequences of ineffective, rash and capricious (unprincely) action.

How exactly Froissart was made privy to the conversations of Richard II and his counsellors in the darkest hour of his reign is uncertain, and Froissart himself does not explain who his sources were for the conversation in the Tower. Periodically throughout the *Chroniques* he takes pride in claiming that he has recorded all events as accurately as possible, and because Richard was still alive when he abdicated the throne and Lancaster was crowned, it seems at least plausible that even if he did not in fact have a source physically placed in the Tower cell with Richard, some semblance of the conversation he recorded still would have happened. It is the substance of the conversation that still fascinates; the words of Richard's advisors strongly echo the advice and ideas of Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy*. This effect is amplified later in the chapter, when after a suspicious death in Pontefract Castle Richard II's corpse is escorted through London in a funeral procession. Froissart uses the opportunity to briefly depart from his narrative and address his readers directly:

Or, considérés, seigneurs, roys, ducs, contes, prélats et toutes gens de lignage et de puissance, comment les fortunes de cestuy monde sont merveilles et tournent diversement. Le roy Richart régna roy d'Angleterre vingt-et-deux ans en grant prospérité tant que de tenir estas et seinouries; car il n'y ot oncques roy en Angleterre, qui despendesist autant à cent mille florins par an pour son hostel tant seulement et son estat tenir, que fist le roy Richart de Bourdeaulx. Car moy, Jehan Froissart, chanoine de Lille et de Chymay et tr sorier en l'église de Chymay, le vey et bien considéray ... [je] suis moult tenu à pryer pour luy, et envis escripvy de sa mort. Mais, pour tant que dittée, ordonnée et augmentée j'ai ceste présente histoire à mon léal povoir, j'en escripvy ce que j'en sçavoie pour icelle heure pour

donner congnoissance de son adventure et ce que il devint. (deLettenhove, tome 16, 233-34)

Now, lords, consider well, kings, dukes, counts, prelates, all men of noble lineage and power, how fickle are the chances of this world. King Richard reigned over England for twenty-two years in great prosperity, holding rich estates and fiefs. No King of England before had come within a hundred thousand florins a year of spending as much as he did on the mere upkeep of his court and the pomp that went with it. For I, Jean Froissart, canon and treasurer of Chimay, saw and observed it at first hand I have a strong obligation to pray for him and I am grieved to write of his death. But since I have compiled and written this history and have continued it to the best of my knowledge and ability, I have recorded it to make known what became of him. (Brereton 469)

In immediate and direct fashion, the passage informs contemporary readers of Froissart's own idea of his audience: he names rulers, "all men of noble lineage and power". Considering this direct address to those inhabiting the various strata of the ruling estate, there can be no mistaking his intention of using the *Chroniques* as a form of advice to princes. He includes his familiarity with the court and rule of Richard II to establish credibility as an informed source, and describes the great wealth Richard enjoyed to highlight his theme of the vagaries, the "chances and changes" of fate. Here perhaps more than anywhere else we are made aware of the inevitable direction in which the *Chroniques* were headed: Froissart intended them to outlive him and provide guidance and information (as accurately as he could manage) to future generations of rulers. Lewis's identification of reasons for medieval authors to engage in writing history may therefore stand some amendment: though Froissart does demonstrate a desire to provide

“ensample”, he also demonstrates the intention to faithfully record the historical events of his day because he found them worthy of being recorded. If Froissart recognized the value of noble inspiration, he also recognized the importance of the events he witnessed because of the value they could offer as practical lessons of statesmanship; one reason to write them down was to provide subsequent statesmen the opportunity to learn from them.

There is no reason to suspect that Froissart’s anticipation of an aristocratic audience for his *Chroniques* was unfounded: Green points out that “a very high proportion of the books owned by the aristocracy in the late middle ages (in most cases probably between twenty and thirty per cent) dealt with ‘historical’ subjects” (137) and elucidates that the evidence of surviving medieval “catalogues and book inventories points to a strong preference for historical fact – or at least for works that were taken to be factual – over romantic fiction” (136). Based on what can be deduced from the contents of surviving fourteenth century collections, it seems that at the time Froissart engaged in the *Chroniques*, stock in the records of historical example was rising. Green agrees that there was an aristocratic desire to study historical examples and discover the validity of lessons of the past, in the hopes of attaining practical wisdom to apply to the problems of leadership.

The desire to successfully negotiate the dangers of fate or chance (often personified as Fortune) cannot be underestimated as a motivating factor behind the aristocratic search for historical insight. Chaucer devotes a fascinating section of his *Franklin’s Tale* to cautioning his readers against the belief that they can successfully navigate fate without first learning the lessons of forbearance and suffering:

Lerneth to suffre, or elles, so moot I goon,
Ye shul lerne, wher so ye wole or noon;

For in this world, certein, ther no wight is
That he ne dooth or seith sometym amys.
Ire, siknesse, or constellacioun,
Wyn, wo, or chaungynge of complexioun
Causeth ful ofte to doon amys or speken.
On every wrong a man may not be wreken.
After the tyme moste be temperaunce
To every wight that kan on governaunce. (ll.777-86)

Several parallels exist between Froissart's record of Richard II's conversation with his counsellors and this passage in which Chaucer's Franklin seems to counsel his pilgrim auditors. First, it can be argued that the passage illustrates Chaucer indulging in Froissart's technique of stepping away from his narrative to directly address, and educate, his audience. What remains is the undeniable fact that both Chaucer and Froissart concern themselves, independently, and at the same point in history, with the advice and education of the ruling estate. Immediately striking is the dedication to their audiences; Froissart's "Now lords, consider well, kings, dukes, counts, prelates, all men of noble lineage and power" echoes Chaucer's "To every wight that kan on governaunce", not only because of the directness of their address but because they do not limit themselves to the highest position of authority, the office of king. Both take pains to include multiple levels of authority and in fact address any man of power who presumes to rule other people. Similar as well are the cautions against underestimating the fallen nature of the temporal world: they warm to the theme that everyone is a potential (or eventual) victim of fate. The inescapable fact that misfortune finds everyone, regardless of social station, is illustrated as "Fortune sometimes [running] against kings and princes as well as against humble people" in

Froissart's text, and finds its analogue in Chaucer's "there no wight is / That he ne dooth or seith sometye amys". The protean nature of the planets and their effects on human machinations provides a further comparison, as Froissart's "chances and changes are unpredictable" echoes Chaucer's "Ire, siknesse, or constellacioun / Wyn, wo, or chaungynge of complexioun". Later in *The Franklin's Tale* Chaucer revisits the theme of astrological motion informing earthly human activity with his squire character; here he seems to give his audience an indication of where his story will go, and the ideas that will eventually manifest themselves within it.

Summary

What becomes clear in comparing the advice and intentions evident in instances of the *Chroniques* and *The Franklin's Tale* is that the passages expose more than the desire to write for the noble estate, though that objective is evident and heretofore under-considered. The analogous historical situations of the authors, their remarkably similar backgrounds in literature and correlative social stations, are factors that inform their writing as well, and though it cannot be surprising that two writers from such comparable circumstances would create works that exhibit parallel themes, it is interesting that literary criticism in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries has favoured treating them very independently of each other aside from occasional comparisons of their love poetry. Modern scholarship tends, in fact, to a deliberate and careful separation of Chaucer and Froissart, sometimes in hopes of allowing Froissart's works the independence necessary to be considered on their own merits, and sometimes because of the divergence of genres evident after Froissart left poetry to focus on what was, in its medieval incarnation, journalism. Their similarities, however, were too great for the authors themselves to avoid; their shared concerns for advising the ruling class, and the obvious qualifications both felt they possessed in order to embark on "advice to princes" writing, mark them as being analogous in

more than just situation and era. What is more, comparing all of these factors (concern for the noble estate, sharing a courtly background, possessing the education necessary to converse with and write for the ruling class) throws light on another theme that hovers underneath “advice to princes” writing: this is nothing less than the cultural foundation on which the princely estate was ideally based – the chivalric ideal. Froissart and Chaucer are both writing for the ostensible guardians and inheritors of the ruling estate, hoping to demonstrate and inspire chivalrous (and therefore noble) deeds. Chivalry, then, is an important theme in understanding the goals of both authors, and how effectively these are accomplished. Moreover, present in both texts is the idea that noble *action* can define one’s character and value more accurately, perhaps, than noble birth. For my purposes, this prevalence of admirable action independent of aristocratic inheritance will be considered *gentillesse*. My next chapter logically focuses, then, on chivalry in the fourteenth century, and the location and importance of *gentillesse* in the texts.

Chapter Four

Gentillesse and the Culture of Chivalry

Introduction

In order to properly explore the textual experiments in *gentillesse* made by Chaucer and Froissart, it is necessary to sketch the extraordinary importance, for both authors, of the phenomenon we recognize as chivalry. Chivalry is foundational in *The Franklin's Tale* and the *Chroniques*. Through his work in the *Chroniques* Froissart would become known as one of the premier defenders of chivalry in the fourteenth century. The world of Chaucer's *Franklin's Tale* revolves around chivalry; it dramatically affects the actions of all three protagonists. It is necessary, therefore, to investigate what the authors understood chivalry to be, and how it manifested itself in their world and in their texts. From there, I will progress to the subject pivotal to my project: the authors' concept of *gentillesse*. I will define it as a separate entity from that of chivalry, and spend some time locating it in the works. I will further postulate that shared biographical elements of the authors' lives (their social positions and access to the ruling class) support their analogous, but individual, subscriptions to the promotion of a *gentil* ideal in society.

Gentillesse and the Culture of Chivalry

It is a challenging task to translate to modern English the exact meanings of words that even in the middle ages held different meanings for the different writers who used them. In order to understand exactly what was meant by the term *gentillesse*, for example, it is quite useful to extract this term from what we recognize as 'chivalry'; for that matter, clarifying the definition of

chivalry, specifically as it applies to the *Chroniques* and *The Franklin's Tale*, is beneficial as well. Maurice Keen is correct in his assertion that the term "remains a word elusive of definition, tonal rather than precise in its implications" (2). Keen spends much effort clarifying the origins of chivalry and, importantly for this study, working towards a "definition of chivalry's elusive ethical implications" (2). The ethical implications of acts of chivalry and *gentillesse*, the authorial intention of encouraging the emulation of both, and their recognized worth in being literarily recorded, are key themes in studying the similarities between Froissart and Chaucer. We are left with the task of dissecting the meaning of the terms as they apply to both authors, locating examples of them in the texts, and sketching the confluence of ethical intentions evident in their writing.

'Sometimes,' Keen writes, "chivalry is spoken of as an order, as if knighthood ought to be compared to an order of religion: sometimes it is spoken of as an estate, a social class – the warrior class whose martial function ... was to defend the patria and the Church" (2). Keen identifies and links three main societal elements as foundational in the creation and promulgation of chivalry, what he eventually calls an "ethos in which martial, aristocratic, and Christian elements were fused together" (16). Based on his careful study of the three medieval texts which he largely credits with the literary establishment of a chivalric code (the anonymous *Ordene de Chevalerie*, Ramon Lull's *Book of the Order of Chyvalry*, and Geoffrey de Charny's *Book of Chivalry*) Keen works his way from the religious origins of chivalry to the more humanistic, secular ideas evident in Charny's work. Charny has also enjoyed recent critical attention from Gerald Nachtwey, who promotes the theory that the system of chivalry was not only heavily martial in origin, but that it was based on a hierarchical model of social relations. He positions his argument in relation to Anne Middleton's claim that in the romances, the "horizontal bonds

between knights and squires reflected the horizontal bonds that formed chivalric marriage" (107). Nachtwey does not entirely contradict Middleton so far as "the *Canterbury Tales* appertain to love and marriage"; rather, he cautions against prescribing a treatment for the *Tales* based on a formula that may only apply specifically to one aspect of medieval society (and even then, perhaps, arguably). Nachtwey claims that "a foundation of chivalric society" (107) was the vertical model of relationships between the different societal strata, and between individuals within those strata. Flowing from the vertical influence of chivalric interaction particularly observable, Nachtwey claims, in Charny's *Book*, the tales that feature chivalric characters or situations can more logically be said to find their mode of social interactions framed hierarchically, rather than horizontally.

That the great pillar of chivalric accomplishment was martial prowess is generally not argued; Charny's work completely supports this theory and he is safely considered a contemporary expert on the subject, as he was an experienced knight who died defending the royal banner of France at Poitiers. There is also considerable consensus that some origins of chivalry can be traced to Christianity; what is fascinating in Keen's work, particularly, is the attempt by numerous religious writers to co-opt the idea of chivalry to fit their intentions and agendas. One notable example from Keen's study follows:

Etienne de Fougeres, Bishop of Lisieux, who wrote in the 1170s (and in the vernacular, the language of knights), and whose work has at least a claim to contain the first systematic treatment of chivalry ... [saw] it as the knight's business to be the strong right arm of the Church, which should do the bidding of the superior clerical order - and without too much questioning. It is doubtful whether many knights would have seen their duty here in such clear-cut terms as he did. (4)

And later he states,

Looking at matters through priestly eyes, as they naturally most often did, ecclesiastical authors showed a very general tendency to portray chivalry in terms of priestly priorities which most knights either did not fully understand or felt justified in ignoring. (5)

If Christianity was one strand in the chivalric thread, it was not the strongest. Keen's emphasis on the study of medieval texts, however, may not provide the most complete, or accurate, idea of what chivalry was to the men who (nominally) practised it. For example, Peter Ainsworth suggests that the *Chroniques* provide not so much a record of history as a military manual, based on the realization that the law of arms was above all else a professional code of behaviour based on custom and practice; "...[t]he authorities consulted in this sphere of activity, whenever necessary, would be the more experienced and senior knights, marshals, and heralds, rather than books" (83). It seems clear that the men who practiced war, and were consistently successful at it, served as the living sources of what can be considered a chivalric code; more than any text (and certainly any religious text) their advice was valued as forming the guidelines of chivalrous conduct. Becoming one of the warriors so consulted, then, was understandably a desired goal for the medieval man-at-arms, and no matter the dissension among different sources as to the most important facet of the chivalric code, it is generally agreed that knights were to defend the Church, fight for their temporal lords when called, and defend against the physical dangers of the world those who could not defend themselves: incapacitated men, women (particularly widows) and orphans (Keen 15).

Ainsworth brings up the interesting point that writers seemed no less susceptible to the lure of the chivalric life than warriors, which corresponds to Keen's third element in his definition of

chivalry: the aristocratic link. Just as "[c]hivalry cannot be divorced from the martial world of the mounted warrior," writes Keen, "it cannot be divorced from the aristocracy, because knights commonly were men of high lineage" (2). The glitter of aristocratic association was real to those who aspired to chivalric knighthood, and Ainsworth includes Froissart with the aspirants, claiming: "evidently concerned to draw attention to his already quite eminent social status, Froissart seems to have harboured the lifelong desire of crossing the threshold into the ranks of chivalry" (77). Ainsworth's claim is justified considering the respect, almost awe, with which Froissart writes of the most typically chivalrous endeavours of the Hundred Years' War – his chapter on the founding of the Order of the Garter exemplifies his respect for chivalric values. Particular to this chapter is the ideal of knight errantry, the encouragement to young men to travel abroad and earn fame, fortune and prestige through successful combat or on glorious quests. Keen records that "in the cult of knight errantry, the ideal of service and that of individualistic endeavour to meet self-imposed tests of personal enterprise and endurance, came to meet and harmonise" (227) and the knight who had fought on foreign campaigns was considerably more honoured than one whose experience was restricted to local conflicts.

The idea, hardly a new one considering the Arthurian cycle by which much of its popularity was sealed, was ripe for abuse from several sources. Religious authorities embraced the idea of the knightly quest so long as it could be directed to the Holy Land, or to defend the Church from whatever most threatened it at any given time (the frontiers of Moorish Spain and Eastern Europe served as acceptable fields of combat as well as Jerusalem). Secular rulers encouraged their subjects to travel as mercenaries to maintain their estates if they were in economic hardship, as "errantry ... would prepare men to be more useful as warriors when they came home" (227). Once knights were let loose on individualistic quests of errantry, however, it

was very hard to monitor, much less control, the actions they may have engaged in. "From here," Keen writes, "it is all too short a step to the scene that another witness ... describes, of seeing the English knight Sir John Harleston and a group of captains all sitting together drinking from silver chalices, which they had looted from churches" (232).

What Froissart can be considered to have aspired to, however, is not the reality of chaos humans could wreak on facets of chivalry but the ideal embodiment of the chivalric code. His chapter on the Order of the Garter begins by describing the vaunted origins of knight errantry:

En ce tamps vint-il en vollenté au roy d'Engleterre de rédifyer le biau chastieau de Windesore et de faire une congrégation de chevaliers, où quel chastiel anchienement la Table Ronde avoit esté faite et ordonnée, dont tant de bons chevaliers estoient yssus... (deLettenhove, tome 17, 151)

King Edward of England conceived the idea of altering and rebuilding the great castle of Windsor, originally built by King Arthur, and where had first been established the noble Round Table, from which so many fine men and brave knights had gone forth and performed great deeds throughout the world. (Brereton 66)

The ideal of chivalry, in its manifestation as virtuous knight errantry, is a phenomenon that Chaucer responds to as well: he incorporates the same ideal in the character of Arveragus in *The Franklin's Tale*. Arveragus embodies the qualities of the perfect knight: he is strong, morally upright, virtuous and generous. He also feels the need, after some two years of marriage, to go adventuring "In Engelond, that cleped was eek Briteyne, / To seke in armes worshipe and honour- / For al his lust he sette in swich labour-" (ll. 810-12). This need to look for the adventures by which he could advance his social position would not have been questioned by Chaucer's audience; indeed, knights were encouraged to constantly exercise and resist resting

contentedly at home. At various points in the *Chroniques* and *The Canterbury Tales*, Chaucer and Froissart exhibit a healthy cynicism that indicates they are not naïve worshippers of the cult of chivalry or its adherents; instances in *The Canterbury Tales* are numerous in which Chaucer takes the opportunity to expose the flawed humanity behind the idealized chivalric code.

Conversely in the *Chroniques*, Froissart's unflinching descriptions of various sackings, pillaging, rape, murder and evidence of an otherwise consistent “scorched earth” policy, even on the part of characters he paints as heroes capable of showing perfectly chivalrous behaviour (the Black Prince's massacre at Limoges comes to mind, as does his generous treatment of France's defeated King John the Good) indicate that he is not blind to the abuses possible in war, even by warriors ostensibly fighting under the chivalric banner.

Another aspect of chivalry that informs the work of both Froissart and Chaucer is the involvement of women in the chivalric code: specifically, women acting as motivating factors and inspirations to noble action. Keen locates one of the stronger textual origins of this in Geoffrey de Charny's work: Charny advocates a generous "treatment of woman in the context of the chivalrous life, and of love as a human passion which, rightly regulated, sharpens and refines the honourable ambitions of martial men" (14). In other words, questing for recognition and prestige in battle in order to attract the attention of a worthy lady was an appropriate, and honourable, use of a knight's time. The immediate Chaucerian application of this in *The Franklin's Tale* is obvious: Arveragus is initially described as

... a knight that loved and dide his payne

To serve a lady in his beste wise;

And many a labour, many a greet emprise,

He for his lady wroghte* er she were wonne. (ll.729–33) *undertook

The description of Arveragus goes far in providing information as to how women were interwoven in the fabric of chivalric society; several episodes of the *Chroniques* are also very consistent with this use of the feminine in the chivalric context. During the Poitiers campaign Froissart describes two knights, one English and one French, who encounter each other during a truce while each is inspecting the strength of the other's forces. Froissart continues:

Dont it avint que messires Jehans Camdos et messires Jehans de Clèremont,
marescaux de France, se trouvèrent sus les champs où il chevauchent de l'un à
l'autre, et portoit chacuns une meysme devise ... dessus ses parures; c'estoit ouvré de
brodure une bleue dame en un ray d'un soleil bien perlée et bien arréée.

(deLettenhove, tome 5, 416-17)

Sir John Chandos of England and Sir Jean de Clermont of France are shocked to find that they are “both wearing on their left arms the same emblem of a lady in blue embroidered in a sunbeam” (Brereton 132) and “some strong words and some very ugly insults were exchanged” (131) writes Froissart, and though the truce prevents the two from trying to prove by force of arms who is entitled to wear the emblem, Froissart maintains that the reason they both thought of it was that they “were young and in love – for that must certainly have been the explanation” (132). Wearing a lady's emblem, or favour, was obviously a method of bearing her in mind in order to perform feats of arms for her. Ideally one's feats would end, as Arveragus's did, in marriage, but if the lady were already married or otherwise inaccessible there was no shame in maintaining her image in one's heart, and loving her as an ideal rather than reality. Nachtwey's article supporting the hierarchical nature of chivalric influence in medieval society expands this view to comment specifically on *The Franklin's Tale*; women within the chivalric context acted as encouragement to knights to pursue honourable deeds, and therefore Arveragus's departure is

necessitated because of his chivalric obligations as a knight, which as Dorigen's husband he could not ignore. Nachtwey mentions the alternative views of critics who have argued that he is insensitive (at best) for going off to 'win renown'" (115) and abandoning Dorigen. Their claim is largely derailed, he argues, because of "the social context in which both Arveragus and Dorigen lived – the context of *chevalerie*" (115), which dictates their actions (he seeking renown, she chastely waiting for him) more directly than do their own desires.

The element common to both Chaucer's and Froissart's works, that leads from a discussion of chivalry to one of *gentillesse*, is the debate about what is chivalrous and what is not. Deciding which actions deserve commendation and which deserve damnation highlights an aspect of chivalry that runs parallel to the idea of *gentillesse*: charitable actions with no thought of self-interest. The obvious *locus* of the debate on *gentillesse* in *The Franklin's Tale* is the end of the story, when the Franklin asks the company to decide "[w]hich was the moost fre" (l.1623) after he has told them of the acts of *gentillesse* demonstrated by all major characters in the tale. At this point it is beneficial to sketch *gentillesse* in relation to the Franklin's meaning of the word *fre*. Essentially, the idea of *gentillesse*, so far as it is applicable to my project, is in line with the OED definition of a "quality of being gentle" and "an instance of courtesy". It means any instance where one character chooses to act courteously towards another. This courtesy may include aspects of generosity, or humane consideration for another's predicament or will, and especially placing another's needs or interests above one's own. The presence of choice is important in the definition, as characters often must choose *gentil* action in place of autocracy or even legally acceptable retribution (as in the case of those in positions of authority). The relationship of power to *gentillesse* is also interesting, as the historical context of the late medieval period allows kings and lords very serious power over those situated below them, giving rise to the possibility

of *gentil* acts being interpreted as weakness. The Franklin's *démande* to his audience, meanwhile, includes the word *fre*:

Lordynges, this question, thanne, wol I aske

Now,

Which was the mooste fre, as thynketh yow? (ll.1621-23)

Fre in this sense can be interpreted as generous, therefore the Franklin is asking which character had more at stake in choosing *gentil* action in response to his or her moral dilemma, thus who acted most generously. Just before the Franklin's question, however, the clerk affirms that all characters have displayed *gentillesse* to each other: "Leeve brother / Everich of you dide gentilly til oother" (ll. 1607-08) and later "[b]ut if a clerk koude doon a gentil dede / As wel as any of yow, it is no drede!" (ll. 1611-12). The Franklin's question, then, indicates his agreement that all characters acted gently; he wonders who had more to lose in making that decision, and therefore who acted most generously even as he demonstrated gentility.

The *gentil* question in *The Franklin's Tale* should be set against several of the useful examples of nobility of action (or lack thereof) found in the *Chroniques*, that take place during the major battles of the Hundred Years War. To sketch this comparison, we must remain, for a time, focused on acts of chivalry and not strictly of *gentillesse*, though our discussion will develop towards locating *gentillesse* in Froissart's thought. At times, Froissart describes clear instances of chivalrous action, or chivalry as it was ideally meant to be, and he takes appreciable pleasure in being able to recount such experiences; these same examples can feature distortions of the chivalric code that cause modern reading audiences to shudder, and of which Froissart was clearly cognizant. One such example occurs during the campaign of Crécy, when English forces attack the town of Caen in Normandy. Led by King Edward and comprised of the Black Prince

and his forces as well as numerous others, the English have been successfully sacking towns in the countryside when they come upon Caen, whose only line of defence lay in its situation next to the river Orne. Froissart describes the town as particularly ripe for sacking, as it was

...le plus grosse ville, le plus grande, le plus riche et le mieux garnie de toute Normendie, hormis Roem, que on clamme Ken, pleine de très grant rikèce, de draperie et de toutes marcandises, de riches bourgeois, de nobles dames, de belles églises et de II riches abéies. (deLettenhove, tome 4, 405)

...three times larger and full of wealth in the form of cloth and other goods, with rich citizens, noble ladies and very fine churches. In particular, there [were] two big and extremely wealthy abbeys. (Brereton 73)

It is perhaps prudent at this point to remember that the chivalric code allowed for the sacking of towns that had refused terms of surrender. Women were supposed to be protected in all situations, though Froissart is frank in describing the numerous instances where women, girls and nuns are raped during the sieges and seizures of the Hundred Years' War. Churches, likewise, were supposed to be safe from pillaging, but it can be no accident that Froissart describes the richness of Caen's two abbeys in the same paragraph where he discusses the feasibility of sacking the town.

Returning to his story, he writes that Caen's defenders were the Constable of France, the Count of Tancarville, their forces, and numerous townspeople. The townspeople numbered so many, in fact, that they had the confidence to insist on marching out and facing the English; this was regrettable as they broke and fled as soon as they saw the English forces approaching. Froissart records, however, that upon hearing the commoners' intention to fight the attacking army, the Constable declared:

Ce soit ou nom de Dieu, et vous ne vous combaterés point sans mi et sans mes gens.
(deLettenhove, tome 4, 410)

So be it then, and God be with us. If you fight, I and my men will fight with you.
(Brereton 74)

This is a pure example of chivalry in war on the part of experienced knights who knew how to assess military strength and recognized a serious threat, yet did not abandon the citizens to their fate but chose to fight alongside them. It seems clear that Froissart wanted to record the attack on Caen, particularly from his narrative following this statement, that

...et se misent à ce commencement assés en bonne ordenance, et fisent grant samblant d'yaus bien deffendre et de mettre leurs vies en aventure. (deLettenhove, tome 4, 410)

...[t]hey marched out of the town in good enough order a the beginning. They seemed ready to risk their lives courageously and to put up a good defence.
(Brereton 74)

Not only was it an important town in Normandy, there is evidence of chivalrous action that unfolded there. Of course Froissart does not consider it the fault of the Constable or Count that the townspeople of Caen walked into a serious massacre; they agreed to defend the town with its citizens, and in so doing agreed to undertake the grave risk associated with that decision. During the ensuing bloodshed, the Count and Constable hole up in the gate-tower:

Ensi que il regardoient aval en grant doubte ces gens tuer, il perçurent un gentil chevalier englès, qui n'avoit c'un oeil, que on clamoit monseigneur Thumas de Hollandes ... lequel monsigneur Thumas ravisèrent bien ... si furent tout reconforté quant il le veirent....(deLettenhove, tome 4, 411)

...watching the massacre in dismay ... they caught sight of a gallant English knight with only one eye, called Sir Thomas Holland [T]hey recognized him ... and were much relieved when they saw him. (Brereton 75)

It is Holland who proves the saviour of the nobly-born defenders of Caen; they beg him to ransom them and he happily agrees, knowing he will make a fortune off the ransoms of the

...bien XXV chevaliers avoecques euls, qui n'estoient mies bien assurez de l'occision que il veoient que on faisoit sus les rues. (deLettenhove, tome 4, 411)

...twenty-five knights with them, all looking uneasy at the slaughter they could see in the town. (Brereton 75)

Froissart has recorded what constitutes a moment of chivalry here for two reasons: first, the defenders, who acknowledged they were beaten, counted on the chivalrous reputation of Holland to ensure their survival; chivalric practice allowed for the ransoming of prisoners in battle, and frowned on slaughtering them (though of course the latter did happen, sometimes routinely). It should be noted that it was chivalric practice, learned largely on the field and from various practical sources such as wiser authorities in battle, from which knights drew in the tradition of ransoming of prisoners – not in the attempts to codify chivalry found in the texts listed above. Sir Thomas Holland lived up to his reputation and saved their lives, and though the promise of payment through ransoms must also be considered a possible factor in motivating him, it was they who singled him out in the embattled town, knowing their chances with him were greater than with any other knight they saw. Froissart ends his narrative of Holland's actions by describing the further chivalrous acts performed by him and his company:

[M]onsieur Thumas ... monta à cheval et s'en vint sus les rues, et destourna ce jour à faire mainte cruaulté et pluseurs horribles fais qui eussent estet fait, se il ne fus

alés au devant, dont il fist aumosne et gentillèce. Avoecques le dit monsieur Thumas de Hollandes avoit pluseurs gentils chevaliers d'Engleterre, qui gardèrent et esconsèrent tamaint meschief à faire et mainte belle bourgoise et tamainte dame d'enclostre à violer.... (deLettenhove, tome 4, 412)

...[h]e was able that day to prevent many cruel and horrible acts which would otherwise have been committed, thus giving proof of his kind and noble heart. Several gallant English knights who were with him also prevented a number of evil deeds and rescued many a pretty townswoman and many a nun from rape. (Brereton 75)

The virtuous behaviour of Sir Holland identifies him most clearly as behaving chivalrously in war – and though the spectre of payment in return for ransoms will encourage more cynical readers to believe he was acting completely from self-interest and not altruistically at all, his rescue of townswomen and nuns who had no thought (or ability) to repay him richly is evidence that he did exhibit concern for those he was supposed to protect.

Removing the aspect of war from the equation, we have something like Chaucer's idea of *gentillesse* in *The Franklin's Tale*; Cooper describes "the quintessential idea in Chaucer's concept of *gentillesse*" as "the independence of noble action from noble birth" (240) and Allen develops this idea in depth while investigating Chaucer's conception of *gentillesse* in his ballade of the same name. "Gentillesse" provides evidence of his belief that nobility of action was guaranteed to no one and possible for all, and the bulk of its third stanza is worth repeating here:

Vyce may well be heir to old richesse,
But ther may no man, as men wel see,
Bequethe his heir his virtuous noblesse

(That is approped* unto no degree

*exclusively assigned

But to the firste fader in magestee,

That maketh hem his heyres that him queme*)

*please

Chaucer also uses the ballade to play on the concept of a *firste stok* in human heredity. Basing her hypothesis on the medieval meaning of the word *stok*, Allen sketches Chaucer's development of a "moral aristocracy" that is attainable by all humans by virtue of their descent from Adam, himself in turn created by God. "From its association with heraldry," Allen summarizes, "*stok* implies a rarefied and exclusive line of descent. It stands in the poem in apposition not to a *fader* of any social degree but to the progenitor of a morally aristocratic – or even royal – line. The inference is that in being heir to the 'fader of gentillesse' one belongs to a strain much purer and more thoroughbred than do the mere offspring of courtly kings and aristocrats" (532). The thrust of the argument is that, in Allen's words, " 'firste stok' signifies God. He is certainly implied in the term 'fader in magestee'; the sense of the lines confirms that God is the only legitimate source of *gentillesse*" (*ibid.*) Because they have the ability to recognize and choose Godly action, all humans can claim the heredity of *gentillesse*, but they must choose it first. Noble action, therefore, is one half of the formulation of Chaucer's idea of *gentillesse*, and its equitable, non-exclusive nature is the other.

Though this concept seems counter-intuitive considering the primacy of inheritance and gentility of birth observable throughout the medieval period, there was an established precedent of valuing nobility of character above nobility of birth, and encouraging the development of noble character traits in order to benefit greater society. Keen devotes a chapter of his *Chivalry* to the "idea of nobility", pointing out that "the champions of the claims of blood and lineage rested their case more often on traditional authority than on reason" (157). He cites the difficulty

encountered by those who tried to defend the superior claim of lineage through logic:

They looked back to the story in the Bible of Noah and his sons: freemen descended from Shem, it was claimed, knights from Japheth, and bondmen from Ham who dishonoured his seed by mocking his father. There was a catch in this explanation, of course, as the clerk shrewdly pointed out in the *Songe du Vergier*: all three sons sprang from the same parent. (157)

And Allen refers to Dante's use of biblical sources in her examination of Chaucer's use of God as the moral ancestor of all strains of society: "Dante, a certain source for ["Gentillesse"], also linked the virtue with God in *Il Convivio* [D]iscussing *nobilitate*, [he] argues how absurd it is to claim that moral virtue or vice descends from the parent: ... "Therefore if Adam was noble, we are all noble; or if Adam was base, we are all base'" (534). For Chaucer, then, as for Dante, the idea of a moral aristocracy was viable and biblically proven; Chaucer's advocacy of this ideal is sketched in "Gentillesse," and explored more fully in *The Franklin's Tale*.

Gerald Morgan amplifies the practical reasons for avoiding exclusivity or creating an inviolable social hierarchy in his book *The Franklin's Tale*. He agrees "the Chaucerian conception of *gentillesse* (as also that of Dante and Gower) is not a matter of inherited position" and goes on to state:

This conception of *gentillesse* does not, however, presuppose a separation of the social and moral orders. The medieval conception of nobility or gentility (the two are synonymous in the late fourteenth century) is based on service and not blood; this is almost inevitable when one bears in mind that the rate of extinction within noble families constantly necessitated recruitment from below. (13)

Considering Chaucer's social position as attached to the ruling class but not born to it, the idea

that men of lower birth could attain higher positions than those they inherited would have been comforting; Chaucer in fact lived this reality in his series of appointments and consistent maintenance (through various royal administrations) of royal favour. It cannot be surprising, therefore, that the concept of *gentillesse* appears periodically in his work. In addition to the centrality of the theme in *The Franklin's Tale*, it is treated in *The Wife of Bath's Tale* as well. Here the idea of *gentillesse* serves as the podium that elevates the peasant hag from social inferior to moral superior. Federico investigates the relation of *gentillesse* to sexual violence (and sketches the idea of *gentillesse* as cure to sexual violence) in the hag's edification of the erstwhile rapist-knight, stating that the knight "views women purely as sexual objects. It is only once she has instructed him in the concept of *gentillesse* that he can accept her authority, and thus her 'personhood', suggesting that this is the lecture which finally accomplishes his reform" (422). Pearsall asserts that "the openness of society, the accessibility of high office to those of low birth, which is the practical consequence of *gentillesse*, was a topic of considerable importance to Chaucer and his friends" (150) and offers further insight into the treatment of *gentillesse* in *The Wife of Bath's Tale*. He argues that Chaucer's method of handling sensitive issues, even rather benign implications that lower-born men might aspire to higher positions, is to domesticate his chosen themes within a narrative that centers around a fiction that is entirely personal. The hag in *The Wife of Bath's Tale* is not politically threatening to the ruling class, therefore her antics can be mocked as irreverent but essentially harmless before they are deemed to threaten the ideals of the noble estate. As Pearsall phrases it, "irony may at any point dissolve the whole process safely into mockery" (150). Given the apparent solidity of this argument, one wonders if Chaucer intends the same ironic capacity in his *Franklin's Tale*:

The Franklin himself is at a critical pressure-point in changing fourteenth-century

society, the point at which old “freedom” (freedom from servility ... as well as freedom of spirit, or nobility), based on gentle birth, meets new 'freedom' based on wealth. His tale ends with a conundrum on gentillesse in which it is suggested that it may be difficult to decide [who has been] “the mooste fre”. (150–1)

Pearsall implies that Chaucer may have been suggesting "the true hero of *gentillesse* is a heroine" (151): Dorigen, therefore, becomes the possible saviour of the tale from threatening or revolutionary social implications. I believe that this suggestion is attractive, but think it possible that positioning the question at the end of the tale indicates that each character was as free as the next to choose noble action over self-interest. All characters, in other words, acted equally in the pursuit of gentility, and it was the actions of all that equally unraveled them from their moral dilemma. Of particular importance in that the magician, though his manipulation of appearances is suspicious, shows as much gentility as does Arveragus.

This is not to say that readings of the tale are consistent in their treatment of the clerk and Aurelius as students and purveyors of the *gentil* code; many are based on the premise that Aurelius's deception in not physically removing the coastal rocks but only making it seem he had, constitutes a falseness that bestows unfair power on him. Aurelius cannot fully participate in *gentillesse*, according to this theory, because he has not earned Dorigen's indebtedness. The argument is particularly interesting in the context of class issues and social advancement; Sweeney argues that Chaucer uses the tale to “create a romance that reflects the serious nature of political change and social unrest” (168) because Aurelius and the clerk have conspired to create an illusion that does not fulfil the letter of the agreement of Dorigen's promise:

Through magic Aurelius acquires control over Arveragus and Dorigen, his social superiors. As the story continues, what one finds is that a clerk, the lowliest of all the

characters in the social structure ... acquires a moral hold over the characters in the tale ... [and] in building such a conclusion on the power of an *illusioun* ... Chaucer demonstrates that regardless of how fair and just the social system of the Franklin may sound [the suggested system of *gentillesse*], beneath the illusion of “fair practice” the entire social structure would be vulnerable to the intemperate aspirations of squires and the magical abilities of clerks. (167)

Sweeney summarizes that because of the potential for upward social mobility based on deceptiveness exhibited in the tale, Chaucer “*seems* to be supportive of a new type of society in which men class-climb as a result of their actions” (167, italics Sweeney’s). Nor is she alone in perceiving a view to advancement in the tale; Nachtwey agrees that both Aurelius and the clerk intend to improve their respective social stations by demonstrating *gentillesse*, though he bases his argument on the vertical nature of the characters’ chivalrous society. Aurelius sees “the possibility for advancement in the situation” (117), Nachtwey argues, because the generosity of spirit inherent in a show of *gentillesse* may proclaim his knightly value. Likewise, “when the clerk makes a similar claim in absolving Aurelius of his debt, he too has advancement in the hierarchy in mind” (117). I agree that there are avenues of investigation available in characterizing Chaucer’s intended social message(s) in the tale; I prefer the idea that the clerk and Aurelius participated earnestly in the *gentil* exchange because the teller does not himself focus on the deceptive nature of the illusion nearly so much as do his modern critics. If the essential nature of magic is fascinating, and it is, in the creation of a situation where a knight is freed from moral crisis through the actions of a squire, I do not believe it was so vital to the tale as to fixate Chaucer’s energy, or attention, to the detriment of the message of *gentillesse*.

Having established Chaucer's fondness for textualizing a moral aristocracy (*gentillesse*)

descending to man from God, I will briefly examine one further useful representation of it from the *Canterbury* collection. The image of gentility trickling down through medieval society appears in the Prologue to *The Clerk's Tale*; in its introduction, the image of the River Po streams down from Monte Viso in the Alps to the lower countries of Italy. The tale itself fulfils the idea of nobility stemming from character and not birth, as Griselda the peasant demonstrates greater virtue and forbearance than her noble husband Walter. Returning to Keen's dilemma of logic being defeated in the creation of progeny, where virtuous parents do not always create virtuous children, Walter himself encapsulates the notion admirably:

For God it woot, that children ofte been

Unlyk hir worthy eldres hem bifore;

Bountee comth al of God, nat of the streen*

*bloodline

Of which they been engendred and ybore. (ll.155–158)

Walter is given the lines that define Chaucer's idea of moral aristocratic inheritance. This is ironic not only because of Walter's position as indomitable social superior of the tale, but because his ignoble treatment of his wife will truly illustrate that God's "bountee" is more available to a commoner, in this tale, than it is to the nominal lord.

Froissart does not directly treat dilemmas of *gentillesse* as such; his attention in the *Chroniques* is greatly fixed by accounts of conflict and war. He does show concern, however, with the idea of meritorious service earning its proper respect, and knightly service in the tradition of the chivalric ideal is specifically highlighted as being worthy of recognition. An excerpt from his Prologue to the *Chroniques* accurately reflects his concern:

Or puet estre que cil livre n'est mie examiné, ne ordonné si justement que telle chose
le requiert; car faits d'armes qui si chièrement sont comparés, doivent estre donnés et

loyaument départis à ceulx qui par proesce y travaillent: donc pour moy acquitter envers tous, ainsy que droit est, j'ay emprise ceste hystoire à poursuivre sur l'ordenance et fondation devant dicte.... (deLettenhove, tome 2, 5)

Now perhaps that book was not thought out and composed as scrupulously as such a subject demands – for deeds of arms, in which distinction is so dearly bought, should be faithfully credited to those whose valour has achieved them. Therefore, to discharge my debt to all, as is only proper, I have undertaken the writing of this history according to the method and foundation already mentioned.... (Brereton 38)

It is clear that Froissart's goal, through much of the *Chroniques*, is to record deeds that are worthy of recognition, regardless of who has achieved them. If we must add the caveat that it was usually knights who achieved feats of arms worthy of distinction, and not villeins, we must also acknowledge that knights could hail from lower levels of the ruling class, and indeed from the commons, as well as live without great inheritances or considerable land, but so long as they displayed chivalric virtue on the field, Froissart undertook to record their exploits as industriously as he recorded those of his hero, the Black Prince.

An example of this occurs in Book Two, during the Peasants' Revolt in England, when a knight encounters a mob led by Geoffrey Lister outside the city of Norwich. Froissart describes the situation as follows:

Il y avoit un chevalier cappitaine de la ville, qui s'appelloit messires Robert Salle. Point gentils homs n'estoit, mais il avoit la grâce, le fait et le renommée de estre sages et vaillans homs as armes, et l'avoit fait pour sa vaillance li rois Édouwars chevalier, et estoit li mieux tournés et li plus fors homs de toute Engletière. Listiers et ses routes s'avisèrent que il enmenroient che chevalier avoec eux et en feroient leur

souverain cappitaine Quant il le virent, il ly fissent très-grant chière et l'onnourèrent moult et luy prièrent que il volsist descendre de son cheval et parler à eulx ...il l'environnèrent et puis commenchièrent à traitier moult bellement, et li dissent: << Robers, vous estes chevaliers et uns homs de grant créance en ce païs et de renommée, moult vaillans homs, et quoique vous soyés tells nous vous conissons bien. Vous n'estes mies gentils homs, mais fils d'un villain et d'un machon, sicom nous sommes. Venés ent avoecques nous. Vous serés nos maistres, et nous vous ferons si grant signeur que li quars d'Engletière sera en vostre obéissance.>>

(deLettenhove, tome 9, 407-8)

The captain of that town was a knight called Sir Robert Salle. He was not of gentle birth, but in appearance, reputation and fact he was a brave and experienced fighting-man. King Edward had knighted him for his sterling worth and physically he was the best-built and strongest man in all England Lister and his followers thought that they would take this knight ... and make him their commander [T]hey greeted him and asked him to get off his horse to talk with them ...and began pleading with him ...[saying] Robert, you are a knight and you have a great reputation round here as a brave and worthy man. Of course you are one, but we know very well that you are not a gentleman, but the son of a common mason, of the same sort as us. Come with us and you shall be our master and we will make you so great a lord that the fourth part of England will be under your rule. (Brereton 222–23)

Confronted with the opportunity to lead people who thought of him as one of their own, possibly to power and fortune, Salle reacted with the horror entirely appropriate to his knightly station. In inviting him to lead them, Lister's gang was inviting Salle to betray one of the enduring

principles of chivalry, to defend and respect his own overlord. If he had done so, he would have considered himself no longer fit for knighthood and merely one of the violent rabble before which he was now – because he had dismounted before talking to them – helpless. After telling the mob he would rather see them all hanged, Salle tried, and failed, to remount his horse, which then galloped away. Left with his sword before the enraged group (described by Froissart as "sixty thousand strong" though the accuracy of his numbers has been questioned) he managed to kill more than a dozen of them before they overpowered him and ripped him apart. When news of his death was known, "en furent depuis en Engletière courouchiet tout li chevalier et escuier, quant il en seurent les nouvelles (deLettenhove, tome 9, 409; "all knights and squires in England were deeply angered by it" Brereton 224); it would seem, then, that his admittance through valour and not birth to the knightly class was complete and unquestioned by most people in it. It was the common people who could not forget his common inheritance, or consider him free of it.

Summary

Though Froissart's example of Sir Robert Salle is not a successful one, Salle did act in perfect accord with the chivalrous virtues he was sworn to defend. His death was, however, an example based on imminent physical threat and not only the moral threat of Chaucer's Franklin's dilemma. Morally, Salle made the correct choice and died for his virtuous principles. The dilemma in *The Franklin's Tale* could be said to revolve around the question of whether its characters could choose a virtuous and possibly destructive course for themselves if it meant relieving another character's duress. As Helen Cooper put it, "[a] happy ending requires not that God should unmake the rocks, but that a series of individuals should opt to yield up and to give rather than take" (240). The characters of the tale, all of them, do decide that the virtuous solution, the solution of *gentillesse*, is the right one, and so are freed by it. *Gentillesse* proves to be

the answer to their dilemma. Froissart records sufficient examples of virtue demonstrated by lesser-born characters, and of honour earned rather than inherited, that he can be considered to share Chaucer's belief in the viability, at least, of the idea of virtue seeping through society from its font (God, as professed by both authors) to the humblest citizens. If *gentillesse* does not always prove to deliver the immediate physical solution to the very temporal problems Froissart records, it can be thought of as the correct moral solution to the moral dilemmas recorded in both works.

Chapter Five

The Figure of Authority

Introduction

Since there exists a commonality between Chaucer and Froissart that can be considered a fascination with the confluence of moral dilemmas and human decisions, and since we have discussed, in the previous chapter, that the solution to such dilemmas observable in *The Franklin's Tale* and often in the *Chroniques* is the altruism exhibited through *gentillesse*, we must acknowledge that a further commonality the authors share is the desire to effectively demonstrate ethical action. The reason for writing *gentillesse* into the texts, after all, is the hope that its presence will inspire at least a debate about its viability as a means of improving interaction between people in a fallen world. Both authors therefore take on the role of moral authorities, for the purposes of their texts, as they demonstrate ethical decisions that they believe are tenable. Froissart asks his audience to trust his authority that events during the Hundred Years' War were as he records them; Chaucer's Franklin asks his fellow pilgrims to contemplate the ethical implications of the outcome of his story, and thereby accept him as the arbiter of a lesson in morality. The emergent link between the two has therefore become the presence of authority in their works; accordingly, I will turn my attention to a treatment of the figure, and location, of authority in both.

The Figure of Authority

To preface my discussion of authority and the emerging literate culture in which Chaucer and Froissart wrote, I wish first to briefly sketch the idea of authority in the late medieval period

as it pertained to literature. A passage from St. Bonaventure is particularly helpful. I quote from Burrow's citation of Bonaventure in *Medieval Writers and Their Work*: "Sometimes a man writes both his own words and others', but with his own in prime place and others' added only for purposes of confirmation; and he should be called an author [*auctor*]" (30). This is in contrast to men who simply transcribe the work of others' (*scriptor*), compile passages (*compilator*), or put others' words in "prime place" and include their own for purposes of clarification (*commentator*). Importantly, Burrow notes that according to Bonaventure's definition, an *auctor* does not write only his own material; "[t]he scheme simply does not allow for that possibility: even *auctores* will write the words of others.... Perhaps Bonaventure had in mind the Latin theologians, with their constant citation of earlier authorities..." (30). The Latin tradition, in fact, plays a huge role in the medieval concept of authority in literature: Latin was traditionally the language of legal and religious authority before (and considerably during) the fourteenth century, and though French and English had made inroads as languages in aristocratic and common usage, a knowledge of Latin and especially of Latin classical sources was what made one truly literate, and therefore allowed writers like Chaucer and Froissart (who certainly, by virtue of their educations, had mastery of Latin) to claim any sort of authoritative literary status. It is on a Latin foundation, therefore, that their literacy was based, and this went hand-in-hand with, indeed abetted, their writing in French in each case, and English in Chaucer's. Further, their participation in what I term the literate culture of their time was not predicated on their poetry, though both were acknowledged by their contemporaries as being very poetically skilled. It is Chaucer's work as a Customs official that distinguished him, in the eyes of his society, as a participant in literate culture. Froissart's status as a cleric automatically qualified him as part of literate culture because of the primacy of the Church, even though he was reasonably renowned

as a master of French verse. Clanchy states that “*clericus* and *litteratus* [were] interchangeable terms, both meaning ‘learned’ or ‘scholarly’” (179). *Litteratus* “meant ‘literate’ in something like its modern sense and also (in the most classical usage of Cicero) described a person with *scientia litterarum*, meaning ‘a knowledge of letters’ in the sense of ‘literature’” (177). The medieval sense of literate culture, therefore, was different from simply being able to read and write in the vernacular; a broader knowledge base than this, and a level of involvement in literate society different than simply writing poetry, for example, was required for real participation, and certainly required before any level of authority could be achieved in a text.

A study of the ethical nature of medieval texts implies that the authors of these texts concerned themselves, at least partly, with questions of correct and virtuous action – or more accurately, with questions of what constituted correct action in which circumstances, whether changing circumstances should result in different decisions, whether the pursuit of virtue, once defined, was a choice open to all members of society or restricted to certain groups – and if so, to which ones. Much of this discussion revolves around authority – the authority of authors to decide which examples are worthy of codification in their texts, and the authority of the texts themselves in their ability to transmit ideas effectively to their designated audiences. In other words, studying the authorial decision where to invest authority within a text can be as important to the discussion of medieval ethics as studying the authority of its writer. Locating the *figure* of authority in *The Franklin's Tale* and the *Chroniques*, therefore, is as informative to the study of the shared ethical intentions of Chaucer and Froissart as investigating the *locus* and strength of their own authority as authors.

Important in the discussion of textual authority in medieval western Europe is discovering where, within this period and region, social authority rested. In addition to the established

primacy of the Church and the temporal overlords who governed its various regions, European populations were responding to a shift in authority that they perceived as evident, certainly by the middle of the fourteenth century. Bisson addresses this shift; discussing the Peasants' Revolt of 1381, she cites a distinct wrath on the part of common people, centred on the inequitable conditions of their social stations but encompassing all of "literate culture": she explains this anger as follows:

The core motive spurring the rebels was the straightforward – and revolutionary – desire for freedom from bondage. The centrality of that goal helps to explain the intensity of the rebels' desire to destroy manorial records and their special wrath against lawyers; anger against official abuse, not frustration about food shortages, fuelled this revolt. Not just court records but literate culture itself seems to have been under attack. Susan Crane has argued that the uprising evidences the rebels' frustration at the encroachments that a spreading literate culture was making among those whose traditions were essentially oral. For literacy can become an instrument of control and oppression that leaves the illiterate both voiceless and powerless.

(156)

Authority was shifting, or had in fact shifted, to those who had mastered the requirements of the new literate culture (they could read and perhaps write – the two were not synonymous skills) and those who were left behind by it were angered at their exclusion. People who could read and write automatically enjoyed a certain authority derived from their abilities to partake in the new currency of literacy. "Crane's argument," Bisson continues, "helps to explain why, in addition to lawyers and government officials, the rebels targeted everyone who could write, as Walsingham's chronicle reports: "they ... had it cried around the city that all lawyers, all the men

of the Chancery and the Exchequer and everyone who could write a writ or a letter should be beheaded, wherever they could be found" (157). Educated men like Chaucer and Froissart profited greatly from the culture of literature, and not only because it allowed them, through virtue of their talent, to maintain their status as moderately comfortable commoners. Chaucer's opportunities for travel and social advancement, indeed his rather advantageous marriage, occurred because of his literary abilities executed in the service of the royal court, and if his poetic inclinations did not materially advance his status, they certainly earned him respect and prestige within the courtly circle he served. Froissart became one of the men who recorded history, including the Peasants' Revolt, and was considered to "reflect the perspective of the literate, power-holding authorities" (Bisson 156), a judgment which, if not entirely accurate at all times, (he was able to record multiple – and opposing – viewpoints of the powerful and powerless) still can be said to apply to him as a writer who upheld the traditional hierarchy.

There is evidence in the *Chroniques* of the advantages gained from the mastery of literature, indeed of sympathy felt towards those whose skills did not include literacy. For example, Froissart describes the mayor of the port of La Rochelle, Jean Caudourier, as “durement agu et soubtil en toutes ses soses et bon françois de corage” (deLettenhove, tome 8, 181; “a very sharpwitted man, shrewd in all his undertakings, and a good Frenchman at heart” Brereton 182) who schemes to subvert English command and deliver the town to King Charles. Sir John Devereux, the English governor at La Rochelle, departs with half his garrison to relieve neighbouring Poitiers, which is under attack, and leaves a squire, one Philippot Mansel, “qui n'estoit mies trop soutieuls, et demorèrent avoech lui environ LX compagnons” (deLettenhove, tome 8, 181; “a happy-go-lucky sort of fellow, with about sixty soldiers under him” (Brereton 182) in charge of the port. Froissart details how the overthrow of the English was predicated on

the illiteracy (and gullibility) of one man. Knowing that control of the port depended on its castle, Caudourier concocts a plan whereby the castle could be emptied of its English occupiers. He invites Mansel to supper, where he reveals that he had received a letter, the day before, from the King of England. He removes from a chest a letter bearing Edward III's seal, which Mansel recognizes, affixed to a letter sent to him at a much earlier point in time:

...mais [Mansel] ne savoit lire: pour tant fu-il décheus. Sire Jehan Chaudouvrier appella un clerch qui il avoit tout pourveu et avisé de son fait ... le clerch le prist et lisi ce que point n'estoit en le lettre, et parloit en lisant que li rois d'Engleterre moult estroitement commandoit au maieur que il fesist faire leur monstre de tous gens armés demorant en le Rocelle, et l'en rescrist le nombre par le porteur de ces lettres.... (deLettenhove, tome 8, 182)

[Mansel] could not read, which made him easy to trick. Jean Caudourier then called a secretary ... [who] took the letter and pretended to read a message which he himself made up, to the effect that the King of England ordered the mayor to hold a parade of all fighting men in the city ... and report their numbers to him by the bearer of the present letter. (Brereton 183)

Eager to comply with what he believes is a royal request, Mansel is further encouraged by the promise of payment to his men, who were at that point "owed three months' pay or more" (184). The next day he empties his forces from the castle and lines them up in the town, while Caudourier, his councillors, and soldiers seize and secure the castle and arrest Mansel's men. As stated above, the episode shows evidence of the advantages made possible by the incipient literate culture, and Froissart evinces admiration for Caudourier's innovative craftiness in using Mansel's illiteracy against him. It is interesting, as well, that there is no serious note of derision

in Froissart's tone while he describes Mansel's duping; he does not portray Mansel as being stupid or lazy, merely disadvantaged – the narration is factual but slightly sympathetic, as if describing one who could not help being unequal to his predicament. Illiteracy, then, elicits a certain sensitivity from Froissart, indicating that as a literate man he acknowledged the potential power of the embryonic literate culture, and realized the disadvantaged position of those left outside of it.

It is tempting, though extremely difficult, to formulate from Chaucer's and Froissart's written documentation of illiterate, subject people a viable theory about their personal views on the common man versus the ruling class. I classify this as extremely difficult first because neither author left explicit written testimony on the subject of his feelings for the peasantry, and therefore views intimated from their writing will be forever subject to critical interpretation, and secondly because their analogous positions writing for and about the nobility largely precluded the feasibility of expressing serious literary concern for the commons that was not conventional, or at least evasive. Through the years, critics have articulated different opinions on Chaucer's treatment of the peasantry, particularly centering on his portraits, in the Prologue to the *Canterbury Tales*, of the representatives of the ruling class (Knight, Franklin) and the ruled (Plowman, Miller). Stillwell's 1939 assessment of Chaucer's attitude to the peasantry held that Chaucer firmly supported the ruling estate, though he was subtle in supporting it; he responds to critical descriptions of the Plowman as being colourless and idealized by claiming that the Plowman "is a colourless figure [because] the real plowman of the time was revolting against everything that Chaucer stood for" (285), referring to the 1381 Peasants' Revolt. In a contemporary critical treatment, Blamires suggests that "Chaucer is committed to the 'dominant' social view and categorically does not sympathize with political dissent" (524). Blamires focuses

his article on Chaucer's assignment of blame for the Revolt "away from lordship (Knight) and judiciary (Franklin)" (523), stating that Chaucer chooses to direct blame towards the Reeve: "he allows no explicit responsibility for exploitation to touch those who control and administer secular government, at least, not at the level of *gentil* society. He displaces it below that stratum" (529). Pearsall cites Chaucer's recent entry to the lowest ranks of the gentry as explanatory in understanding his views on the peasantry:

As to Chaucer's view of the common people, it is one of routine contempt for them en masse ... and routine admiration for them in their individual role of humble and patient organization Chaucer wrote out of concerns of his class; if his text requires an opinion on a matter of political or social concern, he responds by articulating the views of that class or by evading the question. Both the conventionality and the evasiveness are encouraged by his perception of himself as a comparative newcomer to the class. (148)

Pearsall avers, then, that Chaucer felt safe in penning literary admiration for commoners who accepted their lot with patience and without complaint, but would have had scant sympathy for the rebels of the Peasants' Revolt, not only because they congregated in a destructive mob but because he himself, as a major literary cog in the court's wheel, would have been one of their targets. Froissart, for his part, has gained the reputation (because of his known championing of chivalric culture) for being the literary messenger of the ruling class. Charles Wood goes so far as to name one of Froissart's sources for the Peasant's Revolt episode of his *Chroniques* as being a member of the royal family: the King's mother, Joan of Kent. As such, Wood accords the *Chroniques* pivotal importance as historical records not because they may indicate Froissart's view of the peasantry, but because they accurately record "the outlook of those on whose

evidence they depend” (42). Wood names Joan of Kent and her circle as Froissart’s likely source for the Revolt because “[s]he appears in Froissart’s story with greater frequency than anyone else, and it is also the case that some incidents involving her ... appear in no other chronicle” (42) as well as the fact that she was raised in Philippa of Hainault’s household and can be presumed to have trusted Philippa’s clerk and countryman Froissart, much as Philippa did. Wood summarizes that the tone of Froissart’s descriptions of Richard II’s minority kingship (and the repeated implications that mismanagement by Richard’s uncles and governors was to blame for the peasant rising) indicate his sources as being sympathetic to the minor King, yet placed safely within the royal administration; “In short, everything about Froissart’s account ... demonstrates that while he and his sources had no sympathy with the peasants and their urban allies, they appear to have thought that the principal cause of the Peasants’ Revolt lay in the oppression ... of Richard II’s minority government” (44). In attempting to locate their views on the peasantry, therefore, and assess the extent of their sympathy for the ruling estate, there are parallels between critical treatments of Chaucer and Froissart. Primarily, I will point out that in the absence of specific written evidence of their feelings, critics have had to infer their attitudes from their works, and the verdict in each case most convincingly trends toward conventional support of judicial and hereditary rulers, and at least tacit approval of the status quo. Further, there is evidence in both texts of a willingness to blame social unrest on lower-placed members of government instead of attacking the structure of government itself. Notwithstanding their peripheral placement within the ruling class, it is clear that neither author was a member of the peasantry; both authors possessed the skills necessary to trade in literary culture, and recognized that it was best not to attack, literarily or literally, the incumbency of royal authority.

As educated outsiders able to comment intelligently on the workings of the noble estate,

originating in God and being available to all humans, regardless of social class, a favoured Chaucerian theme. Sherman argues that the Wife stages “a radical disruption of the chivalric world of the tale” when her hag quotes Dante’s *Convivio* in demonstrating the nature of *gentillesse*; in so doing she has also demonstrated for us the independent definitions of *gentillesse* and chivalry, illustrating that the two were not inseparable tenets of medieval culture. “By redefining *gentillesse*,” Sherman claims, “the old woman also disentangles the chivalric virtue that clung to it. Dante says *l’umana probitate*, human worth, does not rise through the branches of a dynasty, and Chaucer translates *probitate* as ‘prowesse’, which according to Kaeuper ‘was truly the demi-god in the quasi-religion of chivalric honour’” (107). The old woman continues to draw on sources such as Boethius and Seneca in her argument to convert the knight to a greater understanding of *gentil* values; what becomes obvious in her speech is that her education, and knowledge of classical sources (obviously Chaucer’s education and knowledge of them) are the factors that convince the knight of the viability of her case. Lacking the literacy and gift of rhetoric that clearly allow her to launch such a defense, she would have lacked the very tools that gave her authoritative status. Her mastery of Biblical and classical authorities, in other words, and her facile intellect with its grasp of the power of literacy, lent her the authority necessary to successfully advise the knight. As such, the hag of the Wife’s tale reveals qualities consistent with those that established Chaucer as an accomplished poet among his contemporaries, as well as a trusted minister and royal envoy.

Naturally, the fact that the hag is appointed such an authoritative voice in the tale has not gone unnoticed. The paradox of such an important and ennobling speech articulated by a socially inferior, physically vulnerable woman has attracted considerable and varying critical attention over several decades, as have numerous other facets of *The Wife’s Tale*. Robertson’s 1962

treatment of the Wife cast her as a carnal, dangerous heretic, while Burlin sees her as a battered woman. Hope Weissman cites Chaucer's effectiveness in combining experience with authority in his portrait of the Wife. Recently, Lindley has asserted that the narrator Alisoun does not really exist except as a construct imagined by men, and that it is necessary to remind ourselves not to look for her as a woman but as a pastiche of male views on women: "Alisoun's absence reminds us that Alisoun is in the eye of the beholder, and that her sins – especially the desire to control and define others – are also the sins of those who imagined her ... [W]e are reminded that no woman has taken part in the creation of this 'woman'" (17). Where Alisoun is an enigma who appropriates numerous layers (and voices) of authority in a *mélange* that still engages serious critical attention, the hag of her tale is given a speech featuring notable *auctours* that remains relatively straightforward and effective. More interesting still, the hag's lecture is delivered *after* she has entered into marriage with the knight – adding the subservience of matrimony to the other aspects of inferiority (birth, age, appearance) that already separate her, in the eyes of her husband, from him. As such, the hag offers a perspective on the princely station that encourages us as readers to re-consider the true locus, and embodiment, of *gentil* behaviour.

Froissart details an episode where a counsellor of inferior social status directs his prince to a decision based on *gentillesse* in his chapter on the siege of Calais. Sir Walter Manny was sent by Edward III to negotiate terms with the besieged and starving citizens of Calais in the summer of 1347. When the defenders realize that French forces are incapable of relieving them, they agree to open a dialogue with the English instead of yielding to starvation. Manny relates to them the king's anger at the cost of the siege thus far, in terms of lives, time and funds, and entreats them to surrender unconditionally. When they ask if they might leave the castle unharmed, Manny returns to Edward III to request that they be allowed to do so. Edward retorts that to

satisfy his anger at the men who cost him so much time and effort, all the defenders of Calais must die. It is at this point that Manny quietly takes Edward aside and offers cooler counsel:

Monsigneur, vous poriés bien avoir tort; car vous nous donnés mauvais exemple. Se vous nous voliés envoyer en aucunes de vos forterèces, nous n'irions mies si volentiers, se vous faites ces gens mettre à mort, ensi que vous dittes; car ensi feroit-on de nous en sam blant cas. Cils exemples amolia grandement le corage dou roy d'Engleterre, car li plus des barons qui là estoient, l'aidièrent à soustenir.

(deLettenhove, tome 5, 201)

My lord, you may well be mistaken, and you are setting a bad example for us. Suppose one day you sent us to defend one of your fortresses, we should go less cheerfully if you have these people put to death, for then they would do the same to us if they had the chance. This argument did much to soften the King's heart, especially when most of his barons supported it. (Brereton 106)

Manny's grasp of rhetorical reasoning, even in the midst of war, saves the lives of the defenders of Calais, as Edward decides that if six of the most prominent citizens could be brought to justice in place of all of them, he would spare the rest. When these six are assembled and paraded barefoot before him, he immediately orders their heads struck off, whereupon Manny reappears with more *gentil* advice. Addressing the king, he affirms:

Vous avés le nom et le renommée de souverainne gentillèce et de noblèce: or ne voelliés dont faire cose par quoi elle soit noient amenrie, ne que on puist parler sur vous en nulle manière villainne. (deLettenhove, tome 5, 205)

You have a reputation for royal clemency. Do not perform an act which might tarnish it and allow you to be spoken of dishonourably. (Brereton 109).

Manny has risked falling from Edward's graces by questioning the royal will. Ainsworth believes that the episode is pivotally illuminating: "... a lesson in leadership and statecraft is proposed here, together with an appeal to personal moderation and an invitation to exercise what the chronicler evidently considers ... a supremely royal, heroic virtue" (298). Sir Walter espouses humility in order to save lives, and not only does the actual word *gentillesse* appear in the chronicle, his intelligent association of virtue with honour, and his encouragement to let moderation triumph over angry pride, certainly reveals his status as authority and counsellor to the king. It is Queen Philippa, heavily pregnant, who finishes the task of changing Edward's mind, as she kneels before him and begs him to spare the lives of the six burghers. This is illuminating because it showcases *gentillesse* in a context of uncommon clarity: the Queen, morally and legally subservient to her husband by virtue of matrimony, is also particularly physically vulnerable in her state of advanced pregnancy. Her request is an abject appeal for mercy; there is no glory to be gained in saving the lives of the burghers, and considerable satisfaction to be had in killing them. Edward finally surrenders them to her. In acquiescing to her wish, he acknowledges her gentility in avoiding further bloodshed, and demonstrates the *gentil* action of sparing them rather than exercising his kingly prerogative – his option by right of birth and by the conventions of their chivalric culture – of executing them. Walter Manny's sober, rational advice to the king not to raze the entire town is contrasted here by Philippa's emotional plea; in each case, though, the helplessness of those in positions of danger (the town's citizens, the six burghers) inspires *gentil* action from the ruler in a position of total authority. Philippa fulfills the chivalric female role cited by Charny of encouraging men to perform *gentil* deeds, but she also recognizes the potential for *gentil* action of her own volition, and acts on her beliefs. Sir Walter Manny, meanwhile, may be one of the most ideal knight-counsellors in the

Chroniques; Froissart also portrays him embodying chivalry and *gentillesse* concurrently. His status as subservient to his prince is clear, as is his admirable advocacy of *gentillesse* in war. He conversely portrays, therefore, the image of the social inferior who serves as an authority; his knowledge and reason results in virtuous counsel, and honourable action, comparable to Chaucer's hag of the *Wife of Bath's Tale*.

A discussion of the Chaucerian figure of authority, however, specifically one centred on the inclusion of *gentillesse* in an advisor's counsel, is not complete without a study of Chaucer's Franklin. Twentieth century critics have spent some effort attacking the Franklin, claiming that rather than writing a *gentil* who imparts a tale advocating *gentillesse*, Chaucer in fact paints a social climber desperate to establish himself as a member of the ruling class, however lowly placed. Citing Robertson, Gaylord and Spearing, Helen Cooper declares that "a sinful, ambitious, or patriarchal Franklin is regarded as justifying an ironic reading of the tale" (240). Nevertheless, she herself defends the Franklin as an accepted and unquestioned member of the ruling class. "Chaucer's concept of *gentillesse* is appropriate in the mouth of a Franklin," she writes, "a representative of the lower ranks of the gentry, and therefore the man in the middle, able to acknowledge and approve generous action in both knights and clerks" (240). Morgan elucidates the historical place of the Franklin in medieval society:

The identification of the social status of the Franklin is clearly ... a matter of vital importance. What that social status in fact is emerges very clearly from the General Prologue, for the portraits are organized by class and by rank within the class. The fundamental division of medieval society is not, as ours is commonly perceived to be, into three classes (upper, middle, and lower), but into only two (gentle and commons). This polarity is reflected in Chaucerian poetry in terms of a contrast

between gentils who are courteous and the vilayns who are churlish The Franklin is thus a member of the class of gentles, but of the lowest rank. (12)

It seems clear that the designation did in fact involve membership in the ruling order, but the position's low ranking within that hierarchy indicates that Chaucer was deliberate in choosing a Franklin as the teller of his tale of *gentillesse*: Chaucer's Franklin has sufficient status to serve as an authority to the pilgrims who are placed higher than he is within the nobility, while still retaining the humility and credence to speak effectively to the commons. In fact it is the openness of the tale, the accessibility of the tale's message to all strata of society, which allows the Franklin to instruct his fellow pilgrims in the benefits of *gentil* action. The Franklin's *démande* at the tale's finale requires the pilgrims to consider their reaction to its message, involving them in a dialogue of gentility regardless of rank, and validating the idea of their participation in the thought process of ethical decision-making. The tale is not completed within the Franklin's narrative frame; his question to them dictates that its completion rests with the pilgrims, who will, independently, assess the ultimate value of the *gentil* ideal based on its application by the tale's characters.

Summary

Appreciating the use of authority made by Chaucer and Froissart, and their incorporation of this in the ethical experiments within *The Franklin's Tale* and the *Chroniques*, depends first on a proper appreciation of their status as literate men according to the tenets of the fourteenth century; that is, they were educated in the vernacular languages each used, but also had a mastery of Latin and classical Latin sources. Because of their education, intelligence, and literacy they were able to participate in the incipient literary culture of the late medieval period, which even during their lifetimes was becoming a medium through which the nobility accepted edification

and instruction, even from social inferiors. Within the frameworks of their texts they were able to adopt and develop the idea of a literary, authoritative voice, and explore the possibilities inherent in the characterization of literary characters who could speak with voices of authority despite being situated in positions socially inferior to those they proposed to instruct. Further, the nobility's increasing valuation of literary works allowed for a direct line of communication between author and ruler-reader, allowing Chaucer and Froissart to write for the enjoyment – and instruction – of the princely estate. In furtherance of my goal of exploring their textual framing of *gentillesse*, I have illustrated examples of Froissart chronicling advice given to Edward III by those subject to his will, and of Chaucer experimenting with the trade of *gentillesse* from characters of the noble estate to the commons, and back. In both cases, I have demonstrated their authorship of narrative possibility; of the encouragement to imagine and test out alternative (*gentil*) possibilities instead of following existing autocratic (hereditary) precedent. The next, and last, phase of my ethical investigation will involve pulling even sharper focus on the intra-personal relationships affected by *gentillesse*: specifically, the marriage relationship, iterations of which are prominent in *The Franklin's Tale* and in sections of the *Chroniques*, will serve as the microcosm through which the effects of the authors' advocacy of *gentillesse* in society can be studied.

Chapter Six

The Model of Marriage

Introduction

One of the primary objectives in my thematic comparison between Chaucer and Froissart is to study the use each makes of their texts as structures within which they may experiment with, or expose, the *gentil* dynamic between characters. It makes sense, then, that marriage, the institution that entails the most intimate interpersonal dynamics, can act as a magnifying lens through which we can view the effects of *gentillesse* on the authors' characters. With regards to *The Franklin's Tale*, so much attention has been placed on the subject of marriage in recent decades that the marital relationship between Dorigen and Arveragus could be said to dominate the critical discussion. Since the beginning of serious debate on the *Canterbury Tales* in the twentieth century, arguments about *maistrye* in their marriage (whether it was shared, whether Arveragus governed the relationship, whether Dorigen relinquished the equality she initially enjoyed) have inspired weighty articles and rejoinders that at times have clouded other aspects of the tale. It should not be surprising that since the issue of shared *maistrye* – essentially shared authority – in their marriage is so prominently highlighted by the Franklin, and considering the Franklin's medieval context, a certain fixation on the subject would inevitably follow. In fact questions of marriage and authority can be said to be linked in the medieval mind. Certainly the exegetical and classical texts cited in *The Wife of Bath's Tale* indicate that the Franklin's fellow pilgrims would not have found the confluence of the subjects of marriage and authority unprecedented; the surprising twist the Franklin offers is that authority in his tale is shared

between marital partners. In this chapter I will spend some time detailing critical approaches to the subject of marriage in *The Franklin's Tale*, concluding that the marital relationship of *The Franklin's Tale* – the subject of marriage itself, *per se* – is secondary to the subject of *gentillesse*. It is important, certainly, but not the primary message the tale is meant to convey. It is certainly an arguable, though dated, proposition that the portrait of an ideal marriage is Chaucer's intention for the tale; I will gravitate away from that view and towards the idea that the textual experiment of including *gentillesse* as foundational and beneficial in the marital dynamic is the message that the pilgrims, and ultimately Chaucer's readers, are left to ponder. Having established the primacy of the *gentillesse*-marriage relationship in *The Franklin's Tale*, I will study where the two intersect in the *Chroniques*. Froissart, unexpectedly, does go far in painting an ideal marriage when he describes John of Gaunt's relationship with his third wife, Katherine Swynford. The common link in the marriage illustrated by Chaucer's Franklin and in two examples of marriage I will borrow from Froissart is that gentility between marriage partners is evident in every case. In previous chapters I have sketched a definition of *gentillesse* in late medieval culture, studied the tenets of the chivalric world in which Chaucer and Froissart wrote, and given examples of narrative frameworks in which *gentil* behaviour is being advised; I can now focus closely on *gentillesse* demonstrated at the very intimate level of marriage, where *gentil* conduct is enacted and the advisability of incorporating this into all relationships is inferred.

The Model of Marriage

It has been almost one hundred years since Kittredge argued that there existed within the *Canterbury Tales* a Marriage Group of stories that began with the Wife of Bath and ended with *The Franklin's Tale*. Specifically, Kittredge claimed that Chaucer had sketched a debate on marriage within the *Tales*, beginning with the Wife of Bath's heretical desire for mastery in

marriage, proceeding to the Merchant's and Clerk's tales which featured wives who were subject to their husbands (in varying degrees) and ending with the pact of marital equality evident in *The Franklin's Tale*, according to Kittredge Chaucer's answer to the question of ideal marriage. In the ensuing time much critical attention has been spent either supporting the Marriage Group theory (mostly in works written earlier in the twentieth century) or refuting it entirely. Howard disagreed with Kittredge's conclusion that *The Franklin's Tale* was Chaucer's idea of idyllic marriage, citing evidence that *The Physician's Tale* and *The Second Nun's Tale* offer better and understudied solutions to the marriage debate. As early as 1935, Lyons was arguing that the idea of an actual debate on marriage taking place between the pilgrims was unproven, based on both the links between tales and the substance of the tales themselves. Morgan has made the point that

Kittredge only arrives at his theory by insisting upon the centrality of psychological and dramatic principles in the elucidation of Chaucer's work, and these we have ... established as being anachronistic and largely irrelevant. It should also be evident that the theory of a Marriage Group involves both simplification and distortion of the original design. (30)

Morgan uses as his example *The Franklin's Tale*, stating that it did not "merely or even essentially provide an authoritative resolution of a debate on marriage" (30) and it seems clear that though the Franklin's is the last tale to feature the machinations of marriage at its core, Morgan does not believe Chaucer intended it to comprise the last word in the marriage discussion. More recently, O'Donoghue is informative in advocating the separation of contemporary romance conventions, in which both Chaucer and Froissart periodically traded, from actual legal marital relationships of the time, and deducing from that the untenable quality of Kittredge's argument that Chaucer used the *Tales* to comment on models of marriage as he

observed them. O'Donoghue argues that

[s]everal studies since the 1970s have provided a context for examining marriage in Chaucer and his contemporaries in a more socio-historical framework [W]hat [they] establish, surprisingly at first glance in the light of traditional Chaucer criticism, is how little consideration of actual contemporary marriage there is in Chaucer. (248)

Citing historical accounts of marriage versus literary treatments of it that could be highly conventionalized, he indicates the futility of trying to divine details of actual marriages from tales that are either narrated by literary stereotypes (the Wife), significantly allegorical (the Merchant) or meant to be understood as hagiographic (the Clerk). In part because of the popularity of this view, twenty-first century critics have tended to pay careful attention not to project anachronistic expectations or desires on the *Canterbury* stories or their narrators.

Many critical studies in the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries have revolved away from arguments in favour of a Marriage Group, or a debate between the pilgrims on marriage itself, and towards studying the cultural or social significance of the particular marriage portrayed in *The Franklin's Tale*. Middleton explores the impact of chivalry on marriage; Raybin views the tale through the lens of Dorigen's experience of marriage, while Crane investigates the parallels between the Franklin and Dorigen. Treating the actual marriage agreement between Arveragus and Dorigen, Bisson summarizes that

The mutual accommodation [they] arrive at in the early phase of their marriage strikes Kittredge and other critics as Chaucer's solution to the problem of "maistrye". The exegetical critics, however, reject this view, finding Arveragus guilty of culpably abdicating a husband's rightful authority and thus depriving Dorigen of needed

guidance. Feminist critics, on the other hand, see Arveragus's concession of power as more apparent than real: in her crisis Dorigen essentially reverts to the position of subservient wife, doing, however reluctantly, what her husband commands. (237)

Advocating the 'feminist' critical approach, Cooper maintains that "Dorigen looks to her husband to sort things out for her: that is appropriate for the character Chaucer makes of her, and if it further suggests that a husband's refusal of "soveraynetee" may not be final, and that in the natural order of things he will be the leader and head, it would be anachronistic to demand otherwise" (240). Nachtwey, however, questions whether Dorigen was ever actually in danger of having to yield to Aurelius at all. Because the *Franklin's Tale* unfolds among characters bound to the code of chivalry, Nachtwey argues, the reaction of Aurelius is predictable for a character so accomplished in the "game of 'gentillesse'" as Arveragus: "[t]here is some textual evidence that he knows how Aurelius will react to his own 'largesse'" he writes, "not because Aurelius is unusually moral but because he is compelled to do so" (117). Though it may be true Arveragus had hopes of reciprocal generosity by Aurelius when he sent Dorigen to him, counting on such behavior is still an enormous risk to take considering the consequences of being wrong, especially for a medieval man. Sharing interest in Arveragus's character, Craig Davis pursues a biographical view in his study that links Chaucer's actual marriage to the literary one of Arveragus and Dorigen. Focusing on his inferior social status to Philippa de Roet, who was the daughter of a knight of Hainault in the train of Queen Philippa, her namesake, Davis theorizes that Chaucer modelled Dorigen's noble birth on his own wife's; Arveragus is described in the tale as having to earn Dorigen's affection and the consent of her family to marry him, using the logical and only means within his reach – his martial prowess. His skill as a knight, Davis claims, is the equalizing factor that levels his social status almost alongside hers and allows him

to become sufficiently acceptable for her to marry him.

I believe there are significant reasons why critics have dwelt upon the marriage of Arveragus and Dorigen, and these do not revolve solely around the issue of studying the feasibility of equality in marriage in a medieval context, nor even the question of whether Chaucer intended their marriage to be viewed as idyllic. The marriage of *The Franklin's Tale* is the nexus of its most important theme: *gentillesse*. As is demonstrated in the Squire-Franklin link, *gentillesse* is a chief concern of the Franklin; he compliments the Knight's son on his attempt to tell a tale about *gentil* manners, expressing the wish that his own son would demonstrate such concern. He then proceeds to successfully execute the task the Squire had attempted: he tells the pilgrims a story of *gentillesse* that is effective and edifying, in a narrative format (entertaining Breton *lai*) they will accept. The time the Franklin spends defining the unusual marriage agreement between Arveragus and Dorigen is necessary to establish that theirs is not a marriage of obligation or duress but one of respect and love; both partners willingly enter into the union and earnestly undertake to consider the other's best interest in any eventuality. It is this marriage agreement that allows for the first instance of gentility in the tale – the gentility between Arveragus and Dorigen. When Dorigen explains to Arveragus the dilemma that is causing her such grief, his first reaction is not one of condemnation, nor does he accuse her of untoward behaviour during his absence. Instead, he takes her at her word that the situation with Aurelius is as she says, and works to find a solution to it. His reaction, especially in the character of a husband situated in classical antiquity (we must remember that their Breton story places them in a pagan context) is a prototypically *gentil* reaction – and the example of the *gentil* solution he arrives at is replicated in the consequent gentility demonstrated by the other characters in the tale. In this context of demonstration, the argument of whether Arveragus's reaction

(encouraging his wife to consummate the union with Aurelius that she only really intimated was possible *in play*, and therefore to commit adultery) is one husbands should be encouraged to emulate is immaterial to the actual message being enacted: that his reaction to Dorigen's story was not the one the Franklin's audience may well have anticipated, nor was it a reaction most husbands might display. His reaction demonstrated, primarily, respect and consideration for his wife, instead of the censure that in the absence of his *gentillesse* she may have endured.

It is prudent to ask, now that we have examined the importance of marriage as the origin of *gentillesse* in *The Franklin's Tale*, where exactly Froissart fits into the debate on *gentillesse* within marriage. On first reading the *Chroniques* it may seem that he does not figure largely in any debate on marriage; women generally do not find their way to places of importance in the *Chroniques* except as royal consorts or as the quiet female halves of dynastic alliances. There are notable exceptions – Queen Isabella and Queen Philippa are given attention in Books One and Two, Isabella for her statecraft installing her son as king, Philippa as one of Froissart's most important patrons, and certainly his favourite. There are two episodes that speak directly to the debate on marriage, however, and help to reveal Froissart's opinions on desirable qualities in the marital relationship. Various points of emphasis in his narrative situate *gentillesse* in marriage and uphold the social value of this pairing.

In Book Three, Froissart depicts a judicial duel between a knight and a squire, the circumstances of which parallel the dilemma in the *Franklin's Tale*. Sir Jean de Carrouges and Jacques LeGris served in the household of Count Pierre d'Alencon:

Advenu estoit que volenté avoit esté prinse à messier Jehan de Carouge, pour son avancement, d'aler oultre mer, car à voyages faire avoit-il esté tousjours enclin

(deLettenhove, tome 12, 30)

It happened that Sir Jean de Carrouges made plans to go on an expedition overseas – a thing which he had always been fond of doing – to help him in his advancement

(Brereton 309)

Before leaving, he bade his wife goodbye. Brereton draws from Froissart's *seconde rédaction* of the story to describe Carrouges's wife:

Le chevalier avoit une femme espousée, jeune, belle, bonne, sage et de bon gouvernement, et se départy d'elle amiablement, ainsy que chevaliers font quant ils vont ens es loingtaines marches. (deLettenhove, tome 12, 30)

The knight had married a wife who was young, beautiful, good, sensible, and modest in her behaviour. He bid her a loving goodbye, as knights do when they leave for distant lands. (Brereton 309)

While Carrouges was away, "le déable par temptation perverse et diverse entra ou corps de Jaquet le Gris" (deLettenhove, 12:31; "the devil entered the body of Jacques LeGris" Brereton 310), and he rode to the castle of Argentan, where Carrouges's wife was living quietly with her servants. She welcomed him to the castle as a fellow man-at-arms serving her husband's master, and her servants, recognizing and trusting him, left them alone in the keep. After he had locked them in, Jacques grabbed her, and declaring "Dame, sachiés véritablement que je vous aime plus que moy-mesme; mail il convient que j'aye mes volontés de vous" (deLettenhove, 12:32; "Lady, I swear to you that I love you better than my own life, but I must have my will of you" Brereton 310) he pushed her to the floor and raped her. Before leaving he warned her that because she would be dishonoured if she revealed the rape, they should both stay silent. When her husband returned from his travels, she revealed to him what had happened, to which he replied:

Certes, dame, mais que la chose soit ainsi que vous me comptés, je le vous pardonne;

mais l'escuier mourra pour ce fait par le conseil que j'en auray de mes amis et des vostres; et, si je treuve en fauls ce que vous me dittes, jamais en ma compaignie vous ne serés. (deLettenhove, tome 12, 34)

All right, then, my lady, if the thing happened as you say, I forgive you; but the squire shall die for it in some way to be decided by my friends and yours. And if I find that what you have told me is not true, you shall never live with me again.

(Brereton 311)

With regards to my discussion of *gentillesse* in marriage, it is important to note several points at this juncture. The first is not only the obvious similarity between this and *The Franklin's Tale* but the reaction of the knight to his lady's distress. In this episode the lady has not made rash promises to the squire but has in fact been physically violated; nevertheless we must consider rape in its historical context in order to fully appreciate the *gentillesse* observable in the knight's response. In 1386 (the year Froissart names as the time of events) it was completely possible, even routine, for rape victims to be judged as being at least partially responsible for their predicaments. Particularly for a husband who has just returned from battle abroad, the revelation of his wife's sexual relations (even forced relations) with another man might well be the catalyst for animosity towards her, if not actual violence. The love Carrouges obviously felt for his wife enabled him to believe her, but more importantly the trust she had in him allowed her to tell him of the episode in the first place, contrary to LeGris's instruction and expectation. Carrouges then, like Arveragus, endeavors to find a solution to the situation that demonstrates, as far as he is able, *gentillesse* to his wife: he calls a counsel of their friends to decide the best way forward. In including her friends in his plan of action he validates her position as a blameless victim worthy of trust and deserving of justice, due to their inclination to sympathize with her predicament. As

such the Carrouges marriage acts, just as does the marriage of Arveragus and Dorigen, as a framework in which we can view the *gentil* dynamic at close hand.

Continuing with Froissart's story, the Count of Alençon is asked to adjudicate the matter, and listened to both the knight's and lady's testimony and the squire's defence, which was that he did not have the time that day to have ridden the distance to Argentan and back in order to perpetrate the rape. The Count decided that his favourite was telling the truth, and

...disoit le seigneur à la dame ... qu'elle l'avoit songié ... [mais] le chevalier qui grant courage avoit et qui sa femme croioit, ne volt mie tenir celle oppinion mais s'en vint à Paris et remonstra sa cause en parlement, et fist appeller en parlement ce Jacquet le Gris, lequel respondi à son appel et dist et promist et livra plesges que il feroit et tendroit ce que parlement en ordonneroit. (deLettenhove, tome 12, 35)

[Alencon] told the lady that she must have dreamt it ... [whereupon] the knight, who possessed great courage and believed his wife, refused to obey this ruling. He went to Paris and laid his case against Jacques Le Gris before the High Court. Jacques responded to his summons and gave securities pledging him to abide by the court's decision. (Brereton 312)

After a protracted legal battle, the Court ruled that since the lady could not prove LeGris guilty and since the knight "se tenoit seur et bien infourmé de sa femme" (deLettenhove 12:35; "believed absolutely in his wife's account", Brereton 313) and would not revoke the charge, the two should put it to combat and duel to the death, with God deciding whose side justice was on. The duel was scheduled and attended by the king and many of his barons. The Lady of Carrouges

...[e]stoit en grans transes et n'estoit pas assurée de sa vye; car, se la bataille

tournoit à desconfiture sur son mary, il estoit sentencié que sans remède nul on l'eust arse et son mary pendu. (deLettenhove, 12:37)

...was in great anxiety and far from certain that her own life was safe, for if her husband got the worst of it, the sentence was that he should be hanged and she burnt, without appeal. (Brereton 314)

The knight entered the lists after kissing his wife and signing the cross over his chest, swore an oath along with Le Gris, and proceeded to kill him in combat. The king confirmed that Carrouges had done his duty, presented him with a thousand francs, made him a member of his chamber, and granted him an annuity of two hundred francs a year for life, whereupon he returned to his wife, kissed her, and they left for the Cathedral of Notre Dame where they thanked God for his beneficence in allowing them justice.

Froissart mentions that the case attracted attention throughout France; its notoriety derived as much, perhaps more, from its miraculous elements as its scandalous ones. The mention of God, the ultimate authority to whom the dispute is finally addressed, implies Froissart's belief that the Lord of Carrouges did indeed fight a just cause, that his wife had been violated, and that his victory was evidence of the heavenly affirmation of his faith in his wife's word, and their joint moral righteousness. Not only is the knight rewarded with a very public temporal (and therefore moral) victory, the king rewards him materially, considerably increasing his financial solidity. The knight's interest in proving his wife's innocence could possibly have had to do with his need to assert sexual possession over her along with concern for the injustice she suffered, but as Cooper points out in discussing *The Franklin's Tale*, it would be anachronistic to demand of the knight that he behave otherwise. Her faith in him, it must be remembered, allowed her to reveal the attack in the first place, and their mutual support and concern for each other is evident

throughout the story. As such, Froissart is telling his audience that the story ended well, the trust and love between husband and wife enabling the divinely ordained conclusion.

Another marital “story” that ends well in the *Chroniques* is found in Froissart’s description of John of Gaunt’s last marriage, in Book Four. It seems plausible that this episode showcases, more than any other, Froissart’s answer to the optimal marital relationship based on love. Gaunt’s third wife was his long-time mistress, Katherine Swynford, sister to the Philippa de Roet who married Geoffrey Chaucer. Froissart records:

Tousjours de duc Jehan de Lancastre avoit amé et tenu celle dame Katherine, de laquelle il ot trois enfans ...

and when Gaunt marries her

dont on fut en France et en Angleterre moult esmerveillié, car elle estoit de basse lignie au regard des deux autres dames ... que le duc avoit en devant eues par mariage. (deLettenhove, tome 15, 239)

Duke John of Lancaster [Gaunt] had always loved and maintained this lady Katherine, by whom he had three children [The marriage caused] much astonishment in France and England, for she was of humble birth compared to the other two ladies ... whom the Duke had had as his wives before her. (Brereton 419)

Gaunt's relationship with Katherine posed significant challenges to his reputation, particularly at court and among the English aristocracy. When the “haultes dames” (239) of England heard of the marriage, they were particularly scandalized and vowed not to help the new Duchess Katherine welcome 8-year old Queen Isabella when she arrived from France. Froissart records with exacting clarity the words of the Duchesses of Gloucester and York and the Countesses of Arundel and Derby:

...le duc de Lancastre s'estoit grandement fourfait et vitupéré, quant il avoit espousé sa concubine [Nous] vendrons en nulle place où elle soit; car ce nous tourneroit à trop grant blasme que une telle duchesse qui vient de basse lignie et que a esté concubine de duc ung trop long temps en ses mariages ... passoit devant nous. (deLettenhove, tome 15, 240)

The Duke of Lancaster has quite disgraced himself by marrying his concubine [W]e will not go to any place where she may be. It would really demean us too much if that kind of duchess, who comes of humble stock and was the Duke's concubine for a very long time ... were to take precedence over us. (Brereton 419)

Gaunt's third marriage cost him respect among the nobility, but also among ecclesiastics who had been impressed with his second wife's piety. Contemporary chroniclers vary in the manner they record his decades-long affair with Katherine before their marriage, but it seems clear that his mistress was no secret at all to society, nor did he take any pains to hide her; Froissart records that Gaunt maintained Catherine "inside and outside his marriages" (419). The unsavoury aspect of his adultery also coloured his reputation on his deathbed; his manner of death was often associated with genital disease (Goodman 167).

Far from exhibiting concern about tainting Gaunt's legacy by chronicling the social unpopularity of his third marriage, Froissart treats it as a positive decision and celebrates the love match as a prerogative of nobility. In studying the marriage as a site of *gentillesse*, it must be noted that Froissart records the anxieties of the Duchesses and Countesses by writing their aristocratic protestations *in their own words*; at no time are we to mistake their negativity for Froissart's. Further, his description of the marriage has parallels to the Franklin's rejection of

maistrie between husband and wife in *The Franklin's Tale*; Froissart records Gaunt's elevation of Katherine's social status and leveling of it with his own when he installs her as Duchess Katherine, while Arveragus refuses the conventional husbandly authority that would have placed him in a situation superior to his wife, ensuring their parallel social status. The most convincing evidence we have, however, of Froissart's belief in Gaunt's gentility in marrying Katherine comes at the end of the chapter, when he narrates in his own words:

Cette dame Katherine demoura, tant qu'elle vesquy, duchesse de Lancastre, et fut seconde en Angleterre et ailleurs après la royne d'Angleterre, et fut une dame qui sçavoit moult de toutes honneurs, car elle y avoit dès sa jeunesse et tout son temps esté nourrie, et moult ama le duc de Lancastre les enfans que il ot de la dame, et bien leur monstra à mort et à vie. (deLettenhove, 15:240)

This Catherine de Ruet [*sic*] remained Duchess of Lancaster for the rest of her life. She was the second lady in England and elsewhere after the Queen and she had a perfect knowledge of court etiquette because she had been brought up in it continually since her youth. She loved the Duke of Lancaster, and the children she had with him, and she showed it in life and in death. (Brereton 420)

It is clear, therefore, that Froissart locates the true *gentillesse* of the episode as occurring between the partners of the Lancaster marriage. Also clear is that the opposite virtues of *gentillesse* (animosity, suspicion, envy) are found in the highest aristocratic circles of England, and Froissart's juxtaposition of the two within one chapter highlights the moral validity of Gaunt's decision. So far as Froissart is concerned, it is love that validates the marriage of the Duke and Katherine, and from this foundation grow the honour and virtue Froissart witnesses and defends. The *gentillesse* John shows in marrying the mother of his three (thereto) illegitimate children,

notwithstanding the protestations of a society that was taken aback at the socially inappropriate match, is something Froissart obviously wants to record and champion.

Summary

Because Froissart works within an historical chronicle format, we cannot study his text as we do Chaucer's, as a creative experiment writing *gentillesse* within marriage. Rather, we must read the history while paying careful attention to the location of Froissart's sympathy, realizing that he has written the episodes in a way that directs his readers' thoughts to particular subjects: he textually encourages understanding and consideration of causes he believes are just. In the case of the chapters that present the closest views of marriage in the *Chroniques*, readers are clearly drawn to a consideration of *gentil* behaviour within the marriage dynamic. His 'marriage' chapters are important for two other reasons. The first is that he chose to include them in his oeuvre; they are not descriptions of epic battle but treatments of the intimate relationship between husband and wife, and their inclusion within his *Chroniques* indicates that he found the lessons of the episodes just as valid as those to be learned from the Hundred Years War or the downfall of Richard II. Secondly, Froissart records the episodes in such a way as to make the *gentillesse* they demonstrate obvious to his readers. He could, we must remember, simply have recorded the facts without giving an opinion either way on the innocence of the Lady of Carrouges and the steadfastness of her husband, for example, or the intrinsic nobility of Katherine de Roet. Most importantly, in each case the *gentil* treatment between husband and wife results in happiness for both members of the married couple – and this is pivotal in understanding the resemblance between the histories and *The Franklin's Tale*. *Gentillesse*, in addition to abetting the trust and concern that comforts the married couples in Froissart's and Chaucer's texts, allows for happy resolutions to the vagaries and trials the characters encounter.

We can summarize, therefore, that there is textual evidence that both the *Chroniques* and *The Franklin's Tale* portray a binary relationship of *gentillesse* and marriage in cases where the happiness and well-being of both partners is optimally maintained. Further, both texts represent *gentillesse* as the best course of action in navigating the disasters and crises that everyone, as both authors have earlier stated, is prone to.

Conclusion

I began my project by examining the known similarities between Chaucer and Froissart. Their biographical commonalities are the most striking: they lived as almost exact contemporaries, travelled in the same geographical areas, almost certainly knew of each other and definitely knew some of the same historical characters. All of these factors lead to understandable comparisons between the two. Further, their poetry (and especially their dream poetry) has been the source of fascinating criticism in the twentieth century, centering on their shared sources and the use each made of them, and Chaucer's use of Froissart himself as a source. There has not, however, been significant work done on inter-genre comparison as a method of better understanding their work. The idea of comparing separate but contemporary genres, such as romance and chronicle, is one that is not widely explored when logically it could be. Valuable information about medieval literature may be discoverable through such unconventional comparisons, as authorial intentions and thematic commonalities between authors need not be restricted to such exact contemporaries as Chaucer and Froissart. Major poetic works of the period have generally been compared to similar poetic works; what would be the result if one were to compare the records of medieval chroniclers – Froissart for example – with Gower's *Confessio Amantis*, or research Froissart's messages to the ruling class against Lydgate's *Fall of Princes*? Even Gower's *Vox Clamatis* may be of entertaining use in light of Froissart's dislike of mobs and partiality to orderly monarchical government. I believe it is because of the dramatic difference in genre between the *Canterbury Tales* and the *Chroniques* that critics have traditionally overlooked, or avoided, comparing the two. Indeed, studying such dissimilar genres is not an instinctive method of comparison if one wishes to investigate parallels

in the separate works of two authors. However, when we consider the biographical similarities between the two as a starting point, and proceed from there to establish how their analogous backgrounds contributed to their development as authors, the justification for examining thematic parallels instead of merely shared sources begins to become clear. It makes sense that two authors placed relatively close to each other geographically, and on the edge of the aristocratic class, might develop similar intentions as their writing developed. Their shared timeframe adds to the likelihood that they might have been similarly influenced by historical occurrences. The most conclusive proof, though, that an inter-genre comparison of the works of Chaucer and Froissart is valid and educative, lies within the texts themselves: the works bear witness to the similar concerns felt by their authors.

The fact that both authors wrote for and about an aristocratic audience lays the foundation for comparison in my study. I have looked at how each author's education and literary talent allowed him to adopt a literary position of authority and dispense advice that could apply to princes as well as to the common man. This is an important link: their ability to trade in literary culture allowed Chaucer and Froissart to develop an authoritative voice that transcended the rank they inherited at birth, an impressive feat considering the relatively static social hierarchy of the late medieval period. Further, there are significant confluences of intention evident in *The Franklin's Tale* and the *Chroniques*: the most important of these is the presence, and advocacy, of *gentillesse* in the works. In both works, *gentillesse* is portrayed as a virtue that is universally attainable given the will to choose it: available to commoners and nobles alike, it is not hereditary within the ruling class but descends from God to all humanity. Chaucer makes this obvious by allowing characters from both the gentry and the commons to display it; Froissart includes numerous examples of people not in positions of power using *gentillesse* to counsel

better governance, or make a noble choice. The crucial role of *gentillesse* in the texts becomes more obvious when we consider the system of kingly inheritance of autocratic power that was in place during Chaucer's and Froissart's lifetime. One of my primary goals was to examine how both authors use their texts to create frameworks that allow for, or exemplify, the *gentil* possibility, which they advocate as a viable alternative to the potentially unjust dictatorial power they witnessed during their lifetimes. They do this by asking their readers to make value judgments based on their texts; they ask their readers to locate, and at times shift, their views in relation to the ethical dilemmas they present. In other words, there are examples in the two works that require, or inspire, value judgments, and these are used as instruments of instruction by the authors.

It is not hard to see that Chaucer's Franklin explicitly requires his audience to consider the question he posits at the end of his tale. Chaucer, as well, asks his reading audience to ponder the question of who was most *fre* by using his Franklin, and extending the *démande* to everyone who reads his story. *The Franklin's Tale* can be considered, as I have written, a creative experiment in writing *gentillesse*, particularly in the context of marriage. Froissart, on the other hand, writes in the very different genre of historical chronicle; he cannot create and test interesting textual lessons, as his business is recording history. He does, however, directly interpose his value judgments in his text by interspersing the narrative with his opinions and comments, frequently drawing his reader's attention to injustices or virtues as he sees them. In this way, he includes value judgments in the *Chroniques* and his reading audience is asked to locate their ethical views in relation to his; the work challenges its readers to study history with ethical considerations in mind.

Having studied both works through the lens of thematic comparison, I wish to make two

final observations of the use each author makes of the *gentil* ideal. There is a message observable in the application of *gentillesse* to human conduct: first, both authors advocate the inclusion of *gentil* behaviour in daily life; they portray it as beneficial to mankind and, especially as demonstrated in examples of close personal interaction (marriage), illustrate that the *gentil* disposition between partners results in happiness for the couple. This is a vital equation: adopting an attitude of gentility helps you achieve happiness. My second point develops this thought further, and relates it directly to the numerous textual instances where Froissart and Chaucer point out the threats that blind fortune can pose to human happiness. In case after case, it is *gentillesse* that leads to humility, acceptance of trials, and the surmounting of obstacles. The authors seem to agree that knowing *gentillesse* allows one to negotiate the vagaries of fate, and further, that the practice of *gentillesse* by the princely class (as they illustrate textually) results in improved governance. Particularly interesting as well is the *idea* of governance: Chaucer's Franklin claims that, "After the tyme moste be temperaunce / To every wight that kan on governaunce" (ll. 85-86), and we can understand "governance" to mean, primarily, the governance of others (as would concern the princely estate). It could, however, mean the governance of oneself, bringing the concepts of advising princes and advising the individual remarkably close together: the ordering of society, following this logic, closely parallels the ordering of the single human being. We have returned to a version of Bishop Brinton's analogy that all humans form part of a mystical body, having learned the caveat that the parts of the body interact in better harmony with each other when *gentillesse* is present and practiced between all sides.

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