

**“The emprentyng of hire consolacioun”: Engraving, Erosion, and Persistent Speech in
*The Franklin’s Tale***

Alastair Bennett

Royal Holloway, University of London

When Dorigen mourns the absence of Arveragus early in the *Franklin’s Tale*, her friends do “al hire bisynesse” to comfort her, telling her “nyght and day,/ That causelees she sleeth herself” (V.827, 824-5).¹ The Franklin explains that, through these long endeavours, Dorigen’s friends “emprent” their consolation on her, much as a craftsman might carve “som figure” in stone:

By proces, as ye knowen everichoon,
Men may so longe graven in a stoon
Til som figure therinne emprented be.
So long han they confortid hire til she
Recevyed hath, by hope and by resound,
The emprentyng of hire consolacioun ... (V.829-36).

As he draws this analogy, the Franklin uses makes some confident claims about the power of persistent speech. Over time, he suggests, a speaker can “emprent” new attitudes and desires on even the most obdurate listener, like an artisan incising a resistant material. The “proces”

My thanks to Isabel Davis, Cath Nall and the anonymous readers for *SAC* for their helpful comments on the earlier drafts of this article.

¹ Chaucerian texts are cited from Larry D. Benson, gen. ed., *The Riverside Chaucer*, 3rd edn (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987).

of engraving supplies a figure for the kind of transformation that Dorigen's friends are trying to achieve, a clear, comprehensible metaphor for the way that consolation takes effect, and this figure, in turn, seems to hold out a promise to persistent speakers, reassuring them that, in the end, their words will make an impression.

With this image of "emprentyng," Chaucer reworks another widely-disseminated figure for the power of persistent speech, where the speaker's words are compared to dropping water that hollows out a stone. This analogy features prominently in Menedon's story from Boccaccio's *Il Filocolo*, Chaucer's most immediate source for *The Franklin's Tale*, and Boccaccio cites it from book 1 of Ovid's *Ars amatoria*, another text that Chaucer knew well.² In both these contexts, the analogy refers to seduction rather than consolation. Ovid's *praeceptor amoris* offers reassurance to lovers, promising them that women will respond to their petitions over time. Ovid deploys this analogy in a sophisticated and sceptical way: the *praeceptor* of the *Ars* acknowledges the power of this figure to motivate lovers, even in apparently hopeless circumstances, but he also draws attention to the qualifications it encodes, noting that the "proces" of erosion takes a long time. Ovid returned to the analogy with water dropping on stone over the course of his writing life, revisiting it in his later exile poetry with a very different understanding of what persistent speech could achieve. In his letters *ex Ponto*, the image of water dropping on stone figures the endurance of the speaking subject, even when his words have no effect. Ovid's medieval readers, who were trained to read his works in a complex, mutually qualifying relationship to one another,

² For a detailed bibliography on the sources of *The Franklin's Tale*, see Michael Calabrese, "Chaucer's Dorigen and Boccaccio's Female Voices," *SAC* 29 (2007): 259-292 (259n1). See also, more recently, John Finlayson, "Invention and Disjunction: Chaucer's Rewriting of Boccaccio in the *Franklin's Tale*," *ES* 89 (2008): 385-402.

might find a nuanced account of persistent speech, the desires that animate it, and the effects it achieves, in his evolving treatment of this analogy.

The image of water dropping on stone recurs with its own insistent force in medieval texts of many different kinds.³ If Chaucer was responding to Boccaccio's citation of Ovid in the first instance, he would also have been conscious of the wide dissemination of this figure in a range of discourses, from love poetry to sermons. This analogy retains a strong association with courtship and seduction, offering hope to rejected lovers, but it also works to encourage other kinds of persistent speech, including preaching, instruction and prayer. Texts in these different traditions often sought to theorize or to dramatize the realizations that emerged in Ovid's repeated engagements with this figure; lovers and preachers alike found ways to harness the persuasive power of this analogy, while also qualifying its claims about persistent speech and its effects. Medieval *praeceptores* used the figure to encourage long love service and persistent prayer, but they also invited their students to recognise that these activities brought their own rewards, enabling the cultivation of "noblesse" and *longanimitas*, which might ultimately displace the rewards the analogy seems to promise.

³ For partial lists of this figure in medieval and early modern English sources, see Skeat, *Early English Proverbs: Chiefly of the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries, with illustrative quotations* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1910), 10 (no. 24); Bartlett Jere Whiting and Helen Wescott Whiting, *Proverbs, Sentences and Proverbial Phrases from English Writings Mainly Before 1500* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1968), 145 ("D412, Little drops thirl (*pierce*) the flint on which they often fall"); and Morris Palmer Tilley, *A Dictionary of the Proverbs in England in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1950), 174 ("D618, Constant dropping will wear the stone"). Hans Walther, *Proverbia Sententiaeque Latinitatis Medii Aevi*, 5 vols (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1963-7), II/1, 686, lists a Latin proverbial form: "5599a: Dicit Aristoteles: lapidem cavat ultima gutta". While Skeat traces the figure to the *Epistulae ex Ponto*, both the Whittings and Tilley argue that it derives from Job 14:19, where the effects of water on stone figure the experience of tribulation; none of these lists mentions the *Ars amatoria*.

The analogy between speaking and engraving, rehearsed in the voice of the narrator and applied to the endeavours of Dorigen's friends, has a broader significance for the *Franklin's Tale* as a whole. This tale is populated with persistent speakers: over the course of the narrative, both Dorigen and her unwanted suitor Aurelius will speak long passages of petition and complaint, addressing audiences who are hostile, inscrutable, or simply absent. Some of their speeches are briefly described, but others constitute long, lyrical interludes in the dramatic action. The analogy with "emprentyng" stone expresses the hopes and assumptions that sustain the speakers of this tale in "al hire bisynesse". This "figure" appears in a dense cluster of sententious, proverbial expressions at the start of the narrative, concerned with mastery in marriage and with the need for patience, and, like them, it voices claims that will come under scrutiny as the story unfolds. Some of the tale's most memorable episodes take up and reconfigure the image of "emprentyng" stone, as Dorigen directs her complaint against the black rocks around the coast and when she challenges Aurelius to remove them, "stoon by stoon". Over the course of the Franklin's story, I argue, Dorigen will come to understand how this "figure" works, negotiating its deceptive claims about the "proces" of erosion and the power of persistent speech, but Aurelius will continue to demand the rewards it seems to promise, the power to "emprent" his desires on others.

Gutta cauat lapidem

In the first book of the *Ars amatoria*, the *praeceptor amoris* tells the young men of Rome that they should carry on writing to their ladies even if the ladies return their letters without reading them. He argues that women will succumb to persistent suitors, just as rings and ploughshares are worn down by constant use, and stones are hollowed out by dropping water:

ferreus assiduo consumitur anulus usu,

interit assidua uomer aduncus humo.

quid magis est saxo durum, quid mollius unda?

dura tamen molli saxa cauantur aqua.

Penelopen ipsam, persta modo, tempore uinces ... (1, ll. 473-77)

[An iron ring is worn by constant use, a curved share wastes by constant ploughing of the ground. What is harder than rock, what softer than water? yet soft water hollows out hard rock. Only persevere; in time, you will overcome Penelope herself.]⁴

In Menedon's story from the *Filocolo*, Tarolfo attempts to court a married *donna* who repeatedly rejects his advances. When she ignores his messages, he takes encouragement from the *praeceptor*'s words: "Ma già per tutto questo Tarolfo di ciò non si rimanea, seguendo d'Ovidio gli amaestramenti, il quale dice l'uomo non lasciare per durezza della donna di non perseverare, però che per continuanza la molle acqua fora la dura pietra" (ll. 19-22) ["But through all this Tarolfo still did not stop, following the teachings of Ovid who said that a man should not stop persevering because of a lady's hardness, since by persistence soft water works its way through hard rock"].⁵ The *praeceptor*'s injunction to persevere, "persta modo," becomes an axiom for Tarolfo in this story: it sustains him not only in these early

⁴ Text from Ovid, *Amores, Medicamina faciei femineae, Ars amatoria, Remedia amoris*, ed. E. J. Kenney (Oxford: Clarendon, 1961); translation adapted from Ovid, *Art of Love and Other Poems*, trans. J. H. Mozley, rev. G. P. Goold, Loeb Classical Library 232 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1929).

⁵ Text and translation from Robert R. Edwards, "The Franklin's Tale," in *Sources and Analogues of the Canterbury Tales*, ed. Robert M. Correale and Mary Hamel, 2 vols. (Woodbridge: Brewer, 2002-5), 1.211-265 (220, 221).

efforts at seduction but also in his later trials, when he takes up the impossible task his lady sets for him, to plant a garden for her that blooms in January as though it were May.⁶ In *The Franklin's Tale*, where Chaucer reimagines Menedon's story as a Breton lai, he also recasts this figure for persistent speech, replacing Ovid's image of erosion with an image of engraving and applying it to the consoling speech of Dorigen's friends. In this tale, Chaucer employs the analogy to comment on prayerful petition, instruction and seduction alike; Dorigen echoes her friends' entreaties with her own, ongoing complaint, and the history of this figure, extending back to Boccaccio and Ovid, affirms its relevance to the lovesick petitions of Aurelius, too.

This chain of citations links *The Franklin's Tale* to Ovid's *Ars* and positions its account of persistent speech in part as a response to Ovid's figure of water drops eroding stone. Yet, the significance of this figure was complicated, in turn, by its treatment elsewhere in the *Ovidius minor*, and in other medieval writing that appropriated and redeployed it. As he makes this local allusion to his immediate sources, Chaucer also enters a much larger discourse about persistent speech, the desires that motivate it and the effects it can achieve.

⁶ Modern editions of Chaucer, following Skeat, claim that Tarolfo cites another, later instance of this image of water dropping on stone from Ovid's *Epistulae ex Ponto*, and that this, in turn, is the ultimate source of the Franklin's image of carving and "empretnyng". See, for example, *The Complete Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*, ed. Walter W. Skeat, 2nd edn, 7 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1899-1900), 5.389; *The Riverside Chaucer*, 897; *The Canterbury Tales*, ed. by Jill Mann (London: Penguin, 2005), 952. As editors of Boccaccio have long been aware, however, Tarolfo is citing the *Ars*, where this figure applies directly to the experience of lovers: see Giovanni Boccaccio, *Opere Minori in Volgare, I: Filocolo*, ed. Mario Marti (Milan: Rizzoli, 1969), 475n4. See also the discussion in Richard L. Hoffman, *Ovid and the Canterbury Tales* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1966), 169.

This passage from book 1 of the *Ars* reveals the important role of repeated practice, or *usus*, in Ovid's text, as Colin Fewer has argued.⁷ In the first two books, the *praeceptor* encourages his male readers to cultivate and inhabit a lover's persona, rehearsing the artificial techniques of seduction until they come to seem like "second nature".⁸ The same techniques can be applied to seduction: through the persistent application of artistry, the *praeceptor* argues, men can subject women to their own desires. "What the *magister* audaciously promises in *Ars amatoria*," Fewer writes, "is that the desire of others is capable of being produced and domesticated through practice, by repetition and habituation".⁹ The imagery of water dropping on stone figures the gradual effects of *usus* in both these contexts, Fewer contends, showing how long, reiterative practice can transform the will. This is the promise that consoles Tarolfo in *Il Filocolo* and that encourages Dorigen's friends early in the *Franklin's Tale*. Indeed, Fewer, who discusses the Franklin's version of this analogy alongside other, similar metaphors in *Troilus and Criseyde*, notes that the language of "proces" that appears here is often found in Chaucer in contexts "that recall the Ovidian imagery of shaping the will through practice".¹⁰

Even as he advances his audacious claims about *usus*, however, Ovid's *praeceptor* introduces some ironic qualifications. In a hyperbolic flourish, he evokes Penelope, who resisted many suitors during the long decade when her husband Ulysses was absent: "Penelopen ipsam [...] tempore uinces" ["in time, you will overcome Penelope herself"]. Penelope's long endurance suggests what the analogy with erosion already implies, that

⁷ Colin Fewer, "The Second Nature: *Habitus* as Ideology in the *Ars amatoria* and *Troilus and Criseyde*," *Exemplaria* 20 (2008): 314-39 (322-3).

⁸ On the cultivated identity of the lover in the *Ars*, see Robert R. Edwards, *The Flight from Desire: Augustine and Ovid to Chaucer* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2006), 40-42.

⁹ Fewer, "Second Nature," 323.

¹⁰ Fewer, "Second Nature," 327-8.

cultivating another person's desires through repeated practice will be a long and drawn out process.¹¹ Her story hints at the scale of the lover's task, the length of time he might have to persist. Similar forms of qualification and ambiguity surround the use of this analogy in Boccaccio and Chaucer. In the *Filocolo*, Tarolfo proves himself to be a committed student of Ovid's *praeceptor* and a firm believer in his claims about the power of habituation and persistent speech; his elaborate efforts serve not only to win his lady, but also to prove the arguments about persistent speech that underpin the analogy from the *Ars*. Yet, his turn to magic to achieve his impossible task might itself seem to call these arguments into question; ultimately, in Menedon's story, repetition and habituation are insufficient to provoke and direct the *donna's* desires. The narrative of the Franklin's tale casts doubt on the analogy between speaking and "emprenting" almost as soon as the narrator evokes it. After he affirms the power of persistent speech to "emprent" consolation on its listeners, the Franklin suggests that Dorigen's sorrow "gan aswage" because she had temporarily exhausted herself ("She may nat alwey duren in swich rage"), calling the agency of her friends into question (V.836). In the following lines, moreover, Dorigen resumes her complaint and her friends resume their efforts to console her, the promised reward for their efforts deferred into the future.

In their original context, the *praeceptor's* claims about *usus* were bound up with the larger ironic project of the *Ars amatoria*. Treating the subject matter of love elegy in the form of a didactic poem, Ovid satirised both traditions, offering an urbane comment on Roman

¹¹ Addressing female readers in book 3, the *praeceptor* invokes Penelope as a paradigm of chastity: "est pia Penelope lustris errante duobus/ et totidem lustris bella gerente uiro" ["yet Penelope is chaste, though for ten years her lord was wandering and fighting for as many years"] (3, ll. 15-16). On these lines, and their relation to the passage in book 1, see Roy K. Gibson, *Ovid: Ars amatoria, book 3*, Cambridge Classical Texts and Commentaries, 40 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 93.

morality through the juxtaposition of Augustan poetic genres. The *Ars* suggests that a lover might learn to master the experience of love through the cynical application of craft, and, at the same time, that the forms of self-discipline that were prized in didactic poetry might be exploited for sexual gratification.¹² The analogy with water dropping on stone provides a pre-existing intertextual link between these traditions: Tibullus used it to encourage rejected lovers in his elegies, much as Ovid's *praeceptor* does, while Lucretius, in his *De Rerum Natura*, groups the hollow stone with a worn-down ring and ploughshare, to show the effects of erosion.¹³ These are texts that Ovid knew and which he cites repeatedly in the *Ars*.¹⁴ As Alison Sharrock has noted, moreover, this figure not only links the didactic and amatory traditions, but also suggests that that instruction and seduction might work in similar ways.¹⁵

¹² For introductions to the *Ars*, which consider its complex and subversive relationship to love elegy and didactic poetry, see Patricia Wilson, "*Praecepta amoris*: Ovid's Didactic Elegy," in *Brill's Companion to Ovid*, ed. Barbara Weiden Boyd (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 141-65, and Gibson, "The *Ars amatoria*," in *A Companion to Ovid*, ed. Peter E. Knox (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 90-103.

¹³ In the elegies of Tibullus, the speaker says: "sed ne te capiant, primo si forte negabit,/ taedia [...] longa dies molli saxa peredit aqua" (1.iv, ll. 15-18) ["He will refuse at first, but don't become worn down! [...] Long days let gentle water eat through rock"]; Tibullus, *Elegies*, ed. Robert Maltby, trans. A. M. Juster (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 20, 21. Lucretius describes the ring, the ploughshare, and the stone in book 1, at ll. 312-14: "anulus in digito subter tenuatur habendo,/ stilicidi casus lapidem cavat, uncus aratri/ ferreus occulto decrescit vomer in arvis" ["a ring on the finger is thinned underneath by wear, the fall of drippings hollows a stone, the curved ploughshare of iron imperceptibly dwindles away in the fields"]. Lucretius, *De Rerum Natura*, trans. W. H. D. Rouse, rev. Martin Ferguson Smith, 2nd rev. edn, Loeb Classical Library 181 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982, repr. 1992), 26, 27. The analogy itself predates both Tibullus and Lucretius; the earliest written record of it survives in a fragment of epic poetry attributed to Choerilus of Samos, who wrote at the end of the 5th century BC. See *Choerili Samii Reliquiae*, ed. P. Radici Colace (Rome: Bretschneider, 1979), 79-82.

¹⁴ For Ovid's debts to Tibullus, see Maltby, "Tibullus and Ovid," in *A Companion to Ovid*, ed. Knox, 279-93. Ovid's intertextual engagement with Lucretius was complex and extensive. For a comprehensive list of his allusions and quotations, see Anton Zingerle, *Ovidius und sein Verhältniss zu den Vorgängern und gleichzeitigen römischen Dichtern* (Innsbruck: Wagner, 1869-71), vol. 2, 12-47, (the passage on water and stone is identified on 14); for a discussion of references in the *Ars amatoria* specifically, see Marion Steudel, *Die Literaturparodie in Ovids Ars amatoria* (Hildesheim: Olms-Weidmann, 1992), 40-76, who addresses this passage at 63-4.

¹⁵ Alison Sharrock, *Seduction and Repetition in Ovid's Ars Amatoria 2* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 21-23, and see also Edwards, *Flight from Desire*, 40-41.

The lover persists with his lady much as the *praeceptor* persists with his student, and his own experience of instruction supplies a source of encouragement as he takes up the role of seducer. When Tarolfo remembers the words of Ovid in the *Filocolo*, he takes encouragement not only from the analogy itself, but also from the way his own desires were formed through subjection to Ovid's *praeceptor*.

Amatory didacticism was not necessarily incongruous in medieval culture, and the extent to which medieval readers recognised the original ironies of the *Ars* remains a matter for debate. Marilyn Desmond has argued that, while the juxtaposition of elegiac and didactic modes had a subversive edge for the first readers of the *Ars*, the use of this text to teach Latin composition in the medieval schoolroom served to naturalise the idea that a “pedagogical imperative” attached to the experience of love, that “the onset of *amor* must be attended by instruction”.¹⁶ The *Ars amatoria*, which circulated in Latin and in several vernacular translations, was often evoked as a kind of authority in medieval love literature where, as Suzanne Conklin Akbari writes, “[t]he Ovidian art of love” served as “the foundation of a court centred on service to the ‘dieu d’ amors’”.¹⁷ It also provided inspiration for erotodidactic works like Andreas Capellanus’ *De arte honesti amandi* and the *Roman de la Rose*, both of which borrow from it directly. Desmond argues that medieval writers took

¹⁶ Marilyn Desmond, “Venus’s Clerk: Ovid’s Amatory Poetry in the Middle Ages,” in *A Handbook to the Reception of Ovid*, ed. John F. Miller and Carole E. Newlands (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2014), 161-173 (164). On the study of Ovid in medieval grammar schools and universities, see also Ralph J. Hexter, *Ovid and Medieval Schooling: Studies in Medieval School Commentaries on Ovid’s Ars amatoria, Epistulae ex Ponto, and Epistulae Herodium* (München: Bei der Arbo-Gesellschaft, 1986), and Vincent Gillespie, “From the twelfth century to c. 1450,” in *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism, vol 2. The Middle Ages*, ed. Alastair Minnis and Ian Johnson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 145-235 (186-206).

¹⁷ Suzanne Conklin Akbari, “Ovid and Ovidianism,” in *The Oxford History of Classical Reception vol 1: 800-1558*, ed. Rita Copeland (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 187-204 (198).

Ovid's didacticism seriously in texts like these, imagining him as a cleric of love ("Venus clerk," as Chaucer calls him in the *House of Fame*, l. 1487).¹⁸ The familiarity of Ovid's *Ars*, and of the genre of erotodidactic writing, did not preclude sceptical responses to this text, however. Vincent Gillespie contends that at least some of the medieval *praeceptores* who engaged with the *Ars* were as "subtle and self-aware" in their handling of this text as Ovid was in writing it.¹⁹ Sharrock argues that medieval readers "understood the irony of the poem perfectly well, even if the manner in which such irony played out for their culture was different from that of the Augustan age".²⁰ The treatment of the *praeceptor's* analogy between persistent speech and water dropping on stone, first in the *Filocolo* and then in *The Franklin's Tale*, but also more broadly in the medieval works of amatory and moral instruction, itself reveals a questioning attitude to his didactic methods. If medieval readers no longer recognised the inherent ironies of erotodidaxis, they nevertheless perceived the mercurial qualities of this particular teaching voice.

The lessons of the *Ars amatoria* were further complicated for medieval readers by the poem's relationship to Ovid's biography and to his later writing. Medieval *accessūs* to Ovid explained that the *Ars* created a scandal in Rome that led to the poet's exile, and that his later

¹⁸ Desmond has argued consistently that students and teachers alike "accepted [the] didactic rhetoric [of the *Ars*] without attending to its irony" in the medieval schoolroom; "Venus's Clerk," 162, and see also Desmond, *Ovid's Art and the Wife of Bath: The Ethics of Erotic Violence* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006), 36-7, and Desmond, "Gender and Desire in Medieval French Translations of Ovid's Amatory Works," in *Ovid in the Middle Ages*, ed. James G. Clark, Frank T. Coulson, and Kathryn L. McKinley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 108-22 (109-10).

¹⁹ Gillespie, "From the twelfth century to c. 1450," 187.

²⁰ Sharrock, "*Naso magister erat – sed cui bono?* On Not Taking the Poet's Teaching Seriously," in *Knowledge, Text and Practice in Ancient Technical Writing*, ed. Marco Formisano and Philip van der Eijk (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 112-137 (132).

works were part of a long and unsuccessful attempt to restore his reputation.²¹ The *Remedia amoris*, in particular, was intended to counteract the *Ars*, explaining how to guard against the “illicitum amorem” it had encouraged; in this text, as Fewer observes, repeated *usus* allows the lover to “unlearn” the *praeceptor*’s lessons.²² For medieval readers, Ovid’s teachings about love emerged from the contradictory *duplex sententia* of these texts and not from either in isolation. This situation accounts for what Alastair Minnis has called the characteristic “elasticity” and “pliancy” of the *Ovidius minor* in the hands of medieval interpreters.²³ Ovid’s exile poetry was implicated in the same biographical narrative, which was also rehearsed in *accessūs* to the *Fasti*, the *Amores*, the *Tristia* and the *Epistulae ex Ponto*.²⁴ Readers who were trained to interpret the *Ars* and the *Remedia* as part of a mutually qualifying dialogue were also encouraged to notice moments in these later poems when Ovid returned to images from the *Ars* and used them to lament his altered circumstances.²⁵

²¹ For examples of this narrative, see the twelfth century *accessūs* edited as *Accessus ad auctores, etc.*, by R. B. C. Huygens (Leiden: Brill, 1970), 19-54, and translated in *Medieval Literary Theory and Criticism c.1100-c.1375*, ed. Minnis and A. B. Scott with David Wallace (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 15-36. See also Fausto Ghisalberti, “Mediaeval Biographies of Ovid,” *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 9 (1946): 12; Minnis, *Magister Amoris: The Roman de la Rose and Vernacular Hermeneutics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 11 and 37; and Gillespie, “From the twelfth century to c. 1450,” 186-87.

²² Quotation from *Accessus ad auctores*, 34, l. 11; see Fewer, “Second Nature,” 323.

²³ Minnis, *Magister Amoris*, 39, 102.

²⁴ The *accessus* to *Ex Ponto* says “Dicitur et hunc librum in Ponto insula Scythiae composuisse, quo missus erat in exilium ab Octaviano Cesare propter librum quem scripserat de amore, per quem corruptae fuerant romanae matronae [...]” [“This book is said to have been composed in Pontus, an island in Scythia, where Ovid had been exiled by Octavian Caesar because of the book he had written about love, which had been the means of corrupting Roman matrons”]. “Accessus Ovidii de Ponto,” in Huygens, 34-5, ll. 10-13, translated as “Introduction to Ovid, *From Pontus*”, in Minnis and Scott, 25-6 (26).

²⁵ See K. Sara Myers, “Ovid’s Self-Reception in His Exile Poetry,” *Handbook to the Reception of Ovid*, ed. Miller and Newlands, 8-21. Michael Calabrese describes how, in the *Tristia*, Ovid “summons images and scenes from his earlier love poems and “metamorphizes” them into dark, sorrowful conceits that reflect his downfall and woe”; *Chaucer’s Ovidian Arts of Love* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1994), 13.

Ovid revisited the image of water dropping on stone for precisely this purpose on at least two occasions in his letters *ex Ponto*. In his letter to Atticus from the second book, Ovid employs this figure to describe the effect of his ongoing misfortunes: “utque caducis/ percussu crebro saxa cavantur aquis,/ sic ego continuo Fortunae vulneror ictu” [“as the falling drops by their constant force hollow the rock, so I am wounded by the steady blows of fate”] (2. vii, ll. 39-41).²⁶ In the next lines, he likens his heart to a ploughshare, ground down by repeated *usus*, in a sustained engagement with the language of the *Ars*. The poet himself is subject to the effects of erosion here, as his capacity for hope is worn away by his relentless experience of suffering. In a letter to Albinovanus from the fourth book, however, Ovid distinguishes his own situation from the situation of the stone, the ring and the ploughshare. While other materials wear away, the poet himself endures:

gutta cavat lapidem, consumitur anulus usu,
 atteritur pressa vomer aduncus humo.
 tempus edax igitur praeter nos omnia perdet” (4. x, ll. 5-7)

[“Drops of water hollow out a stone, a ring is worn thin by use, the hooked plough is rubbed away by the soil’s pressure. So devouring time destroys all things but me”].

As he revisits this figure from the *Ars amatoria*, Ovid tacitly acknowledges the resemblance between his own campaign of letter writing and the strategies of seduction he had recommended to lovers in his guise as the *praeceptor amoris*. In both cases, a persistent speaker appeals for pity and continues sending messages when they have no discernible

²⁶ Text and translation from *Ovid, vol. 6: Tristia; Ex Ponto*, trans. Arthur Leslie Wheeler, 2nd rev. ed. G. P. Goold, Loeb Classical Library 151 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988).

effect. Writing from exile, however, the poet has come to a new understanding of his earlier analogy with water dropping on stone: he has discovered that people can withstand persistent speech for longer than a stone withstands water. At the same time, however, his long endeavours have also revealed his own capacity to endure, to carry on speaking and writing in hopeless circumstances. In this sense, lived experience and self-observation have affirmed what the *praeceptor*'s allusion to Penelope had seemed to imply. The speaker's resilience comes into view, even as his earlier claims about persistent speech, figured through the analogy with dropping water, begin to break down.

From its first appearance in the *Ars*, moreover, the analogy contains an invitation to observe the real effects of water dropping on stone and to consider what they might reveal about the power of persistent speech. When the *praeceptor* echoes Lucretius, he allows that his claims about the natural world might be tested against scientific observation, and that such observation might complicate his arguments from analogy. While the *praeceptor* evokes the hollow stone and the worn down ring and ploughshare as unambiguous phenomena that provide tangible support for his arguments, Lucretius describes them as the visible signs of invisible processes, noting that erosion itself is impossible to see: "haec igitur minui, cum sint detrita, videmus;/ sed quae corpora decedant in tempore quoque,/ invida praeclusit specimen natura videndi" (1, ll. 319-21) ["These we observe to be growing less because they are rubbed away; but what particles are separated on each occasion, our niggardly faculty of sight has debarred us from proving"]. For Lucretius, the effect of dropping water on stone remained elusive, constantly evading direct observation. Although Lucretius's poem was largely unknown to medieval readers, the observation about dropping water and its effect on

stone could be found in scientific writing throughout the Middle Ages.²⁷ Seneca quoted both *De rerum natura* and the *Ars amatoria* as related authorities on the way water drops hollow out stone in his *Naturales Quaestiones* (4b, 3-5), a text that influenced many medieval authors, including Robert Grosseteste and Roger Bacon in England.²⁸ The image of water dropping on stone was also presented as a scientific observation in Bartholomeus Anglicus' *De proprietatibus rerum*; John Trevisa, in his Middle English translation, preserves a version of the line from the letter to Albinovanus in Latin: "And þogh a drope be moste nesse, 3it by ofte fallynge he persiþ and þrilleþ þinge þat is wel harde, as þis verse seiþ: *Gutta cavat lapidem non vi set sepe cadendo*; þat is to menyge 'a drope þrilleth þe stone nouzt by strength but by often fallynge'"²⁹ The particular ambiguities that emerge from Ovid's allusion to Lucretius were lost to the Middle Ages, but the sense that the analogy might be tested, reinforced or supplemented by reference to the natural world, as represented in this tradition of scientific writing, was not.

When Chaucer's late medieval contemporaries took up this figure of water dropping on stone, they exploited its power to encourage long endeavours, forms of *usus* that might

²⁷ On the survival of *De Rerum Natura* in the middle ages, see Michael Reeve, "Lucretius in the Middle Ages and Early Renaissance: Transmission and Scholarship," in *The Cambridge Companion to Lucretius*, ed. Stuart Gillespie and Philip Hardie (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 205-13. Large claims have been made for the significance of its rediscovery by the Italian humanist Poggio Bracciolini; see Stephen Greenblatt, *The Swerve: How the Renaissance Began* (London: Vintage, 2012).

²⁸ Seneca, *Natural Questions*, trans. Thomas H. Corcoran, 2 vols, Loeb Classical Library, 450, 457 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971-72), 2.46-9. On the medieval reception of this text, see H. M. Hine, 'The Younger Seneca: *Natural Questions*', in *Texts and Transmission: A Survey of the Latin Classics*, ed. L. D. Reynolds (Oxford: Clarendon, 1983), 376-8, and Winston Black, 'The Quadrivium and Natural Science', in *Classical Reception* ed. Copeland, 84-5.

²⁹ *On the Properties of Things: John Trevisa's Translation of Bartholomaeus Anglicus De proprietatibus rerum*, ed. M. C. Seymour et al., 3 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975-88), 1.675. In *Bartholomaeus Anglicus and his Encyclopedia* (Aldershot: Ashgate Variorum, 1992), 151, the editors point to Job 14.19 as the source of this quotation.

cultivate a noble identity, or foster spiritual virtues. As they did so, however, they sought to preserve the forms of qualifications that emerge from Ovid's use of the figure, retracing the realisations that unfold across the *Ovidius minor*. Thomas Usk's *Testament of Love*, a work that combines amatory instruction with Boethian dialogue, illustrates the careful deployment of this figure in an erotodidactic context. In the third book, Love invites Usk to imagine his devotion to Margery as a tree, which takes root in his heart with the assent of his free will; "[G]ood service" forms the trunk, which grows "by longe processe of tyme" (3.vi, ll. 698-9), the branches are the words of his petitions, spoken "in voice of prayer complayning-wise used" (3.vii, ll. 811-2), and Margery's "grace" is the fruit that grows on them.³⁰ Yet, when Usk imagines this "grace" as "reward for my longe travayle," Love insists that he cannot change Margery's disposition by his own efforts, since any "grace" he receives "cometh not of thy deserte, but of thy Margarytes goodnesse and virtue alone" (3.vii, ll. 876-80). Even as she commends love service as an opportunity to cultivate noble virtues, then, Love withholds the promise that Ovid's *praeceptor* makes to his students, denying Usk the power to "emprent" his desires on Margery through his own persistent efforts. As this part of the dialogue draws to a close, she offers him two examples to encourage him in his ongoing service, the axe that slowly fells a tree and dropping water that hollows out a stone: "So ofte must men on the oke smyte tyl the happy dent have entred, whiche with the okes owne swaye maketh it to come al at ones. So ofte falleth the lethy water on the harde rocke tyl it have thorowe persed it" (3.vii, ll. 870-72). The images of carving and erosion run counter to the metaphor of arboreal growth that structures this dialogue (will the tree flourish or be cut down?); in combination, they serve to promote the "longe processe" of love service itself, while creating ambiguity about its final outcome. Indeed, as he reflects on his own

³⁰ Thomas Usk, *The Testament of Love*, ed. R. Allen Shoaf (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1998). Love elaborates the metaphor of the tree in book 3, chapters 5-7.

experience, Usk identifies complaint itself as a source of satisfaction and enjoyment, saying that the lover who “dare complayne” with “hope of ... grace to be avaunced” is “joyed” and “greatly eased” (3.vii, ll. 816-9); the experience of habituation offers its own rewards.

In lyric poetry of the kind Aurelius composes for Dorigen, speakers rediscover the lessons of the letter to Albinovanus as they follow the advice of the *Ars amatoria*. In Petrarch's *rime* “Aspro core et selvaggio,” for example, the lover despairs of moving his lady, but recalls that drops of water can gradually work through stone – “che poco humor già per continua prova/ consumar vidi marmi et pietre salde” [“I've seen a little liquid's constant trial wear solid stone and marble quite away”] – and concludes that his own tears and prayers might soften her heart in a similar way (ll. 10-13).³¹ The image of dropping water occurs to him as he watches his own tears, which are themselves an expression of his love service, a continuation of his verbal complaint. Self-observation provokes a memory of the *Ars amatoria*, which encourages the speaker to persist, but it also offers the insights of the letters *ex Ponto*, as the speaker affirms his own capacity to endure. A similar act of self-observation plays out in Gower's ballade XVIII. At the start of this poem, the lover challenges the *praeceptor*'s analogy, observing that, while “Les goutes d'eaue qu'cheont menu/ L'en voit sovent percer la dure pierre” (ll. 1-2) [“Little drops of water that fall often are able to pierce the hard stone”], his own petitions leave his lady unmoved: “Com plus la prie, et meinz m'ad entendu” (l. 7) [“The more I pray, the less I am heeded”].³² Yet this complaint, addressed as much to the *praeceptor amoris* as to his lady, itself forms the basis of the poem that follows, and recurs as the refrain at the end of each stanza. In the final quatrain, the speaker considers

³¹ *Petrarch's Songbook: Rerum Vulgarium Fragmenta*, ed. Gianfranco Contini, trans. James Wyatt Cook (Binghamton: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1995), 308-10, 309-11.

³² John Gower, *The French Balades*, ed. and trans R. F. Yeager (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2011), 84-7.

the poem he has written, the material evidence of his own persistence, and resolves to send it to his lady as a “lettre,” as though following the *praeceptor*’s advice in the *Ars* (ll. 21-5). This poem dramatizes the moment when a speaker discovers the purpose of Ovid’s analogy, displaying his cultivation as a lover and asserting his own powers of persistence, even as he abandons the fantasy of transforming his lady through his long efforts.

Similar negotiations can be found in the literature of religious instruction. Here, writers deployed the analogy with dropping water to encourage persistent devotion, only to reveal that persistence was a good in itself. In a sermon for Holy Week, for example, Peter Comestor combines a quotation from the letters *ex Ponto* with a maxim adapted from St Augustine and a verse from the psalms as he encourages his listeners to persevere in love: “Habe charitatem, et fac quidquid vis: omnia difficilia facilia sunt amanti. Gutta cavat lapidem. Exspecta Dominum, viriliter age, et confortabitur cor tuum” [“Have charity and do whatever you want: all difficult things become easy through love. Drops of water hollow out a stone. Expect the Lord, act manfully, and let your heart take courage”].³³ In his commentary on Luke 18:1-8, meanwhile, Bonaventure compares the efficacy of persistent prayer (“efficaciae orationis instantia”) to the power of dropping water, which hollows out a stone: “Gutta cavat lapidem, non vi, sed saepe candendo” [“A drop of water hollows out a stone, not by force but by steady dripping”]; prayer will incline God to mercy, just as the widow’s

³³ Peter Comestor, “Sermo XVI in Hebdomada poenosa,” *PL* 198:1767. Peter quotes Ovid’s *ex Ponto* alongside Psalm 26:14, and a maxim derived from Augustine’s sermon on 1 John 4:4-12. The phrase “Dilige, et quod vis fac” from Augustine’s sermon was recast as “Habe caritatem, et fac quidquid vis”, perhaps by Ivo of Chartres, and often quoted in this form in the twelfth century. See John F. Benson, “Consciousness of Self and Perceptions of Individuality,” in *Renaissance and Renewal in the Twelfth Century*, ed. Benson and Giles Constable with Carol D. Lanham (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982, repr. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991), 293n93.

entreaties move the hard-hearted judge in Luke’s parable (18.ix).³⁴ For Comestor and for Bonaventure, the analogy between persistent speech and dropping water promises rewards that might really come to pass, in the form of divine assistance and salvation. However, it also serves to encourage forms of effort that are virtuous in themselves and which transform the condition of the soul. Comestor, in particular, echoes the literature of amatory instruction, extolling the transformative power of love, which enables the Christian to perform impossible tasks. A sermon from the English Wycliffite cycle names the virtue that this kind of *usus* produces, using Ovid’s analogy to promote *longanimitas*, one of Paul’s twelve fruits of the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:22-3): “þe seuenþe fruyzt of þis spiriȝt is *longlastynge* in uertues, for þe drope persiþ þe stoon not bi ones but bi longlastyng”.³⁵

Henry Suso’s mystical dialogue *Horologium sapientiae* explicitly appropriates Ovidian amatory instruction and repurposes it as a guide to ascetic devotional practice. Wisdom explains that religious contemplatives should emulate the “lovers of þis worlde,” who remain “bisye and abydyng” in their love service, even as they endure the “turnynge abowte of þe whele of love”. The contemplative, too, should be a “feruent lover,” who persists in his devotion despite the “comynge and goynge” of mystical experience.³⁶ Wisdom

³⁴ Bonaventure, “Commentarius in Evangelium S. Lucae,” in *Doctoris Seraphici S. Bonaventurae opera omnia*, 10 vols (Quaracchi: College of St. Bonaventure, 1882-1902), vii (1895), 451. Translation from *The Works of St. Bonaventure: vol. 8, Commentary on the Gospel of Luke*, trans. Robert J. Karris, 3 vols (St. Bonaventure, NY: Franciscan Institute Publications, 2001-4), 3.1713.

³⁵ “Dominica xiiii post Trinitatem, Epistola: Sermo 44,” in *English Wycliffite Sermons*, ed. Anne Hudson and Pamela Gradon, 5 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983-96), 1.663.

³⁶ Carl Horstmann, “Orologium Sapientiae or The Seven Poyntes of Trewe Wisdom, aus MS Douce 114”, *Anglia*, 10 (1888): 323-89 (335). I have silently expanded the contractions and modernised the punctuation. For the Latin text, see *Heinrich Seuses Horologium sapientiae*, ed. Pius Künzle (Freiburg: Universitätsverlag, 1977), and for a modern English translation from the Latin see Henry Suso, *Wisdom’s Watch Upon the Hours*, trans. Edmund Colledge (Washington DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1994). In this part of the “Orologium,” Suso explains the comings and goings of mystical experience as part of the

quotes repeatedly from the *Ars amatoria*, recasting the *praeceptor*'s advice to lovers for his own disciple. He tells him that "Love is a maner of knihthode," "militiae species amor est" (*Ars*, 2, l. 233), which requires courage and commitment, and he reassures him that "continuele trauayle ouercomeþ alle þinges," citing the effect of water drops falling on stone: "For what is softere þanne water, or harder þanne stone? And 3it by ofte fallynge and smytyng of water þe stone is persede".³⁷ The travails of the spiritual lover should include insistent prayers, analogous to the lover's complaint: Wisdom tells the disciple to "preye and aske ofte-siþes, and leue not".³⁸ Suso draws attention to the moment when the comparison breaks down: unlike the stern and savage ladies who confront courtly lovers, he observes, God takes delight in the speaker's petitions and will be quick to answer them.³⁹ At the same time, however, he affirms that, for lovers and contemplatives alike, the long effort of love service brings its own rewards.

Other religious texts, however, cite the analogy from a different source, attributing it to the desert fathers. The image of water dropping on stone appears as a figure for persistent speech on two occasions in the *Verba seniorum*, a collection of anecdotes and exchanges that records the wisdom of the fathers and which often circulated in the Middle Ages with the *Vitas patrum*, an anthology of their lives.⁴⁰ In book 5, abbot Poemen tells the abbot John that

ludus amoris, the "game" or "play" of love, which heightens a lover's desire and allows him to prove his resolve, drawing from Hugh of Saint Victor's *Soliloquium de arrha animae*.

³⁷ "Orologium Sapientiae," 335-6.

³⁸ "Orologium Sapientiae," 336.

³⁹ Suso writes that "in alle þis worlde is none fowndene þat is so liht to be askede of and preyede, so redye to hir and so godelye to answeye, as is sche þis þin most goddelye spowse"; "Orologium Sapientiae," 336.

⁴⁰ The Latin *Verba seniorum* was translated from the systematic version of the Greek *Apophthegmata Patrum*, which derives in turn from a Coptic oral tradition; the earliest texts were produced in late fifth century Palestine, and the monks whose wisdom they record were active in Lower Egypt from the 330s to the 460s. See William Harmless, S.J., *Desert Christians: An Introduction to the Literature of Early Monasticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 169-71. For general introductions to the *Apophthegmata Patrum* see

frequent exposure to the word of God will stir the fear of God in a hard heart, just as dropping water works its way through stone; abbot Pimenion uses the analogy to make the same point to an unnamed questioner in book 7 (5.xviii.16, 7.xxix.1).⁴¹ The exchange between Poemen and John was anthologised in medieval resources for preachers: the late thirteenth-century *Liber de similitudinibus et exemplis*, for example, contains an exemplum concerning “De abbate Johanne et lapide et aqua et duricia cordis”.⁴² It also appears in surviving sermons: in a Middle English sermon from Bodleian Library, MS Laud Misc. 706, the preacher rehearses it to console those members of his audience who might struggle to follow his argument and so conclude that listening to preaching is “a spending and wastyng of tyme”.⁴³ In this version, an “hold fadyr” promises a “zong man” that “the ardnes and the dolnes” of his wit will be “parchit” by “ofte heryng of the word of God,” just as “a harde stone whas parchyd whyt softe watur be ofte dropyng of reyne”.⁴⁴

Harmless, *Desert Christians*, 167-273, and Douglas Burton-Christie, *The Word in the Desert: Scripture and the Quest for Holiness in Early Christian Monasticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 76-103. On the medieval transmission of the *Verba seniorum*, see Columba M. Batlle, *Die ‘Adhortationes sanctorum patrum’ (‘Verba seniorum’) im lateinischen Mittelalter* (Munster: Aschendorffsche, 1972).

⁴¹ *De Vitis Patrum libri quinque, sex, septem, sive Verba Seniorum*, PL 73. For the exchange between Poemen and John, see col. 983, for the words of Pimenion, see col. 1050.

⁴² See J.-Th. Welter, *L’Exemplum dans la Littérature Religieuse et Didactique du Moyen Âge: La Tabula Exemplorum secundum Ordinem Alphabeti; Recueil d’exempla compile en France à la fin du XIIIe siècle* (Geneva: Slatkine Reprints, 2012), 80, no. 298, and Frederic C. Tubach, *Index Exemplorum: A Handbook of Medieval Religious Tales*, FF Communications, 204 (Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedekatemia, 1969), no. 4636. Karris, *Commentary on the Gospel*, 1713n43, suggests that Bonaventure may have found the analogy in the *Verba seniorum*, rather than in Ovid.

⁴³ Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Laud Misc. 706, fol. 149v. I cite the text of this sermon from Patrick Horner, “An Edition of Five Medieval Sermons from MS Laud misc. 706” (PhD diss., State University of New York, Albany, 1975), 111-146 (quotation at 119). On the sermons in this manuscript see also Veronica O’Mara and Suzanne Paul, *A Repertorium of Middle English Prose Sermons*, 4 vols (Turnhout: Brepols, 2007), 3.2183-2194 (this sermon is summarised as Bodl/Laud 706/002); Horner, “Benedictines and Preaching in Fifteenth-century England: The Evidence of Two Bodleian Library Manuscripts”, *Revue Bénédictine* 99 (1989): 313-32; and Wenzel, *Macaronic Sermons: Bilingualism and Preaching in Late-Medieval England* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994), 173-77.

⁴⁴ Horner, “Five Medieval Sermons,” 119-20.

These borrowings from the *Verba seniorum* reveal the application of this figure to persistent teaching and instruction, a connotation that was always present in Ovid's *Ars*. The desert fathers also echoed Ovid's invitation to test the claims that underpin the analogy through direct observation of the natural world. Abbot Poemen even suggests that John might stage an experiment in order to see the process of erosion for himself:

Natura aquae mollis est, lapidis autem dura est; e si vas aquae plenum pendeat supra lapidem, ex quo assidue stillans gutta cadat in lapidem, perforat eum; ita et sermo divinus lenis est, cor autem nostrum durum; audiens ergo homo frequenter divinum sermonem, aperitur cor ejus ad timendum Deum. (5.xviii.16)

[The nature of water is soft, the nature of stone is hard; but if a bottle is hung above a stone letting water drip down, it wears away the stone. It is like that with the word of God; it is soft and our heart is hard, but if a man hears the word of God often, it will break open his heart to the fear of God.]⁴⁵

Isolated in the desert, Poemen and Pimenion were uniquely placed to observe such natural processes as they unfolded over time. This kind of knowledge was directly related to their ascetic practice. This was the wisdom the recluse could offer the preacher, recasting the analogy with water dropping on stone as a comment on the slow, incremental process of instruction, rather than a promise of immediate transformation.

⁴⁵ *Verba Seniorum*, PL 73:983. Translation from *The Desert Fathers: Sayings of the Early Christian Monks*, trans. by Benedicta Ward (London: Penguin, 2003), 191.

The analogy between persistent speech and water dropping on stone, which in turn informs the image of engraving and “emprentyng” in *The Franklin’s Tale*, emerged from the *Ovidius minor* as an elusive, ambivalent kind of wisdom, qualified by the complex ironies of the *Ars amatoria*, by the invitation to observe the process of erosion in nature, and by the evidence of lived experience, prefigured in the allusion to Penelope and affirmed by the poet in his later exile poetry. The medieval writers who appropriated this analogy either discerned these complexities in Ovid or rediscovered them for themselves, balancing the questionable promise that a speaker might reshape his listener’s desires through his own efforts, against the evident power of this figure to sustain worthwhile endeavours and to enable the cultivation of virtue. Preachers and poets alike promote the analogy as wisdom to use but not necessarily to believe, a figure that encouraged worthwhile endeavours by promising deferred, intangible, or illusory rewards.

***The Franklin’s Tale*, “stoon by stoon”**

The analogy with “emprentyng” stone that appears near the start of the *Franklin’s Tale* signals Chaucer’s engagement with a long tradition of writing about persistent speech and its consequences. Taking up Boccaccio’s reference to Ovid in his immediate source, Chaucer offers an expansive reply, which responds to the evolving significance of this analogy in the *Ovidius minor* and to its treatment in the work of his own contemporaries. The *Franklin’s Tale* presents persistent speech of many kinds, clerical consolation, preacherly instruction, lovers’ complaints and petitionary prayer, linking together the discursive contexts where Ovid’s analogy was cited and theorised. It describes the “proces” by which speakers might come to understand how this analogy works, testing its claims about speech and stone against

their own experience, but it also asks what happens when a persistent speaker resists this kind of realisation and demands instead the rewards that the analogy seems to promise, the power to reshape another person's desires through long, reiterative effort.

The analogy with engraving forms part of a cluster of proverbs and sentences that appear early on in *The Franklin's Tale* and which inform the subsequent development of its narrative. They include another Ovidian aphorism, "Love wol nat been constreynd by maistrye" (V.765), a version of *Metamorphoses*, 2.846-7, "non bene conveniunt nec in una sede morantur/ maiestas et amor," as well as Boethian sentences on the instinctive desire for freedom and an injunction to lovers to "lerne to suffre".⁴⁶ This cluster of *sententiae* is organised around a central, proverbial claim about the power of patience, which the Franklin attributes to "clerkes," and which is glossed in one manuscript with its Latin form, "pacientes vincunt": "Pacience is an heigh vertu, certeyn,/ For it venquysseth, as thise clerkes seyn,/ Thynges that rigour shoulde nevere ateyne" (773-5).⁴⁷ The Franklin's analogy with engraving, which appears shortly after this sententious passage in the tale, echoes the proverb "pacientes vincunt" in its claim that persistent speech will "conquer" resistant listeners, transforming their desires through habituation and repeated *usus*, but the forms of speech it seems to encourage might as easily take the form of "rigour," with its connotations of

⁴⁶ Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. Frank Justus Miller, rev. G. P. Goold, 3rd edn, 2 vols, Loeb Classical Library 42-3 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1977, repr. 1994). Chaucer would also have encountered this aphorism in the *Roman de la Rose*, where it forms part of the advice of Friend to the lover; see Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun. *Le Roman de la Rose*, ed. Félix Lecoy, 3 vols (Paris: Librairie Honoré Champion, 1965-70), II. 9409-12. For a reading of *The Franklin's Tale* as a meditation on these lines from Ovid, see Gregory Heyworth, *Desiring Bodies: Ovidian Romance and the Cult of Form* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2009), 121-40.

⁴⁷ London, British Library, MS Egerton 2864 (En3). For a transcription of the text, see Stephen Bradford Partridge, "Glosses in the Manuscripts of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*: An Edition and Commentary" (PhD diss., Harvard University, 1991), V-5.

obduracy, fixity and violence, as of patience, with its links to sufferance and forbearance.⁴⁸

Understanding this analogy will itself require patience, a willingness to test its claims against lived experience, to revisit them over time. Learning to suffer in *The Franklin's Tale* involves making the proper use of proverbial wisdom like this.

The figure of “emprentyng” stone appears in a scene where amatory complaint and clerical instruction are in open competition. While Dorigen laments the absence of Arveragus, her friends attempt to console her, countering her complaints with appeals and petitions of their own. Dorigen articulates her suffering in a wide range of expressive modes, from wordless weeping to elaborate speech, and the tale describes them with an asyndetic list of terms, which suggests their insistent, repetitive quality: “She moorneth, waketh, wayleth, fasteth, pleyneth” (V.819). Her friends display similar forms of tenacity and resourcefulness in their replies: they appeal to her reason, telling her “nyght and day/ That causelees she sleeth hirself” (V.824-5), they plead with her, “on knees, for Goddes sake,” to abandon her “derke fantasye” (V.824), and they “prechen hire” (V.824), offering instruction and illustrative examples. The tale hints at the preacherly content of these exhortations when Dorigen relents for a moment, as though accepting her friends’ argument that all “was for the beste” (V.846), a proverbial recasting of Romans 8:28, “omnia cooperantur in bonum” [“all things work together unto good”]. When the Franklin refers to the long “proces” of their speech, moreover, he uses a term that describes the *processus* or development of a scholastic sermon. In doing so, he maps the procedures of habituation onto the recursive, exegetical forms of this discourse, which returns to and elaborates on the same *thema*, much as a lover

⁴⁸ Compare *MED* sv “paciencie,” 1 and 2, and *MED* sv “rigour,” esp. 2. On the distinction between these terms, see Jill Mann, *Feminizing Chaucer*, new edn. (Cambridge: Brewer, 2001), 89-90.

derives new complaints from the same subject matter.⁴⁹ As it opposes complaint and consolation, the tale affirms the close resemblance between these two forms of persistent speech. Each provides opportunities for the cultivation of virtue and an occasion for the masochistic enjoyments of self-denial: through her long commitment to complaint, Dorigen confirms her place among “thise noble wyves” (V.817), while her friends display their own form of preacherly “noblesse” as they work to console her.⁵⁰ The Franklin describes “The emprenting of [Dorigen’s] consolacioun” at the point when she seems to succumb to her friends’ entreaties, before taking up her complaint again in the subsequent lines (V.834); voicing the analogy in this moment, where complaint and consolation provoke and sustain one another, he reveals its applicability to both forms of persistent speech.

As Dorigen continues her complaint, however, she comes to a new understanding of the analogy between persistent speech and “emprenting” stone. Walking by the sea, she considers the “grisly rokes blake” around the coast (V.859) and, imagining that they might shipwreck Arveragus on his return, she prays to God to drag them down into hell. These related acts of observation and expression place different kinds of pressure on Ovid’s *praeceptor*’s arguments about the powers of speech and the properties of stone. Dorigen sees the rocks surrounded by water, but sees no evidence of the water wearing them away. Instead, she reflects on their capacity for endurance, tracing their effects on human beings

⁴⁹ For the specialised sense of this term in preaching, see H. Leith Spencer, *English Preaching in the Late Middle Ages* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 111 and n130. Spencer (*English Preaching*, 110-111) shows that preachers would describe the structure of their sermons using this kind of technical terminology, importing Latin terms into Middle English, and that attentive listeners absorbed these terms into their own vocabulary.

⁵⁰ Tison Pugh has argued that Arveragus assumes the role of the Lacanian courtly lady in this part of the poem, inflicting arbitrary cruelty on Dorigen through his motiveless absence and occasioning her long complaint: *Chaucer’s (Anti-)Eroticisms and the Queer Middle Ages* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2014), 30-64; I would add that Dorigen performs a similar role for her friends, prolonging their suffering by resisting their petitions.

through a long, destructive history that extends beyond her own memory into the distant past: “An hundred thousand bodyes of mankynde/ Han rokkes slayn, al be they nat in mynde” (V.877-78). The rocks inhabit a slow, geological time – what Jeffrey Jerome Cohen has called “lithic time” – that exceeds the limits of a human life and so also the human capacity for observation.⁵¹ Erosion, too, takes place on this time scale, lasting longer than the history Dorigen can recall. In her prayer to God, Dorigen tries to remove the rocks through an act of persistent speech, as though the corresponding terms in Ovid’s analogy were interchangeable. The rocks, however, remain unmoved: they resist the force of her petitions just as they resist the force of the waves.

This encounter reframes the implications of Ovid’s analogy and of the Franklin’s, placing the promised rewards for persistent speech out of reach of any individual speaker. Even as she comes to this realisation, however, Dorigen also displays and affirms her own capacity for endurance. Her ongoing prayer, marked out in one manuscript as “the complaynte of dame Dorigen,” forms the first of the tale’s lyric interludes, where the claims of first-person expression outweigh the claims of narrative.⁵² Her tenacity in the face of the implacable rocks creates opportunities for creative expression: she echoes the Franklin’s first description of the “grisly rokkes blake,” transforming it into a refrain, which appears in amplified and abbreviated forms (“thise grisly feendly rokkes blake,” “thise rokkes blake”) and she extrapolates an elaborate challenge to God’s providential design from her

⁵¹ Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, *Stone: An Ecology of the Inhuman* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015), 198-9. Both Cohen and W. A. Davenport have linked these rocks to the standing stones of ancient British history, drawing attention to their ancient condition. See Davenport, *Chaucer, Complaint and Narrative* (Woodbridge: Brewer, 1988), 180-81, and Cohen, *Stone*, 198-200. John B. Friedman, “Dorigen’s “Grisly Rokkes Blake” Again,” *ChauR* 31, no. 2 (1996): 133-144, argues that the rocks in the tale refer to the prehistoric menhirs that stand on the coast of Brittany as a reminder of the ancient past.

⁵² This gloss appears in Bodleian Library MS Arc. Selden B. 14 (Se). See Partridge, “Glosses in the Manuscripts,” V-5.

observations about the dangers they pose, in a remarkable act of rhetorical invention (V.859, 868, 891). In this pivotal scene, Dorigen takes up the invitation that was always present in this analogy, in Ovid and in the wisdom of the desert fathers, testing and qualifying its confident claims by considering the real effect of water on stone. At the same time, like Ovid in exile, she discovers her own capacity for perseverance, finding new opportunities for creative expression as she addresses the impervious rocks.

Dorigen's persistence in this scene is closely linked to her intransigence, her resistance to the entreaties of her friends. As she observes the rocks, she restates her indifference to their preacherly petitions. Imagining that "clerkes" might try to account for the rocks as part of God's creation, she rejects their arguments, which contain an echo of her friends' insistent claim that Arveragus's absence was "for the beste" (V.846):

I woot wel clerkes wol seyn as hem leste,
By argumentz, that al is for the beste,
Though I ne kan the causes nat yknowe.
But thilke God that made wynd to blowe
As kepe my lord! This my conclusion.

To clerkes lete I al disputison. (V.885-90)

This outspoken rejection of "argumentz" and "disputision" itself forms part of Dorigen's complex response to Ovid's analogy. The claim about persuasive speech that informs this analogy is shown to be insufficient, even misleading, when qualified by the evidence of Dorigen's direct experience, and Dorigen, at this point of realisation, alleges the evidence of her own situation against the promises the analogy seems to make. Perhaps Ovid's

praeceptor, “Venus clerk,” is himself among the “clerkes” to whom she offers her reply. These lines also anticipate the difficulties that Dorigen will face when she tries to communicate what she has learned, however. These are lessons that emerge over time, in dialogue with lived experience, and which cannot be simply expressed as clerical “argumentz”.

With the introduction of Aurelius, *The Franklin’s Tale* turns its attention to the kind of speaker who Ovid addresses in books 1 and 2 of the *Ars amatoria*. A “lusty squier” and “servant to Venus,” Aurelius loves Dorigen “best of any creature” (V.937). His long and fruitless love service is modelled on Tarolfo’s attempts to seduce the married *donna* in Menedon’s story from *Il Filocolo*, a task inspired and sustained by the *praeceptor*’s advice. Courting Dorigen in her husband’s absence, however, he also resembles the suitors of Penelope, whose trials seem to undercut, or at least to qualify, the *praeceptor*’s assertions about the power of persistent speech. When he first appears in the tale, Aurelius expresses his “wo” in lyric poetry, performing “layes,/ Songes, compleintes, roundels, virelayes” for Dorigen (V.945, 947-8); here, Chaucer introduces another mode of first-person speech that was associated with the figure of water dropping on stone, like a lover’s lament, petitionary prayer and preacherly consolation. This asyndetic list of poetic forms recalls the list of terms that described Dorigen’s sorrowful expression earlier in the tale and hints again at the persistent way Aurelius returns to the same “matere,” prolonging his sufferings as he articulates them (V.947).⁵³ It also suggests that Aurelius has made his suffering the occasion

⁵³ This inventory of poetic forms has a literary tradition of its own. In Gower’s *Confessio Amantis*, for example, Amans confesses that “I have ofte assaied/ Rondeal, balade and virelai/ For hire on whom myn herte lai/ To make [...]” (I, 2726-9), listing some of the forms Aurelius employs, while, in *The Legend of Good Women*, Alceste remembers the “balades, roundels, virelayes” that Chaucer has composed in praise of love (F.423, G.412). The constitution of the *Cour Amoureuse* adds *complainte* to this list, condemning lovers who compose “dittierz, complaintes, rondeaux, virelays, balades, [ou] lays” that disparage women,

for sophisticated, creative expression: “compleinte” appears here alongside demanding forms like the rondel and the *virelai*, where, as James Wimsatt has observed, the principles of “repetition and accumulation” produce ornate and elaborate patterns.⁵⁴ As Jenni Nuttall has recently noted, however, these forms are often identified with juvenilia in Chaucer’s poetry and with the self-regarding naivety of inexperienced lovers.⁵⁵ For Aurelius, perhaps, the process of habituation has only just begun.

Certainly, Aurelius has still to recognise this process of habituation as a source of satisfaction in its own right. As he composes his poems, he continues to complain that his words have no effect on Dorigen. Turning from the *Ars* to the *Metamorphoses*, he likens himself to Echo, who “dorste nat telle hir wo” to Narcissus, a persistent speaker who never obtained her desires and who, with a prayer to Venus, finally wore herself away (V.951-2).⁵⁶ At a crucial turning point in the tale, Aurelius abandons his “general compleynyng” and openly declares his “entente,” petitioning Dorigen, “reweth upon my peynes smerte” (V.945, 958, 974). Rather than persisting with his own lyrical expression, to the point where he might discover the real significance of Ovid’s analogy, he demands the power to “emprent” his

and so does Lydgate when, in the *The Fall of Princes*, he praises Chaucer for his “Compleyntis, baladis, roundelis, virelais / Ful delectable” (I, 353-4). See Gower, *Confessio Amantis*, ed. Russell A. Peck, 3 vols (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2001-4), 1.174, and *La Cour Amoureuse Dite de Charles VI*, vol. 1: *Étude et édition critique des sources manuscrites*, ed. Carla Bozzolo and Hélène Loyau (Paris: Léopard d’Or, 1982). These lines from *La Cour Amoureuse* are cited, translated and discussed in Carolyn P. Collette, *Rethinking Chaucer’s Legend of Good Women* (Woodbridge: York Medieval Press, 2014), 57-8.

⁵⁴ James I. Wimsatt, *Chaucer and his French Contemporaries: Natural Music in the Fourteenth Century* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991), 110.

⁵⁵ Jenni Nuttall, “‘Many a Lay and Many a Thing’: Chaucer’s Technical Terms,” in *Chaucer and the Subversion of Form*, ed. Thomas A. Prendergast and Jessica Rosenfeld (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 21-37 (31-2).

⁵⁶ Elizabeth A. Dobbs (“Re-Sounding Echo,” *ChauR* 40, no. 3 (2006): 291) links this reference to Echo to the earlier analogy with “emprentyng” stone, as related Ovidian allusions concerned with speaking and interpreting.

desires on others that the *praeceptor* had promised, the ability to reconfigure Dorigen's will through his own persistent speech.

In her reply, Dorigen searches for a way to share her own understanding of Ovid's analogy with Aurelius. First, she flatly refuses him, resisting his efforts at subjection and declaring her loyalty to Arveragus: "Ne shal I nevere been untrewe wyf/ In word ne werk, as fer as I have wit [...]/ Taak this for fynal answeare as of me" (V.984-7). Then she presents him with an impossible task, like the task the *donna* demands from Tarolfo, challenging him to remove the rocks from around the coast:

"Aurelie," quod she, "by heighe God above,
Yet wolde I graunte yow to been youre love,
Syn I yow se so pitously complayne.
Looke what day that endelong Britayne
Ye remoeve alle the rokkes, stoon by stoon,
That they ne lette ship ne boot to goon –
I seye, whan ye han maad the coost so clene
Of rokkes that ther nys no stoon ysene,
Thanne wol I love yow best of any man;
Have heer my trouthe, in al that evere I kan." (V.989-98)

Aurelius accuses Dorigen of capricious, motiveless cruelty, demanding "Is ther noon oother grace in yow?" and declaring his task "an inpossible!" (V.999, 1010). Yet, Dorigen's challenge is no senseless ordeal. Rather, it seeks to recreate for Aurelius the circumstances in which she had come to re-evaluate the claims of the analogy herself. Dorigen invites Aurelius

to confront the material realities of the black rocks and consider the time it would take to wear them away, “emprentyng” or eroding them, “stoon by stoon”. She also presents an opportunity for him to continue his complaint and so to arrive at a mature understanding of persistent effort, the virtues it cultivates and the satisfactions it entails. Recognising the onset of *amor* in her young suitor, Dorigen also perceives his need for instruction and assumes the role of *praeceptor* herself. Rather than instructing him directly, however, she works to prolong his endeavours, so that the full significance of Ovid’s analogy might emerge in his own experience over time.

There are early signs that Dorigen’s strategy has been successful, as Aurelius resumes his complaint, moving from lyric poetry to petitionary prayer and calling on Apollo and Lucina to cover the rocks with a high tide. Like Dorigen’s lines on the black rocks, Aurelius’s prayer forms a long, lyrical interlude in the narrative, marked out in the Ellesmere manuscript (El) and in British Library, MS Additional 35286 (Ad³), as “The compleint of Aurelius to the goddes and to the sonne,” and it expresses a similar desire, to remove the rocks from around the coast.⁵⁷ There are signs, too, that Aurelius is discovering the pleasures of deferred gratification, as he asks the gods to create a flood that will “endure yeres twaine” before he finally declares to Dorigen that “the rokkes been aweye” (V.1062-4). Through the intervention of his brother, however, Aurelius finds a way to prolong the fantasy that he might still habituate Dorigen to his own desires, avoiding the direct encounter with stone that Dorigen had sought to engineer for him.

Remembering his schooldays in Orléans, where “yonge clerkes [...] were lykerous/ To reden artes that been curious,” Aurelius’s brother takes him to meet another clerk, still

⁵⁷ See Partridge, “Glosses in the Manuscripts,” V-5.

resident in the city, who can create the illusion that the rocks have disappeared (V.1105-6). The clerk displays his skills to Aurelius, conjuring scenes of hunting and hawking, jousting and dancing and, finally, an image of Aurelius and Dorigen dancing together, as though promising the ultimate fulfilment of his desires. The cathedral school at Orléans was renowned as a centre for the study of classical authors and the Orléanais masters Arnulf, William and Fulco produced some of the most influential medieval commentaries on Ovid's work.⁵⁸ The curious "artes" the clerk has read include books of "magyk natureel" (V.1125) but also, surely, the *Ars amatoria*; indeed, his skilful manipulation of Aurelius's fantasies might seem to figure his mastery of that text. When Dorigen set Aurelius his impossible task, she proposed a course of study that would allow him to move beyond the deceptive promises of the *Ars* and discover what Ovid had learned in his letters *ex Ponto*. Aurelius's brother, however, invites him to return to Orléans, where "yonge clerkes" have learned to prolong the fantasies of the *Ars* itself. Like Tarolfo in Menedon's story, Aurelius resorts to magic and illusion in an effort to validate the *praeceptor*'s claims, seeking to avoid the encounter with nature that would qualify them: rather than confront the material reality of stone, he remains in the clerk's study, "theras his bookes be" (V. 1207 and cf. 1214), and indulges ephemeral illusions, which are quickly "voyded," disappearing when he "clapte his handes two" (V.1195, 1203).

Criticism on *The Franklin's Tale* has often returned to the "rash promise" that forms part of Dorigen's challenge to Aurelius, her pledge to love him if he can "remoeve alle the

⁵⁸ On the school of Orléans and the Orléanais commentators, see Coulson, "Metamorphoses in the school tradition of France," in *Ovid in the Middle Ages*, 48-82 (50-59), and Wilken Engelbrecht, "Fulco, Arnulf, and William: Twelfth-Century Views on Ovid in Orléans," *The Journal of Medieval Latin* 18 (2008): 52-73. Fulco wrote commentaries on the *Ars amatoria* and the *Remedia amoris*, while Arnulf wrote commentaries on the *Ars*, the *Remedia*, and *Ex Ponto*.

rokkes” from around the coast (V.992).⁵⁹ Bonnie Wheeler argues that Dorigen is “constrained [...] [by the] rhetorical codes” of courtly love, which provide no way to refuse Aurelius: “[a] woman who is chosen as a beloved is allowed myriad delaying techniques, but postponement is as close as she can come to a final *no*,” she writes.⁶⁰ Susan Crane, too, contends that the discourse of *fin’ amor* restricts what Dorigen can say, so that she “finds herself ventriloquizing encouragement” even as “she attempts refusal”.⁶¹ For Michael Calabrese, by contrast, this moment reveals the reckless excesses of Dorigen’s language, which play out in her characteristic tendency to “endless amplification”; Calabrese argues that Dorigen lacks the “self-mastery and rhetorical cultivation” prized in the ladies of the *Filocolo* and other Italian *novelle*, who often bring lovesick men sharply to their senses with their incisive wit.⁶² I suggest, however, that Dorigen’s difficulties arise from the elusive qualities of Ovid’s analogy, whose lessons resist direct communication and whose promises encourage dangerous illusions about the power of persistent effort. Dorigen’s “rash promise” to Aurelius is, after all, the same promise that Ovid’s *praeceptor* makes to his students, refashioned as a lover’s ordeal. She places herself at risk, promising her own subjection as an incentive for his continued efforts, in the hope that these efforts will teach their own lessons in time. When Dorigen steps into the role of *praeceptor amoris*, offering Aurelius this lesson in love, she stakes her own honour on the efficacy of this pedagogical strategy, a level of personal investment that was never required from the *praeceptor* of Ovid’s *Ars*.

⁵⁹ On the literary and legal contexts for the “rash promise,” see Alan T. Gaylord, “The Promises in *The Franklin’s Tale*,” *ELH* 31, no. 4 (1964): 331-65, and Richard Firth Green, *A Crisis of Truth: Literature and Law in Ricardian England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), 293-335.

⁶⁰ Bonnie Wheeler, “Trouthe without Consequences: Rhetoric and Gender in Chaucer’s Franklin’s Tale,” in *Feminea Medievalia I: Representations of the Feminine in the Middle Ages*, ed. Wheeler (Cambridge, UK and Dallas: Academia Press, 1993), 106.

⁶¹ Susan Crane, *Gender and Romance in Chaucer’s Canterbury Tales* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 65.

⁶² Calabrese, “Chaucer’s Dorigen and Boccaccio’s Female Voices,” 266, 272. Calabrese here responds directly to Wheeler and Crane.

Dorigen's difficulties are compounded in this moment by the very habits of persistent speech that the analogy serves to encourage. Her reply to Aurelius is insistent and reiterative; she refuses him, then restates her refusal in another form, then elaborates on the terms of this new refusal. As she reiterates her challenge, Dorigen creates ambiguity around its conditions: in l. 993 Aurelius must physically remove the rocks, but ll. 995-96 allow that he might find a way to conceal them instead. Dorigen knows that the lessons of this analogy are only available from long experience and cannot be communicated as clerical "argumentz": to learn them, Aurelius must observe the effects of his own complaint and consider the realities of stone. Even so, her language begins to resemble clerical consolation, echoing the preaching of her friends, as she urges Aurelius to "Lat swiche folies out of youre herte slyde" (V.1002). Aurelius seems to recognise a clerical aspect to the impossible task she sets for him when he calls it "an impossible," a form of ingenious argumentation, a realisation that in some ways foreshadows his later journey to Orléans.⁶³ The generosity of Dorigen's response is confounded by the duplicity and ambivalence of the *praeceptor's* analogy, the deceptive way it teaches and the dangerous desires it provokes. Her own capacity for persistent speech serves to exacerbate these problems, as she communicates her lesson in a mode that Aurelius is bound to resist.

⁶³ Kyle Mahowald argues that Aurelius recasts the nature of the challenge when he identifies Dorigen's task as "an impossible". Dorigen intends the task as a form of *adynaton*, insisting by hyperbole that she will never grant Aurelius's request, yet Aurelius will come to treat it as a scholastic *impossible*, a proposition that runs counter to commonsense assumptions about the world, but which may yet be proved true by ingenious argument. Mahowald, "'It may nat be': Chaucer, Derrida, and the Impossibility of the Gift," *SAC* 32 (2010): 129-50. Mahowald draws definitions of the scholastic *impossible* from Percy, "Chaucer's 'An Impossible' ('Summoner's Tale' III, 2231)," *Notes and Queries* 14 (1967): 322-23.

When the clerk of Orléans performs his trick and Aurelius announces that the rocks are “aweye,” Dorigen declares it a “monstre,” a “merveille,” and “agains the proces of nature” (V.1344-5). This clerical illusion challenges the lessons she has learned from her encounter with the rocks and makes it difficult for her to reaffirm them. In his effort to obtain the rewards that the *praeceptor* seems to promise, Aurelius has removed the natural evidence that qualifies his claims: the “proces” of erosion, with its comment on the “proces” of habituation, is no longer available for observation. As Dorigen understands her situation, she must now either keep the promise the *praeceptor* had made to male lovers, subjecting herself to Aurelius’s desires, or end her own life: “oonly deeth or elles dishonour;/ Oon of this two bihoveth me to chese” (V. 1358-9).

Dorigen responds with the longest passage of first-person speech in the tale, glossed in El and Ad³ as “The compleynt of Dorigene ayeyns Fortune”.⁶⁴ Petitionary prayer evolves into preacherly consolation as, “wrapped” in the “cheyne” of Fortune (V.1356), Dorigen draws out a long *catena* of interrelated stories that bear on her own situation, listing virtuous women who chose death over dishonour.⁶⁵ Kara Gaston reads Dorigen’s complaint as an attempt to “buy time,” postponing the choice between “death” or “dishonour” that Aurelius presses on her.⁶⁶ Although she gestures ahead to the conclusion she will reach (“I wol

⁶⁴ Partridge, “Glosses in the Manuscripts,” V-7.

⁶⁵ Carruthers, *Book of Memory*, 259, explains the *catena* as a metaphor for a particular technique of memorial composition, where each remembered text “pulls other texts and sayings with it” as the speaker brings it to mind. On the *catena* as an image for associative groupings in the memory, see also *Book of Memory*, 78 and 143, and for a related manuscript border illustration see 322.

⁶⁶ Kara Gaston, “The Poetics of Time Management from the *Metamorphoses* to *Il filocolo* and *The Franklin’s Tale*,” *SAC* 37 (2015): 227. Gaston stresses the creativity involved in this endeavour, linking Dorigen’s *compleinte* to the magician’s spell in the *Filocolo*, and to Medea’s spell in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, both of which might seem to reorganise time by analogy with poetic craft. Kathryn L. Lynch, “East Meets West in Chaucer’s Squire’s and Franklin’s Tales,” *Speculum* 70, no. 3 (1995): 530-51, has also argued that Dorigen buys time with her complaint. Lynch, who reads *The Franklin’s Tale* in part as a response to the exotic

conclude that it is bet for me/ To sleen myself than been defouled thus,” V.1423-4), she also defers the moment of her death through the accumulation of examples. I would add that Dorigen’s complaint is also an attempt to reaffirm her hard-won understanding of Ovid’s analogy between dropping water and persistent speech, recovering the lessons that Ovid learned in his letters *ex Ponto*. Although she can no longer see the rocks, or observe the “proces” of erosion, she can observe her own resilience and her capacity for creative invention as she carves out this time for herself. The stories of these other women extend into something like “lithic time”. Like the history of the rocks themselves, they exceed what Dorigen herself can imagine or remember: “Mo than a thousand stories, as I gesse,/ Koude I now telle as touchynge this mateere [...]” (V.1412-13). Linking her story to theirs, Dorigen amplifies her own claim to stony endurance. At the same time, she demonstrates her resilience by resisting the conclusions of these narratives; although she addresses these stories “to herself” (V.1232), Dorigen never moves herself to action. The tale avoids staging a single moment of realisation, turning away from Dorigen as her speech continues: “Thus pleyned Dorigen a day or tweye,/ Purposynge evere that she wolde deye” (V.1457-8); holding the *praeceptor*’s promises in tension with the lessons of the letters *ex Ponto*, she continues to cultivate and perform her “noblesse”. It seems significant, however, that, late in her speech, she evokes the example of Penelope, whose introduction in the *Ars amatoria* first seemed to complicate the *praeceptor*’s claims about the power of habituation: “What seith Omer of goode Penalopee?” she asks; “Al Grece knoweth of hire chastitee” (V.1443-4).

orientalism of the *Squire’s Tale*, proposes that Dorigen’s examples serve a similar purpose to Shahrazad’s stories in the *Thousand and One Nights*, providing a way “to avoid death by passing the time”. Yet, for Lynch, the “awkwardly recursive” quality of Dorigen’s complaint limits its creative potential. She writes: “the exempla are sterile, mechanical, nothing more than the expanded version of ‘She moorneth, waketh, wayleth, fasteth, pleyneth’” (548).

The turn to illusion has very different consequences for Aurelius. When he first encounters Dorigen on his return from Orléans, Aurelius resumes his complaint, lamenting his “peyne” and appealing for “routhe” (V.1317-8). His intention, however, is to claim the rewards the *praeceptor* had promised and that Dorigen had reformulated in her challenge to him. When Dorigen and Aurelius meet in the garden, however, Aurelius is moved to “routhe” by Dorigen’s sorrowful condition and releases her from her promise “in fewe wordes,” recognising his request as a kind of “cherlissh wrecchednesse” (V.1520, 1525, 1523). Dorigen’s distress reveals the shortcomings of Aurelius’ strategy: rather than engage in a long, persistent effort to alter Dorigen’s desires, he has forced her to submit to him against her will. Although the narrator himself declares this a “gentil dede,” it soon becomes clear that the satisfactions of habituation are now denied to Aurelius; this affirmation of “gentillesse” seems as richly ironic as anything in Ovid’s *Ars* (V.1543). Avoiding the encounter with stone that Dorigen sought to engineer for him, he has missed his opportunity to cultivate a lover’s “noblesse,” and his chance to understand the implications of Ovid’s promise as they might unfold in his own experience. While Dorigen returns to resume her role as a noble wife, Aurelius is left to worry about money, debating how he can afford to pay the clerk of Orléans.

This figure for the power of persistent speech formed a small but complex part of Ovid’s legacy to the Middle Ages. Ovid’s medieval readers saw the great utility of this analogy, its power to encourage and sustain persistent effort and enable the cultivation of virtue, but they also recognised the potential for risk in its overstated promises about habituation, its implicit

claim that, through persistence, a speaker might “empress” their desires on a resistant listener. Ovid himself had surrounded this figure with qualifying ironies when he presented it to lovers in the *Ars amatoria*, and medieval *praeceptores*, too, encouraged careful responses to it, urging their readers to appreciate the virtues that developed through long persistence, *longanimitas* and “noblesse,” and to see these as goods in themselves. *The Franklin’s Tale* affirms that Ovid’s analogy can motivate many kinds of persistent speech, from lovers’ complaints to friendly consolation and petitionary prayer, and it demonstrates the kinds of creative expression that are possible in these interrelated modes. Yet, the tale also offers warnings about the destructive desires this analogy encourages and about its peculiar capacity to elude the *praeceptores* who use it, escaping the strategies of qualification and containment that Ovid and his medieval inheritors deployed. While Dorigen comes to a mature understanding of this figure, discovering the rewards and satisfactions of complaint even as she recognises the difficulty of “empressing” stone, Aurelius is never able to abandon the fantasy of “empressing” his desires on Dorigen, and goes to elaborate lengths to sustain it, against the evidence of his own experience. The tale invites its readers to consider what happens when a lover demands the rewards that Ovid’s *praeceptor amoris* tries to defer. While Ovid’s *praeceptor* makes casual promises about the subjection of women in order to motivate the habituation of men, Dorigen reveals what is at risk in these promises when she makes them about herself. The sustained engagement with the image of “empressing” stone that plays out in the narrative of *The Franklin’s Tale* is, in part, an exploration of the desires that motivate persistent speakers, and the benefits that accrue from persistent speech. Yet, it also constitutes an investigation into how people live with and learn from familiar wisdom, whose meanings emerge in dialogue with lived experience, and seem to change and evolve over time.