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**'Rokkes Blake':
Metonymy, Metaphor and Metaphysics in *The Franklin's Tale***

by Timothy Collins

Two of the main currents in criticism regarding *The Franklin's Tale* have been the metaphor of the “rokkes blake” and the allusions to Boethius’ *Consolation of Philosophy*. What has not been thought through is how these two elements of the tale intersect and how this intersection is at the heart of the narrative. This paper will argue that the metaphoric connotations of the “rokkes blake” are the means by which the Boethian morality play is central to the dénouement of *The Franklin's Tale*. Equally, I will argue that a very nuanced form of literary representation is what makes this possible and is the reason why critics have sometimes overlooked it. In what follows I will outline how this metaphor is established, inscribed with multiple layers of meaning, and ultimately becomes central to the tale’s conclusion. Also, I will draw some conclusions about use of metaphor and why it continues to draw critical interest.

As Dorigen is brooding about her husband and looking out over the coast, the narrator repeats the image of the “black rocks” she is gazing at. On a literal level the rocky coastline represents one particular danger for Arveragus – it could cause a shipwreck for a returning vessel. The black rocks are at first only an image of the coast

which then becomes a metonymy for the foreboding presence of the sea. The “rokkes blake” ultimately gain significance beyond the literal and the metonymic – they become metaphoric on a number of different levels. This is supported by the way in which the literal meaning of the rocks is inconsequential to the plot of the tale. Dorigen does not really worry about her husband’s ship coming into danger from these rocks and when he does return no mention is made of them posing any physical danger to his journey. As V.A. Kolve writes: “It is the absence of a certain ship, not danger to all ships, that comes to obsess her – and with that narrowing of emotional focus comes the first notice of the ‘grisly feendly rokkes blake’ . . . Their meaning is more attributed than intrinsic – as other details will soon make clear” (174). The rocks quickly become a metaphor which represents the actual separation of the couple and this metaphor is further displaced as the rocks begin to symbolize Dorigen’s desperation and longing.

Ultimately, Dorigen’s physical sickness over her husband’s absence becomes a synecdoche for a generalized concept of evil in the world. The rocks then become the symbol of an abstract notion of evil which is, at the same time, a necessary element of divine providence understood in a Boethian sense. This metaphor is important because it is ahead of its time. There is a larger gap between the signifier (“the rokkes blake”) and the signified (Dorigen’s brooding, or, better, evil in a wholly good creator’s universe) than is usually found in Chaucer’s work or in medieval literature in general.^[1]

What makes the metaphor particularly powerful is that it is not really allegorical insofar as it is parallel with the literal meaning the rocks have. In other words, the rocks represent a danger posed to Arveragus' ship, the physical separation between the couple, Dorigen's emotional state, and an abstract concept of evil, but the more tangible meanings are, in turn, instances of abstract evil. So, it is not a matter of reading an allegory – if the rocks are taken literally or metaphorically they still refer to the same thing (Dorigen's distress). Through this metaphor Dorigen's sickness is conveyed on both abstract and particular levels. The literal, metaphoric, and abstract metaphysical strains of the tale are unified in this single image. Through all these layers of displacement, the "rokkes blake" become packed with an unusual layering of signification which ties the tale together in both narrative and theme, vehicle and tenor.

The "rokkes blake" first mentioned by the narrator and are soon echoed by Dorigen. The narrator says:

But whan she saugh the grisly rokkes blake,
For verray feere so wolde hir herte quake,
That on hire feet she myghte hire noght sustene. (859-62)

Immediately the "rokkes" are given dramatic emotional importance for Dorigen. The narrator depicts the rocks from Dorigen's perspective and they are associated with her emotional state. They are clearly not just some rocks off the coast, but "grisly rokkes blake" that make her "herte quake." Even before this, Chaucer makes a reference to stones which could be read as self-reflexive and foreshadowing. The narrator says:

"Men may so longe graven in a stoon / Til som figure therinne emprented be" (830-1).

This passage refers to the way in which Dorigen's friends are trying to "imprint" their consolation on her. It also calls to mind how things are inscribed with meaning over time and it can read as a meta-textual meditation on literary representation and foreshadows the "rokkes blake." This metaphor is established methodically and is exactly how Dorigen herself 'inscribes' the rocks. The scene is set up before the rocks are mentioned – Dorigen "often" walks with her friends along the banks of the coast. Then "Another tyme wolde she sitte and thynke / And caste hir eyen dounward fro the brynde" (857-58). These repetitive images make it clear that Chaucer is deliberately establishing this metaphor and "imprinting" the rocks with significations which go further than a simple metonymy for the sea. When Dorigen speaks she transfers her situation onto these rocks. Owing to the fact that Chaucer characterizes Dorigen as a contemplative, intelligent character, her meditations become inscribed in the rocks. She universalizes what she thinks about her suffering and draws larger conclusions about her situation which are continuously inscribed in the "rokkes blake."

These conclusions get played out in a theological debate which draws largely from Boethius and the "rokkes blake" pick up this metaphysical layer of meaning. As a response to her situation, Dorigen is contemplating how a wholly good "God" can allow misfortune to exist. She then uses the metaphor of the rocks in that sense. She says:

Eterne God, that thurgh thy purveiaunce
Ledest the world by certein governaunce,
In ydel, as men seyn, ye nothyng make.
But, Lord, thise grisly, feendly rokkes blake
That semen rather a foul confusioun
Of werk than any fair creacion –
Of swich a parfit, wys God and a stable
Why han ye wroght this werk unresonable? (865-72)

In this passage the rocks are given a completely new layer of meaning – they are “feendly” or evil and at the same time part of God’s “fair creacion.” The prescience, omnipotence and omniscience of a “parfit, wys God” are juxtaposed with these rocks which seem a “foul confusioun” and “werk unresonable.” She is essentially questioning why “Eterne God” created the “feendly rokkes blake,” or evil incarnate. The rocks are symbolic for whatever appears to be evil, confusing, and unreasonable but is equally a part of God’s “fair creation.” Friedman notes:

[T]his questioning of God’s ordering of the universe is deeply indebted to Boethius’ *Consolation of Philosophy* . . . it is appropriate that the philosophical issues it raises are set in a classicizing and even pagan past. The rocks seem the antithesis of God, and, in a Manichaean sense, the representative of Satan and evil aimed against God’s most favored project. (134)

Nevertheless there is one distinction that needs to be drawn about the sense of evil the rocks represent. The rocks are symbolic for evil in the world, but a divinely ordained evil which is a part of the creator’s providence and hence not evil in the sense of Manichaean duality. Her complaint, it should be stressed, is not simply about evil, but the fact that the evil the rocks represent is the “werk” of “Eterne God.” Ultimately,

Dorigen's rejection of them is a rejection of faith in divine providence. In this way, the rocks are associated with divine providence. Through them, Dorigen will come to understand why evil is a part of the "perfect creation" when the rocks are removed and she has to uphold her rash promise.

The "but" of line 868 challenges the orthodox views of a good Christian that Dorrigan outlines in the preceding three lines. Because of "purveiaunce," or divine providence, the whole creation is "parfit" in that it is comprehended by God if not humanity, evil included. Divine providence in a Boethian sense transcends the good/evil binary through which humanity understands the world. Dorigen challenges the transcendental nature of divine providence and explicitly rejects the notion that evil can be a part of a "perfect creation." In her invective against evil for a moment it seems as if the symbol of the rocks will be abandoned in favor of the theological debate it inspires. But, the "rokkes" are recalled and again inscribed with significance, only now clearly on the level of this theological problem. She says:

An hundred thousand bodyes of mankynde
Han rokkes slayn, al be they nat in mynde,
Which mankynde is so fair part of thy werk,
That thou it madest lyk to thyn owene merk.
Thanne semed it ye hadde a greet chiertee
Toward mankynde. But how thane may it bee
That ye swiche meenes make it to destroyen –
Whiche meenes do no good but evere annoyen?
I woot wel clerkes wol seyn as hem leste
By argumentz that al is for the beste,
Though I kan the causes nat yknowe.

But thilke God that make wynde to blowe,
As kepe my lord! This is my conclusioun. (877-889)

The “rokkes” now have theological significance, but they can still be read simply in the context of Dorigen and Arveragus. When Dorigen says the “rookes” have “slayn” a “hundred thousand bodyes of mankynde” she is referring to something beyond these particular rocks, namely evil in the world. But, because they can still be read in this particular context where they represent literal rocks which cause shipwrecks and the sea that separates the couple, the rocks work on multiple layers of meaning simultaneously – this is the novelty of the metaphor. It is clear that Dorigen’s monologue is becoming a polemical debate about the justice of an omnipotent God who allows evil to exist in the world; she is entrenching herself on the side which is opposed to the orthodox Christian stance and, moreover, God himself. There is a sense that she is speaking directly to God while the reader is overhearing her metaphysical argument. She accepts the other side of the debate – the “clerkes” – but gives her diatribe the stamp of finality when she says “this is my conclusion.” She is taking a stand in this debate and her rejection of the rocks, and their ultimate “removal,” are clearly meant to be read in this context.

Critics have questioned how Dorigen’s complaint is portrayed by the narrator and received by the reader. Susanna Fein writes:

Hearing mockery in the way Dorigen’s grief is made silly . . . some commentators think that Dorigen represents merely weak and

weak-minded womanhood, and they feel assured in their knowledge that her complaint against the rocks rings with obvious blasphemy to anyone versed in elementary Boethian philosophy . . . Taking these arguments too far cuts against the narrative grain, however, for much meaning lies in the space given to complaint. Indeed, as Morton Bloomfield noted, we are posed quite an interpretive challenge when the grand metaphysical question of evil in the world, raised by Dorigen at the cliffs, is introduced only to carry little overt consequence later in the tale. A Boethian viewpoint embraces both divine omniscience and human blindness, so having Dorigen represent human despair within a constricted understanding is as fitting as having Arveragus display a high-minded confidence that sending his wife to a would-be lover will turn out well. (201)

Fein is right to say that Dorigen's complaint must have more significance than a "silly" woman's blasphemy. It is fairly clear that this metaphysical question is presented in very sober terms. It is not so much that she is being portrayed as weak or blasphemous as it is that her particular situation is an example of this theological problem manifesting itself in praxis. The way in which she alludes to the "clerkes" is proof that she is aware of the correct philosophical stance in the debate. Dorigen's problem is not ignorance, it is immediacy – she has to deal with very tangible evil in her personal life which is a world away from understanding the debate on purely rhetorical terms. The way in which she then makes her personal suffering a universal concept and laments suffering generally speaks more to her ability to think abstractly than it does to her ignorance of theology. The fact that "a Boethian viewpoint embraces both divine omniscience and human blindness" could allow us to read Dorigen as an exemplum of Boethius' thinking. She is learning this metaphysical lesson in the school of hard

knocks, as it were. She berates God because she does believe in omniscience, but does not have enough faith to get past her “human blindness” and accept evil as a manifestation of divine providence.

Instead of rhetorically celebrating Boethius, what Chaucer is interested in is showing this metaphysical problem in action. One point where Fein’s reading might be lacking is in the contention that this idea is not carried over into the rest of the tale. The “rokkes blake” have obviously been inscribed with the significance of “evil” in the context of this metaphysical question. Even though the rocks might not be explicitly qualified in this way as the story continues, we can and should continue to read them in this light because of the insistence on the metaphor earlier in the tale. The theological debate is then resolved in the way in which the narrative plays out. We see the results of Dorigen’s contention when her wish is fulfilled and the rocks are, literally and metaphorically, “removed.” The tragedy that almost happens is what would happen if evil was not a part of creation.

This begins to play out in the narrative when Dorigen tells Aurelius that he can win her love by removing all the rocks from the coast of Brittany. She says:

Looke what day that endelong Britayne
Ye remoeve alle the rokkes, stoon by stoon,
That they ne lette shipe 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. (992-7)

First, it is impossible to miss that the image of rocks is insisted on emphatically which triggers all the connotations the “rokkes blake” have accrued in the opening scenes. Metaphorically, what Dorigen is essentially telling Aurelius is that she will love him best if he is her husband. Because the rocks represent the separation of the couple, their removal would signify the reunion of the couple and the end of Dorigen’s distress. This is supported by the way the narrator qualifies how these lines are spoken. She tells Aurelius: “I wol been his to whom that I am knyt. / Taak this for fynal answere as of me” (986-7), and then the narrator says “But after that in pley thus seyde she” (988) which introduces the notion that her promise in lines 12-17 is rash. The tone in which these lines are spoken supports this reading, where the rejection of Aurelius is meant in earnest and the rash promise is “play” that mocks him. At this point the actual removal of the rocks is a whimsical fantasy about the immediate return of Arveragus – Dorigen does not foresee that clearing the rocks is literally possible. After she has made the rash promise, she says “wel I woot that it shal never bityde / Lat swiche folies out of youre herte sylde!” (1001-2). Dorigen’s promise is not so much an offer to Aurelius as it is a wish that her husband would return because she is speaking metaphorically.^[2] As Susanna Fein notes: “In turning to Aurelius, unburdening the pain in her heart, Dorigen ventures towards a metaphorical betrayal of her marriage vow” (208). She *does* mean that she will love Aurelius best if he removes the rocks because, metaphorically speaking, the removal of the rocks is equivalent to Dorigen’s reunion with Arveragus. It

might be questionable whether or not Dorigen is “turning to” Aurelius, but it is sure that her rash promise is facilitated by this metaphor. Although in a medieval romance we might expect a suitor to gain a lady’s favor, this tale clearly does not contain this motif – if there is a “romance” in the tale, it is Dorigen’s absolute and idealized fidelity to her husband, which we might consider belongs to a fairytale setting. Dorigen’s horror at Aurelius success in his impossible task, and her suicidal reaction to the predicament his success produces, make Fein’s reading that Dorigen is “turning to” Aurelius hard to follow.

Ultimately, the “rokkes blake” symbolize the imperative suffering of human existence, that, paradoxically, people are better off with than without. Dorigen’s rash promise tries to remove, and, tragically, does remove this element of existence. Gerhard Joseph observes in the conclusion of his reading of the tale as a theodicy: “the black rocks and the blind promise they engender are necessary preparations . . . for the enlightened moral abstentions that close the narrative, [and] the *Franklin’s Tale* may be read as Chaucer’s subtle and delightful parable justifying the ways of God to men” (32). Joseph sees the theological debate continued to the conclusion of the narrative, but what needs to be fleshed out is how this is achieved. The cumulative metaphor of the black rocks is the centerpiece of the narrative, which develops a Christian ethos and, moreover, is how the theodicy is both a subtext and a moral of the tale. When Arveragus returns, the rocks are removed and the abstract notion of evil is removed

from “fair creation.” When evil is removed, it would logically follow that everyone is happy. Dorigen can have her husband and Aurelius can be Dorigen’s husband. It is Chaucer’s black humor that, logically, this is set up to work out. Arveragus does return, the rocks are removed, and Aurelius gets Dorigen. The problem is that this of course makes things impossible – Aurelius cannot become Arveragus and no one can be happy. The conflation of Aurelius and Arveragus that was the inspiration for the rash promise is, in reality, inoperable. Both wishful thinkers seem to get what they wanted when the “rokkes” are removed, but the situation quickly becomes tragic for all the characters. Arveragus has to decide between giving his wife to another man and having her honor stained. Dorigen has to choose between being an unfaithful wife and suicide, and Aurelius has to decide between coercing Dorigen with her rash promise and being love sick and penniless.

This develops an economy of fate. The rocks serve as the currency of this realm – their removal ostensibly gives the two wishers what they wanted, but at the expense of everyone. As Kolve writes, “the rocks, in short, genuinely matter to the moral economy of the tale. Though they do not literally injure anyone or anything, the poem would be something very different without them” (195). The reason why the poem would not be the same without them, as this paper has tried to outline, is that they condense all the issues at hand into a single symbol which becomes not only a polyvalent metaphor but the driving force behind the narrative as well. This symbol mediates among these

characters and brings their “fates” together. The “rokkes blake” are the coin of this “moral economy” where evil and suffering are an inalienable part of existence.

After the wishes of Dorigen and Aurelius are granted they are faced with the fact that their own satisfaction comes at the cost of someone else, namely Arveragus. The story concludes happily because Arveragus displays Christian self-sacrifice and forgiveness which then become infectious and undo the harm done by this rejection of divine providence. The tone of the story echoes a sermon from Matthew 6:12 where Christian forgiveness is outlined in the prayer “forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.” As Steele Nowlin contends, “Arveragus offers an option not available to the women of pagan antiquity: forgiveness” (55). The way Dorigen is surprised that Arveragus might forgive her introduces a binary between Christian and pagan. There is a long passage in which she broods over the only two options she can conceive of – death or dishonor. In his article on this passage, Warren S. Smith notes that it is based on St. Jerome’s *Against Jovinian*, but “focuses on the pagan exempla of the later chapters, in accordance with the occasional pagan or pre-Christian assumptions of the tale” (376). Like her tirade against evil, this passage aligns Dorigen with paganism on the one hand, while strangely using very Christian rhetoric, on the other.

She decides on the option of death, after referencing a slew of literary precedents. As Nowlin’s article outlines, in contrast to Arveragus, Dorigen has a very pagan frame

of mind which is clearly contrasted with the Christian ethos which predominates the happy conclusion of the tale. Most obviously, suicide is not a moral problem for her at all.^[3] So, wrapped up in this debate between the rejection and acceptance of evil in the world and divine providence is a binary between pagan and Christian. It goes without saying that the pagan will be parallel with a rejection of divine providence, while the Christian will be parallel with humble acceptance. Lee considers *The Franklin's Tale* to be the climax of the fifth fragment which "develops as a considered progress from pagan ethics to Christian morality" (47). Dorigen's rejection of evil sets the stage for this morality play. When she rejects the "rokkes" and evil-in-a-wholly-good-God's-creation in a decidedly un-Christian way, she explicitly introduces paganism into the story.^[4]

Many critics have noted the pagan setting of the tale and its importance to problems the tale brings into question. Although Dorigen is anachronistically familiar with Christian theology, there is a sense that she is in the process of learning what it is to be a good Christian. So, instead of portraying blasphemous Christians who are learning their lesson, Chaucer is creating pagan characters who are sympathetic because we are watching them discover a correct Christian ethos. Nowlin argues: "The tale articulates this change in the environment through textual impositions by the narrator that work to render the pagan world of Brittany potentially – though not actually – Christian" (59). The setting becomes multilayered and makes the dénouement possible. On the one hand, the tale is told in decidedly Christian times by the Franklin, on the

other, it takes place in pagan times *which are in the process of being christened*. So, it makes perfect sense that there is a Christian morality play happening in this pagan world which is not explicitly stated as such. The setting and narration, like the metaphor of the black rocks, make the story work on both the literal and metaphorical levels simultaneously. Because the story takes place in antiquity, it is about characters who are actually learning a correct Christian ethos and it is not allegorical. But, because it is told in medieval England by the Franklin, it can equally be read as an allegory.

Poetically what makes this tale so complex is the fact that the symbol of the “rokkes blake” allow for this tale to be a pretty unabashed morality play without becoming tautology. The “rokkes” are a metaphor which makes this ethos a subtext at the same time that it is the central theme. Chaucer conflates the literal and metaphoric in the “rokkes blake” which is one of the reasons why some critics have missed some of the metaphysical connotations of the tale carried out in the conclusion. The rocks are not only a multilayered metaphor, but one which becomes so intricately interwoven into the narrative on a literal level that it becomes almost transparent or imperceptible. For today’s readers, the theological concerns of *The Franklin’s Tale* might seem trite and be of small interest. But, the multivalency of the “rokkes blake” as both symbol and narrative device, and the palimpsest of literal and figural in this image, is a form of literary representation which is extremely ahead of its time and, I would argue, carries weight in the 21st century. This mode of representation which seems out of place in

medieval literature calls attention to the fact that poetic language is not static. Chaucer's use of both conceit and extended metaphor in the image of the black rocks are, one could argue, tropes which are not commonly found in the literature of his times. This use of language demonstrates not only how Chaucer extends the use of metaphor to extremes, but also the fact that, in the historical period Chaucer is writing in, a different, less extensive conception of metaphor was the norm.

The “rokkes blake” illustrate a metaphorical trope which is forward thinking, but also a host of other more mundane rhetorical figures. Pedagogically, these varying connotations of the black rocks could be used to teach a number of different tropes and theories of metaphor.^[5] As the story progresses, the use of metaphor is heightened and the gap between signifier and signified is widened. First the rocks represent a synecdoche for the dangers of the sea (one of which they are), then the sea represents the separation of the couple and the rocks pick up this signification. The rocks then represent Dorigen’s subjective emotional state through a kind of metaphor which is common in Romantic landscape poetry. Dorigen’s suffering is abstracted into a concept of evil and this notion is then transferred into a Christian theological debate about evil in a wholly good creator’s universe. Finally, the “rokkes” as a conceit represent the acceptance of Divine Providence and there is a huge gap between signifier and signified. Instead of a simple synecdoche, this signification is clearly catachresis. Through this kind of broadening of figurative language methodically throughout the

poem, it seems that Chaucer is meditating on metaphor and drawing out the furthest possible conclusions of literary representation. At the beginning of the story the rocks are very literally an image of the ominous sea, by the end they represent the entirely abstract nuances of a metaphysical truism. In teaching the poem, this wide array of figurative language expressed through a single image could be useful in introducing a number of literary tropes and the theory of metaphor. Also, the conflation of the literal and metaphoric, although achieved very deliberately in Chaucer, is relevant when considering postmodern representation and the “free floating signifier.” Even though this trope is not present in *The Franklin’s Tale*, the migrating significations of the “rokkes blake” leave this possibility open. If some black rocks off the coast of Brittany can represent an acceptance of Divine Providence and a metaphysical understanding of the universe, what would prevent the “rokkes” from picking up any and every signification?

Endnotes

[1] It goes without saying that the “rokkes blake” have been studied extensively, but there has not been a study which takes into account the complexity of this metaphor and how this is central to the narrative of *The Franklin’s Tale*. John B. Friedman writes: “A number of psychological explanations for these rocks have been offered by various critics, nearly all of whom, however, taking the rocks simply as a metaphor, have not considered their actual existence and what they might have signified to a medieval audience” (133). Of course the rocks are “simply a metaphor” on one level, but what Friedman is not considering is exactly how multilayered a metaphor they ultimately become. In this vein, Gillian Rudd prefacing an ecocritical reading of *The Franklin’s Tale* and *The Knight’s Tale* by noting that the landscape is “too easily read in simple, if not actually simplistic, metaphorical terms” (117). The fact that the “rokkes blake” will

ultimately represent something which is definitively beyond human control lends *The Franklin's Tale* to an ecocritical reading. The rocks are a metaphor for something beyond human power and cultural metaphors for that which is beyond human control change over time. In the Middle Ages the prevalent metaphor was divine providence while today our metaphor could be thought of as the natural world. As Rudd writes, "nature itself is a social construct that changes over time" (117). In this way, the theological significations attributed to the black rocks can be seen as parallel to this ecocritical reading.

[2] One consequence of this is that it creates an uncanny correspondence between Aurelius and Arveragus. On the one hand, the two are very much conceptual opposites, but on the other, we could read Aurelius as the double of Arveragus because he seems to be *exactly* his binary opposite. Ginsberg mentions the way that in Boccaccio's *Filocolo* the two characters who are antecedents to Aurelius and Arveragus become strangely conflated as well. He writes about the Aurelius character in Boccaccio: "unless Tarolfo, who has already subjugated himself to the terms of her promise, forgoes executing it, he will become, at the moment of its execution, not the knight who has vanquished her husband in love but his doppelgänger" (394). The fact that the removal of the rocks is ostensibly impossible is what makes Dorigen's offer a rash promise instead of an invitation to Aurelius. Furthermore, it is the metaphor of the "rokkes blake" that makes this conflation possible for Chaucer. If Aurelius removes the rocks "stone by stone," metaphorically it will facilitate Dorigen's reunion with her husband. This is the foundation of her "rash promise" – she is thinking wishfully and makes a promise that is not literal but instead further plays on this metaphor.

[3] As B.S. Lee points out: "unlike Hamlet she seems unaware that the Everlasting has fixed his cannon 'against self-slaughter'" (60).

[4] The pagan ethos that is inherent in Dorigen's rejection of the rocks is then transferred over to Aurelius, as the removal of the rocks becomes his major project. Not only is Aurelius described in terms which are extremely pagan, he will represent the pagan ethic in dealing with evil by trying to do away with it through invocation and magic. When he is introduced into the story he is immediately qualified as "servant to Venus" (937). He is then compared to a Fury and the story of Echo and Narcissus is used to describe his situation. These references could be seen as coincidental, but they are prominent here because there has been no mention of classic mythology in the tale until this point and this whole scene is prefaced by the Christian theological debate that is going on in Dorigen's mind. Finally, Aurelius prays to Apollo to remove the rocks and in the process invokes a whole scene of classic mythology, which will be ineffectual in granting his wishes. Ultimately, he will try to remove evil through magic which will

be characterized in a very negative light. This “magyk natureel” (1125) will be insistently disparaged by the narrator because it is, as Dorigen herself says, “agayns the proces of nature” (1345). Magic will not only become exposed as mere superstitious illusion, it will also be portrayed as a means to gain “mastery” over another person, as opposed to the Christian sense of forgiveness which will ultimately be the story’s moral. Even as the narrative progresses in this way, the “rokkes blake” do not lose their metaphorical significance. The rocks still symbolize evil on the particular and universal levels which is very much crucial to the conclusion of the narrative. Once Dorigen makes her rash promise, they also represent Aurelius’s love sickness and suffering insofar as they are keeping him from having Dorigen. The rocks, still retaining all these connotations, will continue their odyssey as the object of pagan magic.

[5] I am particularly thinking of Derrida’s essay “White Mythology: Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy” which tracks conceptions of metaphor from classical rhetoric and Aristotle (where metaphor is a kind of glorified simile) to more contemporary poetics such as Bachelard (where catachrestic metaphor is essential for introducing “new concepts” into not only literature but also scientific and philosophical discourse). Derrida asks “what more urgent task for epistemology and the critical history of the sciences could there be than distinguishing between the word, the metaphorical vehicle, the thing, and the concept?” (63). He argues that the study of metaphor is relevant far beyond the specialization of literary studies. Besides demonstrating many rhetorical tropes in action, *The Franklin’s Tale* explicitly uses catachrestic metaphor to illuminate a philosophical concept. Chaucer “justifies the ways of God to men” through this metaphor, and the multiple layers and intricacies of the “rokkes blake” are what give the tale a sense of immediacy rather than tautology.

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