

The Wife of Bath's Prologue

1: **Experience**, though noon authoritee
2: Were in this world, is right enough for me
3: To speak of woe that is in marriage;
4: For, lordynges, sith I twelve year was of age,
5: Thanked be God that is eterne on lyve,
6: Husbandes at church door I have had five, --
7: If I so ofte might have ywedded bee, --
8: And alle were worthy men in their degree.
9: But me was told, certain, not long agoon is,
10: That sith that Christ ne wente never but once
11: To wedding, in the Cana of Galilee,
12: That by the same ensample taught he me
13: That I ne should wedded be but once.
14: Hearken eek, lo, which a sharp word for the nones,
15: Beside a welle, Jesus, God and man,
16: Spoke in reproof of the Samaritan:
17: 'Thou hast yhad five husbandes, -- quod he,
18: -- And that ilke man that now hath thee
19: Is noght thine husband, -- thus said he certain.
20: What that he meant thereby, I can nat seyn;
21: But that I ask, why that the fifth man
22: Was no husband to the Samaritan?
23: How many mighte she have in mariage?
24: Yet heard I never tellen in mine age
25: Upon this number deffinioun.
26: Men may devyne and glosen, up and down,
27: But well I woot, express, withoute lie,
28: God bade us for to wax and multiply;
29: That gentil text can I wel understonde.
30: Eek wel I woot, he said myn husbände

31: Sholde leave father and mother, and take to me.
32: But of no nombre mencion made he,
33: Of bigamy, or of octogamy;
34: Why sholde men thanne speak of it vileynye?
35: Lo, heere the wise kyng, daun Solomon;
36: I trowe he hadde wyves more than one.
37: As wolde God it were leweful unto me
38: To be refreshed half so ofte as he!
39: Which gift of God hadde he for alle his wives!
40: No man hath such that in this world alive is.
41: God woot, this noble king, as to my wit,
42: The firste night had many a myrie fit
43: With each of them, so wel was him on live.
44: Yblessed be God that I have wedded five!
45: Welcome the sixth, whan that ever he shal.
46: For soothe, I wol nat kepe me chaste in all.
47: Whan myn husbände is from the world ygon,
48: Some cristian man shal wedde me anon,
49: For then, th' apostle seith that I am free
50: To wedde, a Goddes half, where it liketh me.
51: He seith that to be wedded is no sin;
52: Bet is to be wedded than to burn
53: What rekketh me, thogh folk seye vileynye
54: Of shrewed Lameth and his bigamy?
55: I woot wel Abraham was an holy man,
56: And Jacob eek, as ferforth as I kan;
57: And ech of hem hadde wives mo than two,
58: And many another holy man also.
59: Wher can ye seye, in any manere age,
60: That high God defended mariage
61: By express word? I pray yow, telleth me.
62: Or where comanded he virginity?

63: I woot as wel as ye, it is no drede,
64: Th' apostel, whan he speketh of maydenhede,
65: He seyde that precept therof hadde he noon.
66: Men may council a womman to been oon,
67: But conseillyng is no comandement.
68: He put it in oure owene juggement;
69: For hadde God comanded maydenhede,
70: Then hadde he dampned wedding with the dede.
71: And certes, if there were no seed ysowe,
72: Virginitee, thanne wherof sholde it growe?
73: Paul dorste nat comanden, atte leeste,
74: A thyng of which his maister yaf noon heeste.
75: The dart is set up for virginitee:
76: Catch whoso may, who runneth best lat see.
77: But this word is nat taken of every wight,
78: But ther as God lust give it of his myght.
79: I woot wel that th' apostel was a maid;
80: But nathelees, thogh that he wrote and saide
81: He wolde that every wight were suich as he,
82: Al nys but conseil to virginitee.
83: And for to been a wife he gaf me leave
84: Of indulgence; so nys it no repreve
85: To wedde me, if that my mate die,
86: Withouten excepcion of bigamy.
87: Al were it good no womman for to touche, --
88: He mente as in his bed or in his couche;
89: For peril is bothe fire and tow t' assemble:
90: Ye knowe what this ensample may resemble.
91: This is all and sum, he held virginitee
92: More parfit than wedding in frailty.
93: Frailty clepe I, but if that he and she
94: Wolde lead all their life in chastitee.

95: I graunte it wel, I have noon envie,
96: Thogh maydenhede preferre bigamy.
97: It liketh hem to be clean, body and goost;
98: Of myn estaat I nyl nat make no boost.
99: For wel ye knowe, a lord in his household,
100: He nath nat every vessel al of gold;
101: Somme been of tree, and do their lord service.
102: God clepeth folk to hym in sondry wise,
103: And everich hath of God a propre yifte,
104: Some this, some that, as hym liketh shifte.
105: Virginitee is greet perfeccion,
106: And continence eek with devocion,
107: But Christ, that of perfeccion is welle,
108: Bade nat every wight he sholde go selle
109: All that he had, and give it to the poore
110: And in such wise follow him and his foore.
111: He spake to them that wolde live parfitly;
112: And lordynges, by youre leave, that am nat I.
113: I wol bistowe the flower of al myn age
114: In the actes and in fruyt of mariage.
115: Telle me also, to what conclusion
116: Were members made of generacion,
117: And of so parfit wys a wight ywroght?
118: Trusteth right wel, they were nat made for nought.
119: Glose whoso will, and say bothe up and doun,
120: That they were maked for purgacioun
121: Of urine, and oure bothe thynges smale
122: Were eek to knowe a female from a male,
123: And for noon oother cause, -- say ye no?
124: The experience woot wel it is noght so.
125: So that the clerkes be nat with me wrothe,
126: I sey this, that they maked ben for bothe,

127: This is to seye, for office, and for ese
128: Of engendrure, ther we nat God displese.
129: Why sholde men elles in their bookes set
130: That man shal yelde to his wyf hire debt?
131: Now wherwith sholde he make his paiement,
132: If he ne used his sely instrument?
133: Thanne were they maad upon a creature
134: To purge uryne, and eek for engendrure.
135: But I seye noght that every wight is holde,
136: That hath swich harneys as I to yow tolde,
137: To goon and usen hem in engendrure.
138: Thanne sholde men take of chastitee no cure.
139: Christ was a mayde, and shapen as a man,
140: And many a seint, sith that the world bigan;
141: Yet lyved they evere in parfit chastitee.
142: I nyl envye no virginitee.
143: Lat hem be bread of pure wheat-seed,
144: And lat us wyves hoten barley-bread;
145: And yet with barley-breed, Mark telle kan,
146: Oure lord Jesu refreshed many a man.
147: In swich estaat as God hath cleped us
148: I wol persevere; I nam nat precius.
149: In wyfhod I wol use myn instrument
150: As freely as my makere hath it sent.
151: If I be daungerous, God yeve me sorwe!
152: Myn housbonde shal it have bothe eve and morwe,
153: Whan that hym list come forth and paye his dette.
154: An husbunde I wol have, I wol nat lette,
155: Which shal be bothe my debtor and my thrall,
156: And have his tribulacion withal
157: Upon his flessh, while that I am his wyf.
158: I have the power durynge al my lyf

159: Upon his propre body, and noght he.
160: Right thus the apostel tolde it unto me;
161: And bad oure housbondes for to love us weel.
162: Al this sentence me liketh every deel –

163: **Up** stirte the Pardoner, and that anon:
164: Now, dame, quod he, by God and by seint John!
165: Ye been a noble prechour in this cas.
166: I was aboute to wedde a wyf; allas!
167: What sholde I bye it on my flessh so deere?
168: Yet hadde I levere wedde no wyf to-yeere!
169: Abyde! quod she, my tale is nat bigonne.
170: Nay, thou shalt drynken of another tonne,
171: Er that I go, shal savoure wors than ale.
172: And whan that I have toold thee forth my tale
173: Of tribulacion in mariage,
174: Of which I am expert in al myn age,
175: This is to seyn, myself have been the whippe, --
176: Than maystow chese wheither thou wolt sippe
177: Of thilke tonne that I shal abroche.
178: Be war of it, er thou to ny approche;
179: For I shal telle ensamples mo than ten.
180: -- Whoso that nyl be war by othere men,
181: By hym shul othere men corrected be. --
182: The same wordes writeth Ptolomee;
183: Rede in his Almageste, and take it there.
184: Dame, I wolde praye yow, if youre wyl it were,
185: Seyde this Pardoner, as ye bigan,
186: Telle forth youre tale, spareth for no man,
187: And teche us yonge men of youre praktike.
188: Gladly, quod she, sith it may yow like;
189: But that I praye to al this compaignye,

190: If that I speke after my fantasye,
191: As taketh not agrief of that I seye;
192: For myn entente is nat but for to pleye.

193: **Now**, sire, now wol I telle forth my tale. --
194: As evere moote I drynken wyn or ale,
195: I shal seye sooth, tho housbondes that I hadde,
196: As thre of hem were goode, and two were badde.
197: The thre were goode men, and riche, and olde;
198: Unnethe myghte they the statut holde
199: In which that they were bounden unto me.
200: Ye woot wel what I meene of this, pardee!
201: As help me god, I laughe whan I thynke
202: How pitously a-nyght I made hem swynke!
203: And, by my fey, I tolde of it no stoor.
204: They had me yeven hir lond and hir tresoor;
205: Me neded nat do lenger diligence
206: To wynne hir love, or doon hem reverence.
207: They loved me so wel, by God above,
208: That I ne tolde no deyntee of hir love!
209: A wys womman wol bisye hire evere in oon
210: To gete hire love, ye, ther as she hath noon.
211: But sith I hadde hem hoolly in myn hond,
212: And sith they hadde me yeven al hir lond,
213: What sholde I taken keep hem for to plese,
214: But it were for my profit and myn ese?
215: I sette hem so a-werke, by my fey,
216: That many a nyght they songen -- weilaway! --
217: The bacon was nat fet for hem, I trowe,
218: That som men han in essex at dunmowe.
219: I governed hem so wel, after my lawe,
220: That ech of hem ful blisful was and fawe

221: To brynge me gaye thynges fro the fayre.
222: They were ful glad whan I spak to hem faire;
223: For, God it woot, I chidde hem spitously.
224: Now herkneth hou I baar me proprely,
225: Ye wise wyves, that kan understonde.
226: Thus shulde ye speke and bere hem wrong on honde;
227: For half so boldely kan ther no man
228: Swere and lyen, as a womman kan.
229: I sey nat this by wyves that been wyse,
230: But if it be whan they hem mysavyse.
231: A wys wyf shal, it that she kan hir good,
232: Bere hym on honde that the cow is wood,
233: And take witnessse of hir owene mayde
234: Of hir assemt; but **herkneth how I sayde**:
235: Sire olde kaynard, is this thyn array?
236: Why is my neighbores wyf so gay?
237: She is honoured over al ther she gooth;
238: I sitte at hoom I have no thrifty clooth.
239: What dostow at my neighebores hous?
240: Is she so fair? artow so amorous?
241: What rowne ye with oure mayde? benedicite!
242: Sire olde lecchour, lat thy japes be!
243: And if I have a gossib or a freend,
244: Withouten gilt, thou chidest as a feend,
245: If that I walke or pleye unto his hous!
246: Thou comest hoom as dronken as a mous,
247: And prechest on thy bench, with yvel preef!
248: Thou seist to me it is a greet meschief
249: To wedde a povre womman, for costage;
250: And if that she be riche, of heigh parage,
251: Thanne seistow that it is a tormentrie
252: To soffre hire pride and hire malencolie.

253: And if that she be fair, thou verray knave,
254: Thou seyst that every holour wol hire have;
255: She may no while in chastitee abyde,
256: That is assailed upon ech a syde.
257: Thou seyst som folk desiren us for richesse,
258: Somme for oure shap, and somme for oure fairnesse,
259: And som for she kan outhur synge or daunce,
260: And som for gentillesse and daliaunce;
261: Som for hir handes and hir armes smale:
262: Thus goth al to the devel, by thy tale.
263: Thou seyst men may nat kepe a castel wal,
264: It may so longe assailed been over al.
265: And if that she be foul, thou seist that she
266: Coveiteth every man that she may se,
267: For as a spaynel she wol on hym lepe,
268: Til that she fynde som man hire to chepe.
269: Ne noon so grey goos gooth ther in the lake
270: As, seistow, wol been withoute make.
271: And seyst it is an hard thyng for to welde
272: A thyng that no man wole, his thankes, helde.
273: Thus seistow, lorel, whan thow goost to bedde;
274: And that no wys man nedeth for to wedde,
275: Ne no man that entendeth unto hevne.
276: With wilde thonder-dynt and firy levne
277: Moote thy welked nekke be tobroke!
278: Thow seyst that droppying houses, and eek smoke,
279: And chidying wyves maken men to flee
280: Out of his owene hous; a! benedicitee!
281: What eyleth swich an old man for to chide?
282: Thow seyst we wyves wol oure vices hide
283: Til we be fast, and thanne we wol hem shewe, --
284: Wel may that be a proverbe of a shrew!

285: Thou seist that oxen, asses, hors, and houndes,
286: They been assayed at diverse stoundes;
287: Bacyns, lavours, er that men hem bye,
288: Spoones and stooles, and al swich housbondrye,
289: And so been pottes, clothes, and array;
290: But folk of wyves maken noon assay,
291: Til they be wedded; olde dotard shrewel!
292: And thanne, seistow, we wol oure vices shewe.
293: Thou seist also that it displeseth me
294: But if that thou wolt preyse my beautee,
295: And but thou poure alwey upon my face,
296: And clepe me faire dame in every place.
297: And but thou make a feeste on thilke day
298: That I was born, and make me fressh and gay;
299: And but thou do to my norice honour,
300: And to my chamberere withinne my bour,
301: And to my fadres folk and his allyes, --
302: Thus seistow, olde barel-ful of lyes!
303: And yet of oure apprentice janekyn,
304: For his crispe heer, shynynge as gold so fyn,
305: And for he squiereth me bothe up and doun,
306: Yet hastow caught a fals suspecioun.
307: I wol hym noght, thogh thou were deed tomorwe!
308: But tel me this: why hydestow, with sorwe,
309: They keyes of thy cheste away fro me?
310: It is my good as wel as thyn, pardee!
311: What, wenestow make an ydiot of oure dame?
312: Now by that lord that called is seint jame,
313: Thou shalt nat bothe, thogh that thou were wood,
314: Be maister of my body and of my good;
315: That oon thou shalt forgo, maugree thyne yen.
316: What helpith it of me to enquere or spyen?

317: I trowe thou woldest loke me in thy chiste?
318: Thou sholdest seye, wyf, go wher thee liste;
319: Taak youre disport, I wol nat leve no talys.
320: I knowe yow for a trewe wyf, dame alys.
321: We love no man that taketh kep or charge
322: Wher that we goon; we wol ben at oure large.
323: Of alle men yblessed moot he be,
324: The wise astrologien, daun ptholome,
325: That seith this proverbe in his almageste --
326: Of alle men his wysdom is the hyeste
327: That rekketh nevere who hath the world in honde.
328: By this proverbe thou shalt understonde,
329: Have thou ynogh, what thar thee recche or care
330: How myrily that othere folkes fare?
331: For, certeyn, olde dotard, by youre leve,
332: Ye shul have queynte right ynogh at eve.
333: He is to greet a nygard that wolde werne
334: A man to light a candle at his lanterne;
335: He shal have never the lasse light, pardee.
336: Have thou ynogh, thee thar nat pleyne thee.
337: Thou seyst also, that if we make us gay
338: With clothyng, and with precious array,
339: That it is peril of oure chastitee;
340: And yet, with sorwe! thou most enforce thee,
341: And seye thise wordes in the apostles name:
342: in habit maad with chastitee and shame
343: Ye wommen shul apparaille yow, quod he,
344: And noght in tressed heer and gay perree,
345: As perles, ne with gold, ne clothes riche.
346: After thy text, ne after thy rubriche,
347: I wol nat wirche as muchel as a gnat.
348: Thou seydest this, that I was lyk a cat;

349: For whoso wolde senge a cattes skyn,
350: Thanne wolde the cat wel dwellen in his in;
351: And if the cattes skyn be slyk and gay,
352: She wol nat dwelle in house half a day,
353: But forth she wole, er any day be dawed,
354: To shewe hir skyn, and goon a-caterwawed.
355: This is to seye, if I be gay, sire shrewe,
356: I wol renne out, my borel for to shewe.
357: Sire olde fool, what helpeth thee to spyen?
358: Thogh thou preye argus with his hundred yen
359: To be my warde-cors, as he kan best,
360: In feith, he shal nat kepe me but me lest;
361: Yet koude I make his berd, so moot I thee!
362: Thou seydest eek that ther been thynges thre,
363: The whiche thynges troublen al this erthe,
364: And that no wight may endure the ferthe.
365: O leeve sire shrewe, jhesu shorte thy lyf!
366: Yet prechestow and seyst and hateful wyf
367: Yrekened is for oon of thise meschances.
368: Been ther none othere maner resemblances
369: That ye may likne youre parables to,
370: But if a sely wyf be oon of tho?
371: Thou liknest eek wommenes love to helle,
372: To bareyne lond, ther water may nat dwelle.
373: Thou liknest it also to wilde fyr;
374: The moore it brenneth, the moore it hath desir
375: To consume every thyng that brent wole be.
376: Thou seyest, right as wormes shende a tree,
377: Right so a wyf destroyeth hire housbonde;
378: This knowe they that been to wyves bonde. --
379: **Lordynges**, right thus, as ye have understonde,
380: Baar I stifly myne olde housbondes on honde

381: That thus they seyden in hir dronkenesse;
382: **And al was fals**, but that I took wnesse
383: On janekyn, and on my nece also.
384: O lord! the peyne I dide hem and the wo,
385: Ful giltelees, by goddes sweete pyne!
386: For as an hors I koude byte and whyne.
387: I koude pleyne, and yit was in the gilt,
388: Or elles often tyme hadde I been spilt.
389: Whose that first to mille comth, first grynt;
390: I pleynd first, so was oure werre ystynt.
391: They were ful glade to excuse hem blyve
392: Of thyng of which they nevere agilte hir lyve.
393: Of wenchis wolde I beren hem on honde,
394: Whan that for syk unnethes myghte they stonde.
395: Yet tikled I his herte, for that he
396: Wende that I hadde of hym so greet chiertee!
397: I swor that al my walkyng out by nyghte
398: Was for t' espye wenchis that he dighte;
399: Under that colour hadde I many a myrthe.
400: For al swich wit is yeven us in oure byrthe;
401: Deceite, wepyng, spynnyng God hath yive
402: To wommen kyndely, whil that they may lyve.
403: And thus of o thyng I avaunte me,
404: Atte ende I hadde the bettre in ech degree,
405: By sleighte, or force, or by som maner thyng,
406: As by continueel murmur or grucchyng.
407: Namely abedde hadden they meschaunce:
408: Ther wolde I chide, and do hem no plesaunce;
409: I wolde no lenger in the bed abyde,
410: If that I felte his arm over my syde,
411: Til he had maad his raunson unto me;
412: Thanne wolde I suffre hym do his necetee.

413: And therefore every man this tale I telle,
414: Wynne whose may, for al is for to selle;
415: With empty hand men may none haukes lure.
416: For wynnyng wolde I al his lust endure,
417: And make me feyned appetit;
418: And yet in bacon hadde I nevere delit;
419: That made me that evere I wolde hem chide.
420: For thogh the pope hadde seten hem biside,
421: I wolde nat spare hem at hir owene bord;
422: For, by my trouthe, I quitte hem word for word.
423: As helpe me verray God omnipotent,
424: Though I right now sholde make my testament,
425: I ne owe hem nat a word that it nys quit.
426: I broghte it so aboute by my wit
427: That they moste yeve it up, as for the beste,
428: Or elles hadde we nevere been in reste.
429: For thogh he looked as a wood leon,
430: Yet sholde he faille of his conclusion.
431: Thanne wolde I seye, -- goode lief, taak keep
432: How mekely looketh wilkyn, oure sheep!
433: Com neer, my spouse, lat me ba thy cheke!
434: Ye sholde been al pacient and meke,
435: And han a sweete spiced conscience,
436: Sith ye so preche of jobes pacience.
437: Suffreth alwey, syn ye so wel kan preche;
438: And but ye do, certein we shal yow teche
439: That it is fair to have a wyf in pees.
440: Oon of us two moste bowen, doutelees;
441: And sith a man is moore resonable
442: Than womman is, ye moste been suffrable.
443: What eyleth yow to grucche thus and grone?
444: Is it for ye wolde have my queynte allone?

445: Wy, taak it al! lo, have it every deel!
446: Peter! I shrewe yow, but ye love it weel;
447: For if I wolde selle my bele chose,
448: I koude walke as fressh as is a rose;
449: But I wol kepe it for youre owene tooth.
450: Ye be to blame, by god! I sey yow sooth. --
451: Swiche manere wordes hadde we on honde.
452: **Now wol I speken of my fourth housbonde.**
453: My fourthe housbonde was a revelour;
454: This is to seyn, he hadde a paramour;
455: And I was yong and ful of ragerye,
456: Stibourn and strong, and joly as a pye.
457: How koude I daunce to an harpe smale,
458: And synge, ywis, as any nyghtyngale,
459: Whan I had dronke a draughte of sweete wyn!
460: Metellius, the foule cherl, the swyn,
461: That with a staf birafte his wyf hir lyf,
462: For she drank wyn, thogh I hadde been his wyf,
463: He sholde nat han daunted me from drynke!
464: And after wyn on venus moste I thynke,
465: For al so siker as cold engendreth hayl,
466: A likerous mouth moste han a likerous tayl.
467: In wommen vinolent is no defence, --
468: This knowen lecchours by experience.
469: But, lord crist! whan that it remembreth me
470: Upon my yowthe, and on my jolitee,
471: It tikleth me aboute myn herte roote.
472: Unto this day it dooth myn herte boote
473: That I have had my world as in my tyme.
474: But age, allas! that al wole envenyme,
475: Hath me biraft my beautee and my pith.
476: Lat go, farewell! the devel go therwith!

477: The flour is goon, ther is namoore to telle;
478: The bren, as I best kan, now moste I selle;
479: But yet to be right myrie wol I fonde.
480: Now wol I tellen of my fourthe housbonde.
481: I seye, I hadde in herte greet despit
482: That he of any oother had delit.
483: But he was quit, by God and by seint joce!
484: I made hym of the same wode a croce;
485: Nat of my body, in no foul manere,
486: But certainly, I made folk swich cheere
487: That in his owene grece I made hym frye
488: For angre, and for verray jalousye.
489: By god! in erthe I was his purgatorie,
490: For which I hope his soule be in glorie.
491: For, God it woot, he sat ful ofte and song,
492: Whan that his shoo ful bitterly hym wrong.
493: Ther was no wight, save God and he, that wiste,
494: In many wise, how soore I hym twiste.
495: He deyde whan I cam fro Jerusalem,
496: And lith ygrave under the roode beam,
497: Al is his tombe nocht so curyus
498: As was the sepulcre of hym daryus,
499: Which that appeles wroghte subtilly;
500: It nys but wast to burye hym preciously.
501: Lat hym fare wel, God yeve his soul reste!
502: He is now in his grave and in his cheste.
503: **Now of my fifth housbonde wol I telle.**
504: God lete his soule nevere come in helle!
505: And yet was he to me the mooste shrewe;
506: That feele I on my ribbes al by rewe,
507: And evere shal unto myn endyng day.
508: But in oure bed he was so fressh and gay,

509: And therewithal so wel koude he me glose,
510: Whan that he wolde han my bele chose,
511: That thogh he hadde me bete on every bon,
512: He koude wynne agayn my love anon.
513: I trowe I loved hym best, for that he
514: Was of his love daungerous to me.
515: We wommen han if that I shal nat lye,
516: In this matere a queynte fantasye;
517: Wayte what thyng we may nat lightly have,
518: Therafter wol we crie al day and crave.
519: Forbede us thyng, and that desiren we;
520: Preece on us faste, and thanne wol we fle.
521: With daunger oute we al oure chaffare;
522: Greet prees at market maketh deere ware,
523: And to greet cheep is holde at litel prys:
524: This knoweth every womman that is wys.
525: My fifthe housbonde, God his soule blesse!
526: Which that I took for love, and no richesse,
527: He som tyme was a clerk of oxenford,
528: And hadde left scole, and wente at hom to bord
529: With my gossib, dwellynge in oure toun;
530: God have hir soule! hir name was alisoun.
531: She knew myn herte, and eek my privetee,
532: Bet than oure parisshe preest, so moot I thee!
533: To hire biwreyed I my conseil al.
534: For hadde myn housbonde pissed on a wal,
535: Or doon a thyng that sholde han cost his lyf,
536: To hire, and to another worthy wyf,
537: And to my nece, which that I loved weel,
538: I wolde han toold his conseil every deel.
539: And so I dide ful often, God it woot,
540: That made his face often reed and hoot

541: For verray shame, and blamed hymself for he
542: Had toold to me so greet a pryvetee.
543: And so bifel that ones in a lente --
544: So often tymes I to my gossyb wente,
545: For evere yet I loved to be gay,
546: And for to walke in march, averill, and may,
547: Fro hous to hous, to heere sondry talys --
548: That jankyn clerk, and my gossyb dame alys,
549: And I myself, into the feeldes wente.
550: Myn housbonde was at londoun al that lente;
551: I hadde the bettre leysur for to pleye,
552: And for to se, and eek for to be seye
553: Of lusty folk. What wiste I wher my grace
554: Was shapen for to be, or in what place?
555: Therefore I made my visitaciouns
556: To vigilies and to processiouns,
557: To prechyng eek, and to thise pilgrimages,
558: To pleyes of myracles, and to mariages,
559: And wered upon my gaye scarlet gytes.
560: Thise wormes, ne thise motthes, ne thise mytes,
561: Upon my peril, frete hem never a deel;
562: And wostow why? for they were used weel.
563: Now wol I tellen forth what happed me.
564: I seye that in the feeldes walked we,
565: Til trewely we hadde swich daliance,
566: This clerk and I, that of my purveiance
567: I spak to hym and seyde hym how that he,
568: If I were wydwe, sholde wedde me.
569: For certainly, I sey for no bobance,
570: Yet was I nevere withouten purveiance
571: Of mariage, n' of othere thynges eek.
572: I holde a mouses herte nat worth a leek

573: That hath but oon hole for to sterte to,
574: And if that faille, thanne is al ydo.
575: I bar hym on honde he hadde enchanted me, --
576: My dame taughte me that soutiltee.
577: And eek I seyde I mette of hym al nyght,
578: He wolde han slayn me as I lay upright,
579: And al my bed was ful of verray blood;
580: But yet I hope that he shal do me good,
581: For blood bitokeneth gold, as me was taught.
582: And al was fals; I dremed of it right naught,
583: But as I folwed ay my dames loore,
584: As wel of this as of othere thynges moore.
585: But now, sire, lat me se, what I shal seyn?
586: A ha! by god, I have my tale ageyn.
587: **Whan that my fourthe housbonde** was on beere,
588: I weep algate, and made sory cheere,
589: As wyves mooten, for it is usage,
590: And with my coverchief covered my visage,
591: But for that I was purveyed of a make,
592: I wepte but smal, and that I undertake.
593: To chirche was myn housbonde born a-morwe
594: With neighebores, that for hym maden sorwe;
595: And jankyn, oure clerk, was oon of tho.
596: As help me god! whan that I saugh hym go
597: After the beere, me thoughte he hadde a paire
598: Of legges and of feet so clene and faire
599: That al myn herte I yaf unto his hooold.
600: He was, I trowe, a twenty wynter oold,
601: And I was fourty, if I shal seye sooth;
602: But yet I hadde alwey a coltes tooth.
603: Gat-tothed I was, and that bicam me weel;
604: I hadde the prente of seinte venus seel.

605: As help me god! I was a lusty oon,
606: And faire, and riche, and yong, and wel bigon;
607: And trewely, as myne housbondes tolde me,
608: I hadde the beste quoniam myghte be.
609: For certes, I am al venerien
610: In feelynge, and myn herte is marciën.
611: Venus me yaf my lust, my likerousnesse,
612: And Mars yaf me my sturdy hardynesse;
613: Myn ascendent was Taur, and Mars therinne.
614: Allas! allas! that evere love was synne!
615: I folwed ay myn inclinacioun
616: By vertu of my constellacioun;
617: That made me I koude noght withdrawe
618: My chambre of Venus from a good felawe.
619: Yet have I Martes mark upon my face,
620: And also in another privee place.
621: For God so wys be my savacioun,
622: I ne loved nevere by no discrecioun,
623: But evere folwede myn appetit,
624: Al were he short, or long, or blak, or whit;
625: I took no kep, so that he liked me,
626: How poore he was, ne eek of what degree.
627: **What sholde I seye?** but, at the monthes ende,
628: This joly clerk, Jankyn, that was so hende,
629: Hath wedded me with greet solempnytee;
630: And to hym yaf I al the lond and fee
631: That evere was me yeven therbifoore.
632: But afterward repented me ful soore;
633: He nolde suffre nothyng of my list.
634: By god! he smoot me ones on the lyst,
635: For that I rente out of his book a leef,
636: That of the strook myn ere wax al deef.

637: Stibourn I was as is a leonesse,
638: And of my tonge verray jangleresse,
639: And walke I wolde, as I had doon biforn,
640: From hous to hous, although he had it sworn;
641: For which he often tymes wolde preche,
642: And me of olde romayn geestes teche;
643: How he symplicius gallus lefte his wyf,
644: And hire forsook for terme of al his lyf,
645: Noght but for open-heveded he hir say
646: Lookynge out at his dore upon a day.
647: Another romayn tolde he me by name,
648: That, for his wyf was at a someres game
649: Withouten his wityng, he forsook hire eke.
650: And thanne wolde he upon his bible seke
651: That ilke proverbe of ecclesiaste
652: Where he comandeth, and forbedeth faste,
653: Man shal nat suffre his wyf go roule aboute.
654: Thanne wolde he seye right thus, withouten doute:
655: -whoso that buyldeth his hous al of salwes,
656: And priketh his blynde hors over the falwes,
657: And suffreth his wyf to go seken halwes,
658: Is worthy to been hanged on the galwes! --
659: But al for noght, I sette noght an hawe
660: Of his proverbes n' of his olde sawe,
661: Ne I wolde nat of hym corrected be.
662: I hate hym that my vices telleth me,
663: And so doo mo, God woot, of us than I.
664: This made hym with me wood al outrely;
665: I nolde noght forbere hym in no cas.
666: **Now wol I seye yow sooth**, by seint thomas,
667: Why that I rente out of his book a leef,
668: For which he smoot me so that I was deaf.

669: He hadde a book that gladly, nyght and day,
670: For his desport he wolde rede alway;
671: He cleped it valerie and theofraste,
672: At which book he lough alwey ful faste.
673: And eek ther was somtyme a clerk at rome,
674: A cardinal, that highte seint jerome,
675: That made a book agayn Jovinian;
676: In which book eek ther was Tertulan,
677: Crisippus, Trotula, and Helowys,
678: That was abbesse nat fer fro Paris;
679: And eek the parables of Salomon,
680: Ovides art, and bookes many on,
681: And alle these were bounden in o volume.
682: And every nyght and day was his custume,
683: Whan he hadde leyser and vacacioun
684: From oother worldly occupacioun,
685: To reden on this book of wikked wyves.
686: He knew of hem mo legendes and lyves
687: Than been of goode wyves in the bible.
688: For trusteth wel, it is an impossible
689: That any clerk wol speke good of wyves,
690: But if it be of hooly seintes lyves,
691: Ne of noon oother womman never the mo.
692: Who peyntede the leon, tel me who?
693: By god! if wommen hadde writen stories,
694: As clerkes han withinne hire oratories,
695: They wolde han writen of men moore wikkednesse
696: Than al the mark of adam may redresse.
697: The children of mercurie and of venus
698: Been in hir wirkyng ful contrarius;
699: Mercurie loveth wysdam and science,
700: And Venus loveth ryot and dispence.

701: And, for hire diverse disposicioun,
702: Ech falleth in otheres exaltacioun.
703: And thus, God woot, Mercurie is desolat
704: In Pisces, wher Venus is exaltat;
705: And Venus falleth ther Mercurie is reysed.
706: Therefore no womman of no clerk is preysed.
707: The clerk, whan he is oold, and may noght do
708: Of venus werkes worth his olde sho,
709: Thanne sit he doun, and writ in his dotage
710: That wommen kan nat kepe hir mariage!
711: But now to purpos, why I tolde thee
712: That I was beten for a book, pardee!
713: Upon a nyght Jankyn, that was oure sire,
714: Redde on his book, as he sat by the fire,
715: Of eva first, that for hir wikkednesse
716: Was al mankynde broght to wrecchednesse,
717: For which that Jesu Christ hymself was slayn,
718: That boghte us with his herte blood agayn.
719: Lo, heere expres of womman may ye fynde,
720: That womman was the los of al mankynde.
721: The redde he me how Sampson loste his hairs:
722: Slepynge, his lemman kitte it with hir sheres;
723: Thurgh which treson loste he bothe his yen.
724: Tho redde he me, if that I shal nat lyen,
725: Of Hercules and of his Dianyre,
726: That caused hym to sette hymself afyre.
727: No thyng forgat he the care and the wo
728: That Socrates hadde with his wyves two;
729: How Xantippa caste pisse upon his heed.
730: This sely man sat stille as he were deed;
731: He wiped his heed, namoore dorste he seyn,
732: But -- er that thonder stynte, comth a reyn! --

733: Of Pasipha, that was the queen of Crete,
734: For shrewednesse, hym thoughte the tale swete;
735: Fy! spek namoore -- it is a grisly thyng --
736: Of hire horrible lust and hir likyng.
737: Of Clitermystra, for hire lecherye,
738: That falsly made hire housbonde for to dye,
739: He redde it with ful good devocioun.
740: He tolde me eek for what occasioun
741: Amphiorax at Thebes loste his lyf.
742: Myn housbonde hadde a legende of his wyf,
743: Eriphilem, that for an ouche of gold
744: Hath prively unto the Grekes told
745: Wher that hir housbonde hidde hym in a place,
746: For which he hadde at Thebes sorry grace.
747: Of Lyvia tolde he me, and of Lucye:
748: They bothe made hir housbondes for to dye;
749: That oon for love, that oother was for hate.
750: Lyvia hir housbonde, on an even late,
751: Emposoned hath, for that she was his fo;
752: Lucia, likerous, loved hire housbonde so
753: That, for he sholde alway upon hire thynke,
754: She yaf hym swich a manere love-drynke
755: That he was dead er it were by the morwe;
756: And thus algates housbondes han sorwe.
757: Thanne tolde he me how oon Latumyus
758: Compleyned unto his felawe Arrius
759: That in his garden growed such a tree
760: On which he said how that his wives three
761: Hanged hemself for herte despitus.
762: -- O leeve brother, -- quod this Arrius,
763: -- Give me a plante of thilke blissed tree,
764: And in my garden planted shal it bee. --

765: Of latter date, of wives hath he read
766: That somme han slain hir housbondes in hir bed,
767: And lete hir lecchour dighte hire al the nyght,
768: Whan that the corps lay in the floor upright.
769: And somme han dryve nails in hir brayn,
770: Whil that they slepte, and thus they had hem slayn.
771: Somme han hem given poysoun in their drinke.
772: He spak moore harm than herte may bithynke;
773: And therwithal he knew of mo proverbes
774: Than in this world ther growen gras or herbes.
775: -- Bet is, -- quod he, -- thyn habitacioun
776: Be with a leon or foul dragoun,
777: Than with a womman usynge for to chyde --
778: -- Bet is, -- quod he, -- hye in the roof abyde,
779: Than with an angry wyf doun in the hous;
780: They been so wikked and contrarious,
781: They haten that hir housbondes loven ay. --
782: He seyde, -- a womman cast hir shame away,
783: Whan she cast of hir smok; -- and forthermo,
784: -- A fair womman, but she be chaast also,
785: Is lyk a gold ryng in a sowes nose. --
786: Who wolde wene, or who wolde suppose,
787: The wo that in myn herte was, and pyne?
788: **And whan I saugh he wolde nevere fyne**
789: To reden on this cursed book al nyght,
790: Al sodeynly thre leves have I plyght
791: Out of his book, right as he radde, and eke
792: I with my fest so took hym on the cheke
793: That in oure fyr he fil bakward adoun.
794: And he up stirte as dooth a wood leoun,
795: And with his fest he smoot me on the heed,
796: That in the floor I lay as I were deed.

797: And whan he saugh how stille that I lay,
798: He was agast, and wolde han fled his way,
799: Til atte laste out of my swogh I breyde.
800: -- O! hastow slayn me, false thief? -- I seyde,
801: -- And for my land thus hastow mordred me?
802: Er I be deed, yet wol I kisse thee. --
803: And neer he cam and kneled faire adoun,
804: And seyde, -- deere suster alisoun,
805: As help me god! I shal thee nevere smyte.
806: That I have doon, it is thyself to wyte.
807: Foryeve it me, and that I thee biseke! --
808: And yet eftsoones I hitte hym on the cheke,
809: And seyde, -- thief, thus muchel am I wreke;
810: Now wol I dye, I may no lenger speke. --
811: But atte laste, with muchel care and wo,
812: We fille acorded by us selven two.
813: He yaf me al the bridel in myn hond,
814: To han the governance of hous and lond,
815: And of his tonge, and of his hond also;
816: And made hym brenne his book anon right tho.
817: And whan that I hadde geten unto me,
818: By maistrie, al the soveraynette,
819: And that he seyde, -- myn owene trewe wyf,
820: Do as thee lust the terme of al thy lyf;
821: Keep thyn honour, and keep eek myn estaat --
822: After that day we hadden never debaat.
823: God helpe me so, I was to hym as kynde
824: As any wyf from denmark unto ynde,
825: And also trewe, and so was he to me.
826: I prey to God, that sit in magestee,
827: So blesse his soule for his mercy deere.
828: Now wol I seye my tale, if ye wol heere.

The Wife of Bath's Tale

857: In th' olde dayes of the kyng Arthour,
858: Of which that Britons speaken great honour,
859: Al was this land fulfilled of fayerye.
860: The elf-queene, with hir joly compaignye,
861: Daunced ful ofte in many a grene mede.
862: This was the olde opinion, as I rede;
863: I speke of manye hundred yeres ago.
864: But now kan no man se none elves mo,
865: For now the grete charitee and prayers
866: Of lymytours and othere holy friars,
867: That serchen every lond and every streem,
868: As thikke as motes in the sonne-beem,
869: Blessynge halles, chambres, kitchens, bowers,
870: Citees, burghes, castels, high towers,
871: Thropes, barns, shipnes, dayeryes --
872: This maketh that ther ben no fayeryes.
873: For ther as wont to walken was an elf,
874: Ther walketh now the lymytour hymself
875: In undermeles and in morwenynges,
876: And seyth his matyns and his holy thynges
877: As he gooth in his lymytacioun.
878: Women may go now saufly up and down.
879: In every bussh or under every tree
880: Ther is noon oother incubus but he,
881: And he ne wol doon hem but dishonour.
882: **And so bifel it** that this kyng Arthur
883: Hadde in his house a lusty bachelor,
884: That on a day cam ridynge fro ryver;
885: And happed that, allone as he was born,

886: He saw a maiden walkinge hym biforn,
887: Of which maid anon, maugree hir heed,
888: By verray force, he rafte hire maydenhed;
889: For which oppressioun was swich clamour
890: And swich pursute unto the kyng Arthur,
891: That damned was this knight for to be dead,
892: By course of law, and sholde han lost his head --
893: Paraventure swich was the statut tho --
894: But that the queen and othere ladyes mo
895: So longe preyeden the kyng of grace,
896: Til he his lyf hym graunted in the place,
897: And gave hym to the queene, al at hir wille,
898: To chose whether she wolde hym save or spille.
899: The queene thanketh the kyng with al hir myght,
900: And after this thus spak she to the knyght,
901: Whan that she saugh hir tyme, upon a day:
902: Thou standest yet, quod she, in swich array
903: That of thy lyf yet hastow no suretee.
904: I grante thee lyf, if thou kanst tellen me
905: **What thyng is it that wommen moost desiren.**
906: Be war, and keep thy nekke-boon from iron!
907: And if thou kanst nat tellen it anon,
908: Yet wol I yeve thee leve for to gon
909: A twelf-month and a day, to seche and leere
910: An answeere suffisant in this mateere;
911: And suretee wol I han, er that thou pace,
912: Thy body for to yelden in this place.
913: Wo was this knyght, and sorwefully he siketh;
914: But what! he may nat do al as hym liketh.
915: And at the laste he chees hym for to wende,
916: And come agayn, right at the yeres ende,
917: With swich answeere as God wolde hym purveye;

918: And taketh his leve, and wendeth froth his weye.
919: He seketh every hous and and every place
920: Where as he hopeth for to fynde grace,
921: To lerne what thyng wommen loven moost;
922: But he ne koude arryven in no coost
923: Wher as he myghte fynde in this mateere
924: Two creatures accordynge in-feere.
925: Somme seyde wommen loven best richesse,
926: Somme seyde honour, somme seyde jolynesse,
927: Somme riche array, somme seyden lust abedde,
928: And oftetyme to be wydwe and wedde.
929: Somme seyde that oure hertes been moost esed
930: Whan that we ben yflatered and yplesed.
931: He gooth ful ny the sothe, I wol nat lye.
932: A man shal wynne us best with flaterye;
933: And with attendance, and with bisynesse,
934: Been we ylymed, bothe moore and lesse.
935: And somme seyen that we loven best
936: For to be free, and do right as us lest,
937: And that no man repreve us of oure vice,
938: But seye that we be wise, and no thyng nyce.
939: For trewely ther is noon of us alle,
940: If any wight wol clawe us on the galle,
941: That we nel kike, for he seith us sooth.
942: Assay, and he shal fynde it that so dooth;
943: For, be we never so vicious withinne,
944: We wol been holden wise and clene of synne.
945: And somme seyn that greet delit han we
946: For to been holden stable, and eek secree,
947: And in o purpos stedefastly to dwelle,
948: And nat biwreye thyng that men us telle.
949: But that tale is nat worth a rake-stele.

950: Pardee, we wommen konne no thyng hele;
951: Witnesse on Midas, -- wol ye heere the tale?
952: Ovyde, amonges othere thynges smale,
953: Seyde Mida hadde, under his longe hairs,
954: Growing upon his head two asses ears,
955: The whiche vice he hydde, as he best myghte,
956: Ful subtilly from every mannes sighte,
957: That, save his wyf, ther wiste of it namo.
958: He loved hire moost, and trusted hire also;
959: He preyede hire that to no creature
960: She sholde tellen of his disfigure.
961: She swoor him, nay, for al this world to wynne,
962: She nolde do that vileynye or synne,
963: To make hir housbonde han so foul a name.
964: She nolde nat telle it for hir owene shame.
965: But nathelees, hir thoughte that she dyde,
966: That she so longe sholde a conseil hyde;
967: Hir thoughte it swal so soore aboute hir herte
968: That nedely som word hire moste asterte;
969: And sith she dorste telle it to no man,
970: Doun to a mareys faste by she ran
971: Til she cam there, hir herte was a-fyre --
972: And as a bitore bombleth in the myre,
973: She leyde hir mouth unto the water doun:
974: Biwreye me nat, thou water, with thy soun,
975: Quod she; -- to thee I telle it and namo;
976: Myn housbonde hath longe asses erys two!
977: Now is myn herte al hool, now is it oute.
978: I myghte no lenger kepe it, out of doute.
979: Heere may ye se, thogh we a tyme abyde,
980: Yet out it moot; we kan no conseil hyde.
981: The remenant of the tale if ye wol heere,

982: Redeth Ovide, and ther ye may it leere.
983: **This knyght, of which my tale is specially,**
984: Than that he saugh he myghte nat come therby,
985: This is to seye, what wommen love moost,
986: Withinne his brest ful sorweful was the goost.
987: But hoom he gooth, he myghte nat sojourne;
988: The day was come that homward moste he tourne.
989: And in his wey it happed hym to ryde,
990: In al this care, under a forest syde,
991: Wher as he saugh upon a daunce go
992: Of ladyes foure and twenty, and yet mo;
993: Toward the whiche daunce he drow ful yerne,
994: In hope that som wysdom sholde he lerne.
995: But certainly, er he cam fully there,
996: Vanysshed was this daunce, he nyste where.
997: No creature saugh he that bare life,
998: Save on the green he saugh sittyng a wyf --
999: A fouler wight ther may no man devyse.
1000: Agayn the knyght this olde wyf gan ryse,
1001: And seyde, sire knyght, heer forth ne lith no wey.
1002: Tel me what that ye seken, by youre fey!
1003: Paraventure it may the bettre be;
1004: Thise olde folk kan muchel thyng, quod she.
1005: My leeve mooder, quod this knyght, certeyn
1006: I nam but dead, but if that I kan seyn
1007: What thyng it is that wommen moost desire.
1008: Koude ye me wisse, I wolde wel quite youre hire.
1009: Plicht me thy trouthe heere in myn hand, quod she,
1010: The nexte thyng that I requere thee,
1011: Thou shalt it do, if it lye in thy myght,
1012: And I wol telle it yow er it be nyght.
1013: Have heer my trouthe, quod the knyght, I grante.

1014: Thanne, quod she, I dar me wel avante
1015: Thy lyf is sauf; for I wol stonde therby,
1016: Upon my lyf, the queene wol seye as I.
1017: Lat se which is the proudeste of hem alle,
1018: That wereth on a coverchief or a calle,
1019: That day seye nay of that I shal thee teche.
1020: Lat us go forth, withouten lenger speche.
1021: Tho rowned she a pistel in his ere,
1022: And bad hym to be glad, and have no fere.
1023: **Whan they be comen to the court,** this knyght
1024: Seyde he had holde his day, as he hadde hight,
1025: And redy was his answer, as he sayde.
1026: Ful many a noble wyf, and many a mayde,
1027: And many a wydwe, for that they been wise,
1028: The queene hirsself sittyng as a justise,
1029: Assembled been, his answer for to heere;
1030: And afterward this knyght was bode appeere.
1031: To every wight comanded was silence,
1032: And that the knyght sholde telle in audience
1033: What thyng that worldly wommen loven best.
1034: This knyght ne stood nat stille as doth a best,
1035: But to his questioun anon answerde
1036: With manly voys, that al the court it herde:
1037: My lige lady, generally, quod he,
1038: Wommen desiren to have sovereynetee
1039: As wel over his housbond as hir love,
1040: And for to been in maistrie hym above.
1041: This is youre mooste desir, thogh ye me kille.
1042: Dooth as yow list; I am heer at youre wille.
1043: In al the court ne was ther wyf, ne mayde,
1044: Ne wydwe, that contraried that he sayde,
1045: But seyden he was worthy han his lyf.

1046: **And with that word up stirte the olde wyf,**
1047: Which that the knyght saugh sittynge on the grene:
1048: Mercy, quod she, my sovereyn lady queene!
1049: Er that youre court departe, do me right.
1050: I taughte this answeere unto the knyght;
1051: For which he plighte me his trouthe there,
1052: The firste thyng that I wolde hym requere,
1053: He wolde it do, if it lay in his myghte.
1054: Bifore the court thanne preye I thee, sir knyght,
1055: Quod she, that thou me take unto thy wyf;
1056: For wel thou woost that I have kept thy lyf.
1057: If I seye fals, sey nay, upon thy fey!
1058: This knyght answerde, allas! and weylawey!
1059: I woot right wel that swich was my biheste.
1060: For goddes love, as chees a newe requeste!
1061: Taak al my good, and lat my body go.
1062: Nay, thanne, quod she, I shrewe us bothe two!
1063: For thogh that I be foul, and oold, and poore,
1064: I nolde for al the metal, ne for oore,
1065: That under erthe is grave, or lith above,
1066: But if thy wyf I were, and eek thy love.
1067: My love? quod he, nay, my dampnacioun!
1068: Allas! that any of my nacioun
1069: Sholde evere so foule disparaged be!
1070: But al for noght; the ende is this, that he
1071: Constreynd was, he nedes moste hire wedde;
1072: And taketh his olde wyf, and gooth to bedde.
1073: Now wolden som men seye, paraventure,
1074: That for my necligence I do no cure
1075: To tellen yow the joye and al th' array
1076: That at the feeste was that ilke day.
1077: To which thyng shortly answeren I shal:

1078: I seye ther nas no joye ne feeste at al;
1079: Ther nas but hevynesse and mucche sorwe.
1080: For prively he wedded hire on the morwe,
1081: And al day after hidde hym as an owle,
1082: So wo was hym, his wyf looked so foule.
1083: Greet was the wo the knyght hadde in his thoght,
1084: Whan he was with his wyf abedde ybrought;
1085: He walweth and he turneth to and fro.
1086: His olde wyf lay smyllynge everemo,
1087: And seyde, o deere housbonde, benedicitee!
1088: Fareth every knyght thys with his wyf as ye?
1089: Is this the lawe of kyng Arthur's hous?
1090: Is every knyght of his so dangerous?
1091: I am youre owene love and eek youre wyf;
1092: I am she which that saved hath youre lyf,
1093: And, certes, yet ne dide I yow nevere unright;
1094: Why fare ye thus with me this firste nyght?
1095: Ye faren lyk a man had lost his wit.
1096: What is my gilt? for goddes love, tel me it,
1097: And it shal been amende, if I may.
1098: Amended? quod this knyght, allas! nay, nay!
1099: It wol nat been amended nevere mo.
1100: Thou art so loothly, and so oold also,
1101: And therto comen of so lough a kynde,
1102: That litel wonder is thogh I walwe and wynde.
1103: So wolde God myn herte wolde breste!
1104: Is this, quod she, the cause of youre unreste?
1105: Ye, certainly, quod he, no wonder is.
1106: Now, sire, quod she, I koude amende al this,
1107: If that me liste, er it were dayes thre,
1108: So wel ye myghte bere yow unto me.
1109: But, for ye speken of swich **gentillesse**

1110: As is descended out of old richesse,
1111: That therefore sholden ye be gentil men,
1112: Swich arrogance is nat worth an hen.
1113: Looke who that is moost vertuous alway,
1114: Pryvee and apert, and moost entendeth ay
1115: To do the gentil dedes that he kan;
1116: Taak hym for the grettest gentil man.
1117: Crist wole we clayme of hym oure gentillesse,
1118: Nat of oure elders for hire old richesse.
1119: For thogh they yeve us al hir heritage,
1120: For which we clayme to been of heigh parage,
1121: Yet may they nat biquethe, for no thyng,
1122: To noon of us hir vertuous lyvyng,
1123: That made hem gentil men ycalled be,
1124: And bad us folwen hem in swich degree.
1125: Wel kan the wise poete of florence,
1126: That highte dant, speken in this sentence.
1127: Lo, in swich maner rym is dantes tale:
1128: -- Ful selde up riseth by his brances smale
1129: Prowesse of man, for god, of his goodnesse,
1130: Wole that of hym we clayme oure gentillesse; --
1131: For of oure elders may we no thyng clayme
1132: But temporel thyng, that man may hurte and mayme.
1133: Eek every wight woot this as wel as I,
1134: If gentillesse were planted natureelly
1135: Unto a certeyn lynage doun the lyne,
1136: Pryvee and apert, thanne wolde they nevere fyne
1137: To doon of gentillesse the faire office;
1138: They myghte do no vileynye or vice.
1139: Taak fyr, and ber it in the derkeste hous
1140: Bitwix this and the mount of kaukasous,
1141: And lat men shette the dores and go thenne;

1142: Yet wole the fyr as faire lye and brenne
1143: As twenty thousand men myghte it biholde;
1144: His office natureel ay wol it holde,
1145: Up peril of my lyf, til that it dye.
1146: Heere may ye se wel how that genterye
1147: Is nat annexed to possessioun,
1148: Sith folk ne doon hir operacioun
1149: Alwey, as dooth the fyr, lo, in his kynde.
1150: For, God it woot, men may wel often fynde
1151: A lordes sone do shame and vileynye;
1152: And he that wole han pris of his gentrye,
1153: For he was boren of a gentil hous,
1154: And hadde his elders noble and vertuous,
1155: And nel hymselfen do no gentil dedis,
1156: Ne folwen his gentil auncestre that deed is,
1157: He nys nat gentil, be he duc or erl;
1158: For vileyns synful dedes make a cherl.
1159: For gentillesse nys but renomee
1160: Of thyne auncestres, for hire heigh bountee,
1161: Which is a strange thyng to thy persone.
1162: Thy gentillesse cometh fro God allone.
1163: Thanne comth oure verray gentillesse of grace;
1164: It was no thyng biquethe us with oure place.
1165: Thenketh how noble, as seith Valerius,
1166: Was thilke Tullius Hostillius,
1167: That out of poverte roos to heigh noblesse.
1168: Reedeth senek, and redeth eek Boethius;
1169: Ther shul ye seen expres that it no drede is
1170: That he is gentil that dooth gentil dedis.
1171: And therefore, leeve housbonde, thus conclude:
1172: Al were it that myne auncestres were rude,
1173: Yet may the hye god, and so hope I,

1174: Grante me grace to lyven vertuously.
1175: Thanne am I gentil, whan that I bigynne
1176: To lyven vertuously and weyve synne.
1177: And ther as ye of **poverte** me repreeve,
1178: The hye god, on whom that we bileeve,
1179: In wilful poverte chees to lyve his lyf.
1180: And certes every man, mayden, or wyf,
1181: May understonde that Jesus, heaven's kyng,
1182: Ne wolde nat chese a vicious lyvyng.
1183: Glad poverte is an honest thyng, certeyn;
1184: This wole senec and othere clerkes seyn.
1185: Whoso that halt hym payd of his poverte,
1186: I holde hym riche, al hadde he nat a sherte.
1187: He that coveiteth is a povre wight,
1188: For he wolde han that is nat in his myght;
1189: But he that noight hath, ne coveiteth have,
1190: Is riche, although ye holde hym but a knave.
1191: Verray poverte, it syngeth proprely;
1192: Juvenal seith of poverte myrily:
1193: -- The povre man, whan he goth by the weye,
1194: Bifore the theves he may synge and pleye.
1195: Poverte is hateful good and, as I gesse,
1196: A ful greet bryngere out of bisynesse;
1197: A greet amendere eek of sapience
1198: To hym that taketh it in pacience.
1199: Poverte is this, although it seme alenge,
1200: Possessioun that no wight wol chalenge.
1201: Poverte ful ofte, whan a man is lowe,
1202: Maketh his God and eek hymself to knowe.
1203: Poverte a spectacle is, as thynketh me,
1204: Thurgh which he may his verray freendes see.
1205: And therefore, sire, syn that I noight yow greve,

1206: Of my poverte namoore ye me repreve.
1207: No, sire, of **elde** ye repreve me;
1208: And certes, sire, thogh noon auctoritee
1209: Were in no book, ye gentils of honour
1210: Seyn that men sholde an oold wight doon favour,
1211: And clepe hym fader, for youre gentillesse;
1212: And auctours shal I fynde, as I gesse.
1213: Now ther ye seye that I am foul and old,
1214: Than drede you noight to been a cokewold;
1215: For filthe and eelde, also moot I thee,
1216: Been grete wardeyns upon chastitee.
1217: But nathelees, syn I knowe youre delit,
1218: I shal fulfille youre worldly appetit.
1219: **Chese now**, quod she, oon of these thynges tweye:
1220: To han me foul and old til that I deye,
1221: And be to yow a trewe, humble wyf,
1222: And nevere yow displese in al my lyf;
1223: Or elles ye wol han me yong and fair,
1224: And take youre aventure of the repair
1225: That shal be to youre hous by cause of me,
1226: Or in som oother place, may wel be.
1227: Now chese yourselven, wheither that yow liketh.
1228: This knyght avyseth hym and sore siketh,
1229: But atte laste he seyde in this manere:
1230: My lady and my love, and wyf so deere,
1231: I put me in youre wise governance;
1232: **Cheseth youreself** which may be moost plesance,
1233: And moost honour to yow and me also.
1234: I do no fors the wheither of the two;
1235: For as yow liketh, it suffiseth me.
1236: Thanne have I gete of yow maistrie, quod she,
1237: Syn I may chese and governe as me lest?

1238: Ye, certes, wyf, quod he, I holde it best.
1239: Kys me, quod she, we be no lenger wrothe;
1240: For, by my trouthe, I wol be to yow bothe,
1241: This is to seyn, ye, bothe fair and good.
1242: I prey to God that I moote sterven wood,
1243: But I to yow be also good and trewe
1244: As evere was wyf, syn that the world was newe.
1245: And but I be to-morn as fair to seene
1246: As any lady, emperice, or queene,
1247: That is bitwixe the est and eke the west,
1248: Dooth with my lyf and deth right as yow lest.
1249: **Cast up the curtyn**, looke how that it is.
1250: And whan the knyght saugh verrailly al this,
1251: That she so fair was, and so yong therto,
1252: For joye he hente hire in his armes two,
1253: His herte bathed in a bath of blisse.
1254: A thousand tyme a-rewe he gan hire kisse,
1255: And she obeyed hym in every thyng
1256: That myghte doon hym plesance or likyng.
1257: And thys they lyve unto hir lyves ende
1258: In parfit joye; and Jesu Christ us sende
1259: Housbondes meeke, yonge, and fressh abedde,
1260: And grace t' overbyde hem that we wedde;
1261: And eek I praye jhesu shorte hir lyves
1262: That wol nat be governed by hir wyves;
1263: And olde and angry nygardes of dispence,
1264: God sende hem soone verray pestilence!