



The Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale

An Interlinear Translation

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(How to use the [interlinear translations.](#))

The Wife of Bath's Prologue

The Prologe of the Wyves Tale of Bathe

- 1 **"Experience, though noon auctoritee**
 "Experience, though no written authority
- 2 **Were in this world, is right ynogh for me**
 Were in this world, is good enough for me
- 3 **To speke of wo that is in mariage;**
 To speak of the woe that is in marriage;
- 4 **For, lordynges, sith I twelve yeer was of age,**
 For, gentlemen, since I was twelve years of age,
- 5 **Thonked be God that is eterne on lyve,**
 Thanked be God who is eternally alive,
- 6 **Housbondes at chirche dore I have had fyve --**
 I have had five husbands at the church door --
- 7 **If I so ofte myghte have ywedded bee --**
 If I so often might have been wedded --
- 8 **And alle were worthy men in hir degree.**
 And all were worthy men in their way.
- 9 **But me was toold, certeyn, nat longe agoon is,**
 But to me it was told, certainly, it is not long ago,
- 10 **That sith that Crist ne wente nevere but onis**
 That since Christ went never but once
- 11 **To weddyng, in the Cane of Galilee,**
 To a wedding, in the Cana of Galilee,
- 12 **That by the same ensample taughte he me**
 That by that same example he taught me
- 13 **That I ne sholde wedded be but ones.**

- That I should be wedded but once.
- 14 **Herkne eek, lo, which a sharp word for the nones,**
Listen also, lo, what a sharp word for this purpose,
- 15 **Biside a welle, Jhesus, God and man,**
Beside a well, Jesus, God and man,
- 16 **Spak in repreeve of the Samaritan:**
Spoke in reproof of the Samaritan:
- 17 **`Thou hast yhad fyve housbondes,' quod he,**
`Thou hast had five husbands,' he said,
- 18 **`And that ilke man that now hath thee**
`And that same man that now has thee
- 19 **Is noght thyn housbonde,' thus seyde he certeyn.**
Is not thy husband,' thus he said certainly.
- 20 **What that he mente therby, I kan nat seyn;**
What he meant by this, I can not say;
- 21 **But that I axe, why that the fifthe man**
But I ask, why the fifth man
- 22 **Was noon housbonde to the Samaritan?**
Was no husband to the Samaritan?
- 23 **How manye myghte she have in mariage?**
How many might she have in marriage?
- 24 **Yet herde I nevere tellen in myn age**
I never yet heard tell in my lifetime
- 25 **Upon this nombre diffinicioun.**
A definition of this number.
- 26 **Men may devyne and glosen, up and doun,**
Men may conjecture and interpret in every way,
- 27 **But wel I woot, expres, withoute lye,**
But well I know, expressly, without lie,
- 28 **God bad us for to wexe and multiplie;**
God commanded us to grow fruitful and multiply;
- 29 **That gentil text kan I wel understonde.**
That gentle text I can well understand.
- 30 **Eek wel I woot, he seyde myn housbonde**
Also I know well, he said my husband
- 31 **Sholde lete fader and mooder and take to me.**
Should leave father and mother and take to me.

- 32 **But of no nombre mencion made he,**
But he made no mention of number,
- 33 **Of bigamy, or of octogamy;**
Of marrying two, or of marrying eight;
- 34 **Why sholde men thanne speke of it vileynye?**
Why should men then speak evil of it?
- 35 **Lo, heere the wise kyng, daun Salomon;**
Lo, (consider) here the wise king, dan Salomon;
- 36 **I trowe he hadde wyves mo than oon.**
I believe he had wives more than one.
- 37 **As wolde God it levelful were unto me**
As would God it were lawful unto me
- 38 **To be refresshed half so ofte as he!**
To be refreshed half so often as he!
- 39 **Which yifte of God hadde he for alle his wyvys!**
What a gift of God he had because of all his
wives!
- 40 **No man hath swich that in this world alyve is.**
No man that in this world is alive has such (a gift).
- 41 **God woot, this noble kyng, as to my wit,**
God knows, this noble king, according to my
judgment,
- 42 **The firste nyght had many a myrie fit**
The first night had many a merry fit
- 43 **With ech of hem, so wel was hym on lyve.**
With each of them, so well things went for him in
his lifetime.
- 44 **Yblessed be God that I have wedded fyve!**
Blessed be God that I have wedded five!
- 44a **[Of whiche I have pyked out the beste,**
[Of which I have picked out the best,
- 44b **Bothe of here nether purs and of here cheste.**
Both of their lower purse (scrotum) and of their
strongbox.
- 44c **Diverse scoles maken parfynt clerkes,**
Differing schools make perfect clerks,
- 44d **And diverse practyk in many sondry werkes**
And differing practice in many various works
- 44e **Maketh the werkman parfynt sekirly;**

- Makes the workman truly perfect;
 44f **Of fyve husbondes scoleiying am I.]**
 Of five husbands' schooling am I.]
- 45 **Welcome the sixte, whan that evere he shal.**
 Welcome the sixth, whenever he shall appear.
- 46 **For sothe, I wol nat kepe me chaast in al.**
 For truly, I will not keep myself chaste in
 everything.
- 47 **Whan myn housbonde is fro the world ygon,**
 When my husband is gone from the world,
- 48 **Som Cristen man shal wedde me anon,**
 Some Christian man shall wed me straightway,
- 49 **For thanne th' apostle seith that I am free**
 For then the apostle says that I am free
- 50 **To wedde, a Goddes half, where it liketh me.**
 To wed, by God's side (I swear), wherever it
 pleases me.
- 51 **He seith that to be wedded is no synne;**
 He says that to be wedded is no sin;
- 52 **Bet is to be wedded than to brynne.**
 It is better to be wedded than to burn.
- 53 **What rekketh me, thogh folk seye vileynye**
 What do I care, though folk speak evil
- 54 **Of shrewed Lameth and his bigamye?**
 Of cursed Lamech and his bigamy?
- 55 **I woot wel Abraham was an hooly man,**
 I know well Abraham was a holy man,
- 56 **And Jacob eek, as ferforth as I kan;**
 And Jacob also, insofar as I know;
- 57 **And ech of hem hadde wyves mo than two,**
 And each of them had more than two wives,
- 58 **And many another holy man also.**
 And many another holy man also.
- 59 **Wher can ye seye, in any manere age,**
 Where can you find, in any historical period,
- 60 **That hye God defended mariage**
 That high God forbad marriage
- 61 **By expres word? I pray yow, telleth me.**
 By express word? I pray you, tell me.
- 62 **Or where comanded he virginitee?**

- Or where commanded he virginity?
- 63 **I woot as wel as ye, it is no drede,**
I know as well as you, it is no doubt,
- 64 **Th' apostel, whan he speketh of maydenhede,**
The apostle, when he speaks of maidenhood,
- 65 **He seyde that precept therof hadde he noon.**
He said that he had no precept concerning it.
- 66 **Men may conseille a womman to been oon,**
Men may advise a woman to be one,
- 67 **But conseillyng is no comandement.**
But advice is no commandment.
- 68 **He putte it in oure owene juggement;**
He left it to our own judgment;
- 69 **For hadde God comanded maydenhede,**
For had God commanded maidenhood,
- 70 **Thanne hadde he dampned weddyng with the dede.**
Then had he damned marriage along with the act (of procreation).
- 71 **And certes, if ther were no seed ysowe,**
And certainly, if there were no seed sown,
- 72 **Virginitee, thanne wherof sholde it growe?**
Then from what should virginity grow?
- 73 **Poul dorste nat comanden, atte leeste,**
In any case, Paul dared not command
- 74 **A thyng of which his maister yaf noon heeste.**
A thing of which his master gave no command.
- 75 **The dart is set up for virginitee;**
The prize is set up for virginity;
- 76 **Cacche whoso may, who renneth best lat see.**
Catch it whoever can, let's see who runs best.
- 77 **But this word is nat taken of every wight,**
But this word does not apply to every person,
- 78 **But ther as God lust gyve it of his myght.**
But where God desires to give it by his power.
- 79 **I woot wel that th' apostel was a mayde;**
I know well that the apostle was a virgin;
- 80 **But nathelees, thogh that he wroot and sayde**
But nonetheless, though he wrote and said

- 81 **He wolde that every wight were swich as he,**
He would that every person were such as he,
- 82 **Al nys but conseil to virginitee.**
All is nothing but advice to (adopt) virginity.
- 83 **And for to been a wyf he yaf me leve**
And he gave me leave to be a wife
- 84 **Of indulgence; so nys it no repreve**
By explicit permission; so it is not blameful
- 85 **To wedde me, if that my make dye,**
To wed me, if my mate should die,
- 86 **Withouten excepcion of bigamye.**
Without objection on the grounds of bigamy.
- 87 **Al were it good no womman for to touche --**
Although it would be good to touch no woman --
- 88 **He mente as in his bed or in his couche,**
He meant in his bed or in his couch,
- 89 **For peril is bothe fyr and tow t' assemble;**
For it is perilous to assemble both fire and flax;
- 90 **Ye knowe what this ensample may resemble.**
You know what this example may apply to.
- 91 **This is al and som: he heeld virginitee**
This is the sum of it: he held virginity
- 92 **Moore parfit than weddyng in freletee.**
More perfect than wedding in weakness.
- 93 **Freletee clepe I, but if that he and she**
Weakness I call it, unless he and she
- 94 **Wolde leden al hir lyf in chastitee.**
Would lead all their life in chastity.
- 95 **I graunte it wel; I have noon envie,**
I grant it well; I have no envy,
- 96 **Thogh maydenhede preferre bigamye.**
Though maidenhood may have precedence over
a second marriage.
- 97 **It liketh hem to be clene, body and goost;**
It pleases them to be clean, body and spirit;
- 98 **Of myn estaat I nyl nat make no boost,**
Of my state I will make no boast,
- 99 **For wel ye knowe, a lord in his houshold,**
For well you know, a lord in his household,

100 **He nath nat every vessel al of gold;**
 He has not every utensil all of gold;
 101 **Somme been of tree, and doon hir lord servyse.**
 Some are of wood, and do their lord service.
 102 **God clepeth folk to hym in sondry wyse,**
 God calls folk to him in various ways,
 103 **And everich hath of God a propre yifte --**
 And each one has of God an individual gift --
 104 **Som this, som that, as hym liketh shifte.**
 Some this, some that, as it pleases Him to
 provide.

105 **Virginitee is greet perfeccion,**
 Virginity is great perfection,
 106 **And continence eek with devocion,**
 And continence also with devotion,
 107 **But Crist, that of perfeccion is welle,**
 But Christ, who is the source of perfection,
 108 **Bad nat every wight he sholde go selle**
 Did not command that every one should go sell
 109 **Al that he hadde, and gyve it to the poore,**
 All that he had, and give it to the poor,
 110 **And in swich wise folwe hym and his foore.**
 And in such wise follow him and his footsteps.
 111 **He spak to hem that wolde lyve parfitly;**
 He spoke to those who would live perfectly;
 112 **And lordynges, by youre leve, that am nat I.**
 And gentlemen, by your leave, I am not that.
 113 **I wol bistowe the flour of al myn age**
 I will bestow the flower of all my age
 114 **In the actes and in fruyt of mariage.**
 In the acts and in fruit of marriage.

115 **Telle me also, to what conclusion**
 Tell me also, to what purpose
 116 **Were membres maad of generacion,**
 Were members of generation made,
 117 **And of so parfit wys a [wright] ywrought?**
 And by so perfectly wise a Workman wrought?
 118 **Trusteth right wel, they were nat maad for
 noght.**

- Trust right well, they were not made for nothing.
 119 **Glose whoso wole, and seye bothe up and doun**
 Interpret whoever will, and say both up and down
- 120 **That they were maked for purgacioun**
 That they were made for purgation
- 121 **Of uryne, and oure bothe thynges smale**
 Of urine, and both our small things
- 122 **Were eek to knowe a femele from a male,**
 Were also to know a female from a male,
- 123 **And for noon oother cause -- say ye no?**
 And for no other cause -- do you say no?
- 124 **The experience woot wel it is noght so.**
 The experience knows well it is not so.
- 125 **So that the clerkes be nat with me wrothe,**
 Provided that the clerks be not angry with me,
- 126 **I sey this: that they maked ben for bothe;**
 I say this: that they are made for both;
- 127 **That is to seye, for office and for ese**
 That is to say, for urination and for ease
- 128 **Of engendrure, ther we nat God displese.**
 Of procreation, in which we do not displease
- God.
- 129 **Why sholde men elles in hir bookes sette**
 Why else should men set in their books
- 130 **That man shal yelde to his wyf hire dette?**
 That man shall pay to his wife her debt?
- 131 **Now wherwith sholde he make his paiement,**
 Now with what should he make his payment,
- 132 **If he ne used his sely instrument?**
 If he did not use his blessed instrument?
- 133 **Thanne were they maad upon a creature**
 Then were they made upon a creature
- 134 **To purge uryne, and eek for engendrure.**
 To purge urine, and also for procreation.
- 135 **But I seye noght that every wight is holde,**
 But I say not that every person is required,
- 136 **That hath swich harneys as I to yow tolde,**
 That has such equipment as I to you told,
- 137 **To goon and usen hem in engendrure.**

- To go and use them in procreation.
- 138 **Thanne sholde men take of chastitee no cure.**
Then should men have no regard for chastity.
- 139 **Crist was a mayde and shapen as a man,**
Christ was a virgin and shaped like a man,
- 140 **And many a seint, sith that the world bigan;**
And many a saint, since the world began;
- 141 **Yet lyved they evere in parfit chastitee.**
Yet lived they ever in perfect chastity.
- 142 **I nyl envye no virginitee.**
I will envy no virginity.
- 143 **Lat hem be breed of pured whete-seed,**
Let them be bread of pure wheat-seed,
- 144 **And lat us wyves hoten barly-breed;**
And let us wives be called barley-bread;
- 145 **And yet with barly-breed, Mark telle kan,**
And yet with barley-bread, Mark can tell it,
- 146 **Oure Lord Jhesu refressed many a man.**
Our Lord Jesus refreshed many a man.
- 147 **In swich estaat as God hath cleped us**
In such estate as God has called us
- 148 **I wol persevere; I nam nat precius.**
I will persevere; I am not fussy.
- 149 **In wyfhod I wol use myn instrument**
In wifhood I will use my instrument
- 150 **As frely as my Makere hath it sent.**
As freely as my Maker has it sent.
- 151 **If I be daungerous, God yeve me sorwe!**
If I be niggardly, God give me sorrow!
- 152 **Myn housbonde shal it have bothe eve and
morwe,**
My husband shall have it both evenings and
mornings,
- 153 **Whan that hym list come forth and paye his
dette.**
When it pleases him to come forth and pay his
debt.
- 154 **An housbonde I wol have -- I wol nat lette --**
A husband I will have -- I will not desist --
- 155 **Which shal be bothe my dettour and my thral,**

- 156 **Who shall be both my debtor and my slave,
And have his tribulacion withal**
And have his suffering also
- 157 **Upon his flessch, whil that I am his wyf.**
Upon his flesh, while I am his wife.
- 158 **I have the power durynge al my lyf**
I have the power during all my life
- 159 **Upon his propre body, and noght he.**
Over his own body, and not he.
- 160 **Right thus the Apostel tolde it unto me,**
Right thus the Apostle told it unto me,
- 161 **And bad oure housbondes for to love us weel.**
And commanded our husbands to love us well.
- 162 **Al this sentence me liketh every deel" --**
All this sentence pleases me every bit" --
- 163 **Up stirte the Pardoner, and that anon;**
Up sprang the Pardoner, and that at once;
- 164 **"Now, dame," quod he, "by God and by Seint
John!**
"Now, madam," he said, "by God and by Saint
John!
- 165 **Ye been a noble prechour in this cas.**
You are a noble preacher in this case.
- 166 **I was aboute to wedde a wyf; allas!**
I was about to wed a wife; alas!
- 167 **What sholde I bye it on my flessch so deere?**
Why should I pay for it so dearly on my flesh?
- 168 **Yet hadde I levere wedde no wyf to-yeere!"**
Yet would I rather wed no wife this year!"
- 169 **"Abyde!" quod she, "my tale is nat bigonne.**
"Wait!" she said, "my tale is not begun.
- 170 **Nay, thou shalt drynken of another tonne,**
Nay, thou shalt drink from another barrel,
- 171 **Er that I go, shal savoure wors than ale.**
Before I go, which shall taste worse than ale.
- 172 **And whan that I have toold thee forth my tale**
And when I have told thee forth my tale
- 173 **Of tribulacion in mariage,**
Of suffering in marriage,

- 174 **Of which I am expert in al myn age --**
Of which I am expert in all my life --
- 175 **This is to seyn, myself have been the whippe --**
This is to say, myself have been the whip --
- 176 **Than maystow chese wheither thou wolt sippe**
Than may thou choose whether thou will sip
- 177 **Of thilke tonne that I shal abroche.**
Of that same barrel that I shall open.
- 178 **Be war of it, er thou to ny approche;**
Beware of it, before thou too near approach;
- 179 **For I shal telle ensamples mo than ten.**
For I shall tell examples more than ten.
- 180 **`Whoso that nyl be war by othere men,**
`Whoever will not be warned by (the examples of)
other men,
- 181 **By hym shul othere men corrected be.'**
Shall be an example by which other men shall be
corrected.'
- 182 **The same wordes writeth Ptholomee;**
The same words writes Ptholomy;
- 183 **Rede in his Almageste, and take it there."**
Read in his Almagest, and take it there."
- 184 **"Dame, I wolde praye yow, if youre wyl it were,"**
"Madam, I would pray you, if it were your will,"
- 185 **Seyde this Pardoner, "as ye bigan,**
Said this Pardoner, "as you began,
- 186 **Telle forth youre tale, spareth for no man,**
Tell forth your tale, refrain for no man,
- 187 **And teche us yonge men of youre praktike."**
And teach us young men of your practice."
- 188 **"Gladly," quod she, "sith it may yow like;**
"Gladly," she said, "since it may please you;
- 189 **But yet I praye to al this compaignye,**
But yet I pray to all this company,
- 190 **If that I speke after my fantasye,**
If I speak according to my fancy,
- 191 **As taketh not agrief of that I seye,**
Do not be annoyed by what I say,

- 192 **For myn entente nys but for to pleye.**
For my intention is only to amuse.
- 193 **Now, sire, now wol I telle forth my tale.**
Now, sir, now will I tell forth my tale.
- 194 **As evere moote I drynken wyn or ale,**
As ever may I drink wine or ale,
- 195 **I shal seye sooth; tho housbondes that I hadde,**
I shall speak the truth; those husbands that I had,
- 196 **As thre of hem were goode, and two were
badde.**
Three of them were good, and two were bad.
- 197 **The thre were goode men, and riche, and olde;**
The three were good men, and rich, and old;
- 198 **Unnethe myghte they the statut holde**
Hardly might they the statute hold (pay the debt)
- 199 **In which that they were bounden unto me.**
In which they were bound unto me.
- 200 **Ye woot wel what I meene of this, pardee!**
You know well what I mean of this, by God!
- 201 **As help me God, I laughe whan I thynke**
So help me God, I laugh when I think
- 202 **How pitously a-nyght I made hem swynke!**
How pitifully at night I made them work!
- 203 **And, by my fey, I tolde of it no stoor.**
And, by my faith, I set no store by it.
- 204 **They had me yeven hir lond and hir tresoor;**
They had given me their land and their treasure;
- 205 **Me neded nat do lenger diligence**
I needed not work hard any longer
- 206 **To wynne hir love, or doon hem reverence.**
To win their love, or do them reverence.
- 207 **They loved me so wel, by God above,**
They loved me so well, by God above,
- 208 **That I ne tolde no deyntee of hir love!**
That I reckoned little of their love!
- 209 **A wys womman wol bisye hire evere in oon**
A wise woman will be constantly busy
- 210 **To gete hire love, ye, ther as she hath noon.**
To get their love, yes, when she has none.

- 211 **But sith I hadde hem hoolly in myn hond,**
But since I had them wholly in my hand,
- 212 **And sith they hadde me yeven al hir lond,**
And since they had me given all their land,
- 213 **What sholde I taken keep hem for to plesse,**
Why should I take care to please them,
- 214 **But it were for my profit and myn ese?**
Unless it were for my profit and my pleasure?
- 215 **I sette hem so a-werke, by my fey,**
I set them so to work, by my faith,
- 216 **That many a nyght they songen `Weilawaye!'**
That many a night they sang `Woe is me!'
- 217 **The bacon was nat fet for hem, I trowe,**
The bacon was not fetched for them, I believe,
- 218 **That som men han in Essex at Dunmowe.**
That some men have in Essex at Dunmowe.
- 219 **I governed hem so wel, after my lawe,**
I governed them so well, according to my law,
- 220 **That ech of hem ful blisful was and fawe**
That each of them was very blissful and eager
- 221 **To brynge me gaye thynges fro the fayre.**
To bring me gay things from the fair.
- 222 **They were ful glad whan I spak to hem faire,**
They were very glad when I spoke to them
pleasantly,
- 223 **For, God it woot, I chidde hem spitously.**
For, God knows it, I cruelly scolded them.
- 224 **Now herkneth hou I baar me proprely,**
Now listen how well I conducted myself,
- 225 **Ye wise wyves, that kan understonde.**
You wise wives, that can understand.
- 226 **Thus shulde ye speke and bere hem wrong on honde,**
Thus should you speak and accuse them
wrongfully,
- 227 **For half so boldely kan ther no man**
For half so boldly can there no man
- 228 **Swere and lyen, as a womman kan.**
Swear and lie, as a woman can.

- 229 **I sey nat this by wyves that been wyse,**
I do not say this concerning wives that are wise,
- 230 **But if it be whan they hem mysavyse.**
Unless it be when they are ill advised.
- 231 **A wys wyf, if that she kan hir good,**
A wise wife, if she knows what is good for her,
- 232 **Shal beren hym on honde the cow is wood,**
Shall deceive him by swearing the bird is crazy,
- 233 **And take witnessse of hir owene mayde,**
And prove it by taking witness of her own maid
- 234 **Of hir assent. But herkneth how I sayde:**
Who is in league with her. But listen how I spoke:
- 235 **`Sire olde kaynard, is this thyn array?**
`Sir old doddering fool, is this thy doing?
- 236 **Why is my neighebores wyf so gay?**
Why is my neighbor's wife so gay?
- 237 **She is honoured overal ther she gooth;**
She is honored everywhere she goes;
- 238 **I sitte at hoom; I have no thrifty clooth.**
I sit at home; I have no decent clothing.
- 239 **What dostow at my neighebores hous?**
What dost thou at my neighbor's house?
- 240 **Is she so fair? Artow so amorous?**
Is she so fair? Art thou so amorous?
- 241 **What rowne ye with oure mayde? Benedicite!**
What do you whisper with our maid? Bless me!
- 242 **Sire olde lecchour, lat thy japes be!**
Sir old lecher, let thy tricks be!
- 243 **And if I have a gossib or a freend,**
And if I have a close friend or an acquaintance,
- 244 **Withouten gilt, thou chidest as a feend,**
Innocently, thou scold like a fiend,
- 245 **If that I walke or pleye unto his hous!**
If I walk or go unto his house to amuse myself!
- 246 **Thou comest hoom as dronken as a mous,**
Thou comest home as drunk as a mouse,
- 247 **And prechest on thy bench, with yvel preef!**
And preach on thy bench, bad luck to you!
- 248 **Thou seist to me it is a greet meschief**

- 249 **To wedde a povre womman, for costage;**
 To wed a poor woman, because of expense;
- 250 **And if that she be riche, of heigh parage,**
 And if she be rich, of high birth,
- 251 **Thanne seistow that it is a tormentrie**
 Then thou sayest that it is a torment
- 252 **To soffre hire pride and hire malencolie.**
 To put up with her pride and her angry moods.
- 253 **And if that she be fair, thou verray knave,**
 And if she be fair, thou utter knave,
- 254 **Thou seyst that every holour wol hire have;**
 Thou sayest that every lecher wants to have her;
- 255 **She may no while in chastitee abyde,**
 She can not remain chaste for any length of time,
- 256 **That is assailed upon ech a syde.**
 Who is assailed on every side.
- 257 **Thou seyst som folk desiren us for richesse,**
 Thou sayest some folk desire us for riches,
- 258 **Somme for oure shap, and somme for oure
 fairnesse,**
 Some for our shape, and some for our fairness,
- 259 **And som for she kan outhur synge or daunce,**
 And one because she can either sing or dance,
- 260 **And som for gentilnesse and daliaunce;**
 And some because of noble descent and
 flirtatious talk;
- 261 **Som for hir handes and hir armes smale;**
 Some because of their hands and their slender
 arms;
- 262 **Thus goth al to the devel, by thy tale.**
 Thus goes all to the devil, according to you.
- 263 **Thou seyst men may nat kepe a castel wal,**
 Thou sayest men may not defend a castle wall,
- 264 **It may so longe assailed been overal.**
 It may so long be assailed on all sides.
- 265 **And if that she be foul, thou seist that she**
 And if she be ugly, thou sayest that she
- 266 **Coveiteth every man that she may se,**

- Covets every man that she may see,
 267 **For as a spaniel she wol on hym lepe,**
 For like a spaniel she will on him leap,
 268 **Til that she fynde som man hire to chepe.**
 Until she find some man to buy (take) her.
 269 **Ne noon so grey goos gooth ther in the lake**
 Nor does any goose go there in the lake, no
 matter how drab,
 270 **As, seistow, wol been withoute make.**
 That, thou sayest, will be without a mate.
 271 **And seyst it is an hard thyng for to welde**
 And thou sayest it is a hard thing to control
 272 **A thyng that no man wole, his thankes, helde.**
 A thing that no man will, willingly, hold.
 273 **Thus seistow, lorel, whan thow goost to bedde,**
 Thus sayest thou, scoundrel, when thou goest to
 bed,
 274 **And that no wys man nedeth for to wedde,**
 And that no wise man needs to wed,
 275 **Ne no man that entendeth unto hevne.**
 Nor any man that hopes (to go) to heaven.
 276 **With wilde thonder-dynt and firy levne**
 With wild thunder-bolt and fiery lightning
 277 **Moote thy welked nekke be tobroke!**
 May thy wrinkled neck be broken in pieces!

 278 **Thow seyst that droppying houses, and eek**
smoke,
 Thou sayest that leaky houses, and also smoke,
 279 **And chidyng wyves maken men to flee**
 And scolding wives make men to flee
 280 **Out of hir owene houses; a, benedicitee!**
 Out of their own houses; ah, bless me!
 281 **What eyleth swich an old man for to chide?**
 What ails such an old man to chide like that?

 282 **Thow seyst we wyves woloure vices hide**
 Thou sayest we wives will hide our vices
 283 **Til we be fast, and thanne we wol hem shewe --**
 Until we be securely tied (in marriage), and then
 we will them show --

- 284 **Wel may that be a proverbe of a shrewe!**
Well may that be a proverb of a scoundrel!
- 285 **Thou seist that oxen, asses, hors, and houndes,**
Thou sayest that oxen, asses, horses, and
houndes,
- 286 **They been assayed at diverse stoundes;**
They are tried out a number of times;
- 287 **Bacyns, lavours, er that men hem bye,**
Basins, wash bowls, before men them buy,
- 288 **Spoones and stooles, and al swich
housbondrye,**
Spoons and stools, and all such household items,
- 289 **And so been pottes, clothes, and array;**
And so are pots, clothes, and adornments;
- 290 **But folk of wyves maken noon assay,**
But folk of wives make no trial,
- 291 **Til they be wedded -- olde dotard shrewe! --**
Until they are wedded -- old doddering scoundrel!
-
- 292 **And thanne, seistow, we woloure vices shewe.**
And then, sayest thou, we will show our vices.
- 293 **Thou seist also that it displeseth me**
Thou sayest also that it displeases me
- 294 **But if that thou wolt preyse my beautee,**
Unless thou will praise my beauty,
- 295 **And but thou poure alwey upon my face,**
And unless thou peer always upon my face,
- 296 **And clepe me "faire dame" in every place.**
And call me "dear lady" in every place.
- 297 **And but thou make a feeste on thilke day**
And unless thou make a feast on that same day
- 298 **That I was born, and make me fressh and gay;**
That I was born, and make me happy and gay;
- 299 **And but thou do to my norice honour,**
And unless thou do honor to my nurse,
- 300 **And to my chamberere withinne my bour,**
And to my chambermaid within my bedchamber,
- 301 **And to my fadres folk and his allyes --**
And to my father's folk and his allies --

- 302 **Thus seistow, olde barel-ful of lyes!**
Thus sayest thou, old barreland of lies!
- 303 **And yet of oure apprentice Janekyn,**
And yet of our apprentice Janekin,
- 304 **For his criske heer, shynynge as gold so fyn,**
Because of his curly hair, shining like gold so fine,
- 305 **And for he squiereth me bothe up and doun,**
And because he familiarly attends me
everywhere,
- 306 **Yet hastow caught a fals suspecioun.**
Yet hast thou caught a false suspicion.
- 307 **I wol hym noght, thogh thou were deed
tomorwe!**
I do not want him, though thou were dead
tomorrow!
- 308 **But tel me this: why hydestow, with sorwe,**
But tell me this: why hidest thou, bad luck to you,
- 309 **The keyes of thy cheste away fro me?**
The keys of thy strongbox away from me?
- 310 **It is my good as wel as thyn, pardee!**
It is my property as well as thine, by God!
- 311 **What, wenestow make an ydiot of oure dame?**
What, think thou to make a fool of the lady of the
house?
- 312 **Now by that lord that called is Seint Jame,**
Now by that lord that is called Saint James,
- 313 **Thou shalt nat bothe, thogh that thou were
wood,**
Thou shalt not both, though thou were crazy with
anger,
- 314 **Be maister of my body and of my good;**
Be master of my body and of my property;
- 315 **That oon thou shalt forgo, maugree thyne yen.**
One of them thou must give up, despite anything
you can do.
- 316 **What helpith it of me to enquere or spyen?**
What helps it to inquire about me or spy?
- 317 **I trowe thou woldest loke me in thy chiste!**
I believe thou would lock me in thy strongbox!

- 318 **Thou sholdest seye, "Wyf, go wher thee liste;**
 Thou should say, "Wife, go where you please;
- 319 **Taak youre disport; I wol nat leve no talys.**
 Enjoy yourself; I will not believe any gossip.
- 320 **I knowe yow for a trewe wyf, dame Alys."**
 I know you for a true wife, dame Alys."
- 321 **We love no man that taketh kep or charge**
 We love no man who takes notice or concern
 about
- 322 **Wher that we goon; we wol ben at oure large.**
 Where we go; we will be free (to do as we wish).
- 323 **Of alle men yblessed moot he be,**
 Of all men blessed may he be,
- 324 **The wise astrologien, Daun Ptholome,**
 The wise astrologer, Dan Ptolemy,
- 325 **That seith this proverbe in his Almageste:**
 Who says this proverb in his Almagest:
- 326 **"Of alle men his wysdom is the hyste**
 "Of all men his wisdom is the highest
- 327 **That rekketh nevere who hath the world in honde."**
 Who never cares who has the world in his
 control."
- 328 **By this proverbe thou shalt understonde,**
 By this proverb thou shalt understand,
- 329 **Have thou ynogh, what thar thee recche or care**
 If thou have enough, why should thou take note
 or care
- 330 **How myrily that othere folkes fare?**
 How merrily other folks fare?
- 331 **For, certeyn, olde dotard, by youre leve,**
 For, certainly, old senile fool, by your leave,
- 332 **Ye shul have queynte right ynogh at eve.**
 You shall have pudendum right enough at eve.
- 333 **He is to greet a nygard that wolde werne**
 He is too great a miser that would refuse
- 334 **A man to lighte a candle at his lanterne;**
 A man to light a candle at his lantern;
- 335 **He shal have never the lasse light, pardee.**

- He shall have never the less light, by God.
 336 **Have thou ynogh, thee thar nat pleyne thee.**
 If thou have enough, thou need not complain.
- 337 **Thou seyst also, that if we make us gay**
 Thou sayest also, that if we make ourselves gay
 338 **With clothyng, and with precious array,**
 With clothing, and with precious adornments,
 339 **That it is peril of oure chastitee;**
 That it is dangerous to our chastity;
 340 **And yet -- with sorwe! -- thou most enforce**
thee,
 And yet -- bad luck to thee! -- thou must reinforce
 thy argument,
- 341 **And seye thise wordes in the Apostles name:**
 And say these words in the Apostle's name:
 342 **"In habit maad with chastitee and shame**
 "In clothing made with chastity and shame
 343 **Ye wommen shul apparaille yow," quod he,**
 You women shall apparel yourselves," he said,
 344 **"And noight in tressed heer and gay perree,**
 "And not in carefully arranged hair and gay
 precious stones,
 345 **As perles, ne with gold, ne clothes riche."**
 Such as pearls, nor with gold, nor rich cloth."
 346 **After thy text, ne after thy rubriche,**
 In accordance with thy text, nor in accord with thy
 interpretation,
- 347 **I wol nat wirche as muchel as a gnat.**
 I will not do as much as a gnat.
- 348 **Thou seydest this, that I was lyk a cat;**
 Thou said this, that I was like a cat;
 349 **For whoso wolde senge a cattes skyn,**
 For if anyone would singe a cat's skin,
 350 **Thanne wolde the cat wel dwellen in his in;**
 Then would the cat well stay in his dwelling;
 351 **And if the cattes skyn be slyk and gay,**
 And if the cat's skin be sleek and gay,
 352 **She wol nat dwelle in house half a day,**
 She will not stay in house half a day,

- 353 **But forth she wole, er any day be dawed,**
But forth she will (go), before any day be dawned,
- 354 **To shewe hir skyn and goon a-caterwawed.**
To show her skin and go yowling like a cat in
heat.
- 355 **This is to seye, if I be gay, sire shrewe,**
This is to say, if I be well dressed, sir scoundrel,
- 356 **I wol renne out my borel for to shewe.**
I will run out to show my poor clothes.
- 357 **Sire olde fool, what helpeth thee to spyen?**
Sir old fool, what help is it for thee to spy?
- 358 **Thogh thou preye Argus with his hundred yen**
Though thou pray Argus with his hundred eyes
- 359 **To be my warde-cors, as he kan best,**
To be my bodyguard, as he best knows how,
- 360 **In feith, he shal nat kepe me but me lest;**
In faith, he shall not keep me but as I please;
- 361 **Yet koude I make his berd, so moot I thee!**
Yet could I deceive him, as I may prosper!
- 362 **Thou seydest eek that ther been thynges thre,**
Thou said also that there are three things,
- 363 **The whiche thynges troublen al this erthe,**
The which things trouble all this earth,
- 364 **And that no wight may endure the ferthe.**
And that no one can endure the fourth.
- 365 **O leeve sire shrewe, Jhesu shorte thy lyf!**
O dear sir scoundrel, Jesus shorten thy life!
- 366 **Yet prechestow and seyst an hateful wyf**
Yet thou prechest and sayest a hateful wife
- 367 **Yrekened is for oon of these meschances.**
Is reckoned as one of these misfortunes.
- 368 **Been ther none othere maner resemblances**
Are there no other sorts of comparisons
- 369 **That ye may likne youre parables to,**
That you can use in your sayings,
- 370 **But if a sely wyf be oon of tho?**
Without a poor wife's being one of them?

- 371 **Thou liknest eek wommenes love to helle,**
 Thou also compare women's love to hell,
- 372 **To bareyne lond, ther water may nat dwelle.**
 To barren land, where water may not remain.
- 373 **Thou liknest it also to wilde fyr;**
 Thou compare it also to Greek (inextinguishable)
 fire;
- 374 **The moore it brenneth, the moore it hath desir**
 The more it burns, the more it has desire
- 375 **To consume every thyng that brent wole be.**
 To consume every thing that will be burned.
- 376 **Thou seyest, right as wormes shende a tree,**
 Thou sayest, just as worms destroy a tree,
- 377 **Right so a wyf destroyeth hire housbonde;**
 Right so a wife destroys her husband;
- 378 **This knowe they that been to wyves bonde.'**
 This know they who are bound to wives.'
- 379 **Lordynges, right thus, as ye have understonde,**
 Gentlemen, right thus, as you have heard,
- 380 **Baar I stifly myne olde housbondes on honde**
 I firmly swore to my old husbands
- 381 **That thus they seyden in hir dronkenesse;**
 That thus they said in their drunkenness;
- 382 **And al was fals, but that I took witnessse**
 And all was false, but I took witness
- 383 **On Janekyn, and on my nece also.**
 On Janekin, and on my niece also.
- 384 **O Lord! The peyne I dide hem and the wo,**
 O Lord! The pain I did them and the woe,
- 385 **Ful giltelees, by Goddes sweete pyne!**
 Entirely guiltless (they were), by God's sweet
 pain!
- 386 **For as an hors I koude byte and whyne.**
 For like a horse I could bite and whinny.
- 387 **I koude pleyne, and yit was in the gilt,**
 I could complain, and yet was in the wrong,
- 388 **Or elles often tyme hadde I been spilt.**
 Or else many times had I been ruined.
- 389 **Whoso that first to mille comth, first grynt;**

- Whoever first comes to the mill, first grinds;
 390 **I pleyned first, so was oure werre ystynt.**
 I complained first, so was our war ended.
- 391 **They were ful glade to excuse hem blyve**
 They were very glad to excuse themselves
 quickly
- 392 **Of thyng of which they nevere agilte hir lyve.**
 Of things of which they were never guilty in their
 lives.
- 393 **Of wenches wolde I beren hem on honde,**
 Of wenches would I falsely accuse them,
- 394 **Whan that for syk unnethes myghte they stonde.**
 When for sickness they could hardly stand.
- 395 **Yet tikled I his herte, for that he**
 Yet I tickled his heart, for he
- 396 **Wende that I hadde of hym so greet chiertee!**
 Believed that I had of him so great affection!
- 397 **I swoor that al my walkyng out by nyghte**
 I swore that all my walking out by night
- 398 **Was for t' espye wenches that he dighte;**
 Was to spy out wenches with whom he had
 intercourse;
- 399 **Under that colour hadde I many a myrthe.**
 Under that pretense I had many a mirth.
- 400 **For al swich wit is yeven us in oure byrthe;**
 For all such wit is given us in our birth;
- 401 **Deceite, wepyng, spynnyng God hath yive**
 Deceit, weeping, spinning God has given
- 402 **To wommen kyndely, whil that they may lyve.**
 To women naturally, while they may live.
- 403 **And thus of o thyng I avaunte me:**
 And thus of one thing I boast:
- 404 **Atte ende I hadde the bettre in ech degree,**
 At the end I had the better in every way,
- 405 **By sleighte, or force, or by som maner thyng,**
 By trickery, or force, or by some such thing,
- 406 **As by continueel murmur or grucchyng.**
 As by continual grumbling or grouching.

407 **Namely abedde hadden they meschaunce:**
 Especially in bed they had misfortune:
 408 **Ther wolde I chide and do hem no plesaunce;**
 There would I scold and do them no pleasure;
 409 **I wolde no lenger in the bed abyde,**
 I would no longer in the bed abide,
 410 **If that I felte his arm over my syde,**
 If I felt his arm over my side,
 411 **Til he had maad his raunson unto me;**
 Until he had paid his penalty to me;
 412 **Thanne wolde I suffre hym do his nycetee.**
 Then would I allow him to do his foolishness.
 413 **And therefore every man this tale I telle,**
 And therefore this tale I tell to every man,
 414 **Wynne whoso may, for al is for to selle;**
 Anyone can profit, for everything is for sale;
 415 **With empty hand men may none haukes lure.**
 One can lure no hawks with an empty hand.
 416 **For wynnyng wolde I al his lust endure,**
 For profit I would endure all his lust,
 417 **And make me a feyned appetit;**
 And make me a feigned appetite;
 418 **And yet in bacon hadde I nevere delit.**
 And yet in bacon (old meat) I never had delight.
 419 **That made me that evere I wolde hem chide,**
 That made me so that I would always scold them,
 420 **For thogh the pope hadde seten hem biside,**
 For though the pope had sat beside them,
 421 **I wolde nat spare hem at hir owene bord,**
 I would not spare them at their own table,
 422 **For, by my trouthe, I quitte hem word for word.**
 For, by my troth, I paid them back word for word.
 423 **As helpe me verray God omnipotent,**
 As help me true God omnipotent,
 424 **Though I right now sholde make my testament,**
 Though I right now should make my will,
 425 **I ne owe hem nat a word that it nys quit.**
 I owe them not one word that has not been
 avenged.

426 **I broghte it so aboute by my wit**

- I brought it so about by my wit
 427 **That they moste yeve it up, as for the beste,**
 That they had to give it up, as the best they could
 do,
 428 **Or elles hadde we nevere been in reste;**
 Or else had we never been at peace;
 429 **For thogh he looked as a wood leon,**
 For though he looked like a furious lion,
 430 **Yet sholde he faille of his conclusion.**
 Yet should he fail to attain his goal.
- 431 **Thanne wolde I seye, `Goode lief, taak keep**
 Then I would say, `Sweetheart, see
 432 **How mekely looketh Wilkyn,oure sheep!**
 How meekly looks Willy, our sheep!
 433 **Com neer, my spouse, lat me ba thy cheke!**
 Come near, my spouse, let me kiss thy cheek!
 434 **Ye sholde been al pacient and meke,**
 You should be all patient and meek,
 435 **And han a sweete spiced conscience,**
 And have a sweet tender disposition,
 436 **Sith ye so preche of Jobes paciense.**
 Since you so preach of Job's patience.
 437 **Suffreth alwey, syn ye so wel kan preche;**
 Suffer always, since you so well can preach;
 438 **And but ye do, certein we shal yow teche**
 And unless you do, certainly we shall teach you
 439 **That it is fair to have a wyf in pees.**
 That it is fair to have a wife in peace.
 440 **Oon of us two moste bowen, doutelees,**
 One of us two must bow, doubtless,
 441 **And sith a man is moore resonable**
 And since a man is more reasonable
 442 **Than womman is, ye moste been suffrable.**
 Than a woman is, you must be able to bear
 suffering.
 443 **What eyleth yow to grucche thus and grone?**
 What ails you to grouch thus and groan?
 444 **Is it for ye wolde have my queynte allone?**
 Is it because you want to have my pudendum all

to yourself?

445 **Wy, taak it al! Lo, have it every deel!**

Why, take it all! Lo, have it every bit!

446 **Peter! I shrewe yow, but ye love it weel;**

By Saint Peter! I would curse you, if you did not love it well;

447 **For if I wolde selle my bele chose,**

For if I would sell my 'pretty thing,'

448 **I koude walke as fressh as is a rose;**

I could walk as fresh (newly clothed) as is a rose;

449 **But I wol kepe it for youre owene tooth.**

But I will keep it for your own pleasure.

450 **Ye be to blame, by God! I sey yow sooth.'**

You are to blame, by God! I tell you the truth.'

451 **Swiche manere wordes hadde we on honde.**

Such sorts of words we had in hand.

452 **Now wol I speken of my fourthe housbonde.**

Now will I speak of my fourth husband.

453 **My fourthe housbonde was a revelour --**

My fourth husband was a reveller --

454 **This is to seyn, he hadde a paramour --**

This is to say, he had a mistress --

455 **And I was yong and ful of ragerye,**

And I was young and full of playfulness,

456 **Stibourn and strong, and joly as a pye.**

Stubborn and strong, and jolly as a magpie.

457 **How koude I daunce to an harpe smale,**

How well I could dance to a small harp,

458 **And synge, ywis, as any nyghtyngale,**

And sing, indeed, like any nightingale,

459 **Whan I had dronke a draughte of sweete wyn!**

When I had drunk a draft of sweet wine!

460 **Metellius, the foule cherl, the swyn,**

Metellius, the foul churl, the swine,

461 **That with a staf birafte his wyf hir lyf,**

Who with a staff deprived his wife of her life,

462 **For she drank wyn, thogh I hadde been his wyf,**

Because she drank wine, if I had been his wife,

463 **He sholde nat han daunted me fro drynke!**

- He should not have frightened me away from
drink!
- 464 **And after wyn on Venus moste I thynke,**
And after wine on Venus must I think,
- 465 **For al so siker as cold engendreth hayl,**
For as surely as cold engenders hail,
- 466 **A likerous mouth moste han a likerous tayl.**
A gluttonous mouth must have a lecherous tail.
- 467 **In wommen vinolent is no defence --**
In drunken women there is no defense --
- 468 **This knowen lecchours by experience.**
This lechers know by experience.
- 469 **But -- Lord Crist! -- whan that it remembreth me**
But -- Lord Christ! -- when I remember
- 470 **Upon my yowthe, and on my jolitee,**
My youth, and my gaiety,
- 471 **It tikleth me aboute myn herte roote.**
It tickles me to the bottom of my heart.
- 472 **Unto this day it dooth myn herte boote**
Unto this day it does my heart good
- 473 **That I have had my world as in my tyme.**
That I have had my world in my time.
- 474 **But age, allas, that al wole evenyyme,**
But age, alas, that all will poison,
- 475 **Hath me biraft my beautee and my pith.**
Has deprived me of my beauty and my vigor.
- 476 **Lat go. Farewel! The devel go therwith!**
Let it go. Farewell! The devil go with it!
- 477 **The flour is goon; ther is namoore to telle;**
The flour is gone; there is no more to tell;
- 478 **The bren, as I best kan, now moste I selle;**
The bran, as I best can, now I must sell;
- 479 **But yet to be right myrie wol I fonde.**
But yet I will try to be right merry.
- 480 **Now wol I tellen of my fourthe housbonde.**
Now will I tell of my fourth husband.
- 481 **I seye, I hadde in herte greet despit**
I say, I had in heart great anger
- 482 **That he of any oother had delit.**

- That he had delight in any other.
- 483 **But he was quit, by God and by Seint Joce!**
But he was paid back, by God and by Saint Joce!
- 484 **I made hym of the same wode a croce;**
I made him a cross of the same wood;
- 485 **Nat of my body, in no foul manere,**
Not of my body, in no foul manner,
- 486 **But certeinly, I made folk swich cheere**
But certainly, I treated folk in such a way
- 487 **That in his owene grece I made hym frye**
That I made him fry in his own grease
- 488 **For angre, and for verray jealousye.**
For anger, and for pure jealousy.
- 489 **By God, in erthe I was his purgatorie,**
By God, in earth I was his purgatory,
- 490 **For which I hope his soule be in glorie.**
For which I hope his soul may be in glory.
- 491 **For, God it woot, he sat ful ofte and song,**
For, God knows it, he sat very often and cried out
in pain,
- 492 **Whan that his shoo ful bitterly hym wrong.**
When his shoe very bitterly pinched him.
- 493 **Ther was no wight, save God and he, that wiste,**
There was no person who knew it, save God and
he,
- 494 **In many wise, how soore I hym twiste.**
In many a way, how painfully I tortured him.
- 495 **He deyde whan I cam fro Jerusalem,**
He died when I came from Jerusalem,
- 496 **And lith ygrave under the roode beam,**
And lies buried under the rood beam,
- 497 **Al is his tombe noght so curyus**
Although his tomb is not so elaborate
- 498 **As was the sepulcre of hym Daryus,**
As was the sepulcher of that Darius,
- 499 **Which that Appelles wroghte subtilly;**
Which Appelles wrought skillfully;
- 500 **It nys but wast to burye hym preciously.**
It is nothing but waste to bury him expensively.
- 501 **Lat hym fare wel; God yeve his soule reste!**

- 502 Let him fare well; God give his soul rest!
He is now in his grave and in his cheste.
He is now in his grave and in his casket.
- 503 **Now of my fifthe housbonde wol I telle.**
Now of my fifth husband I will tell.
- 504 **God lete his soule nevere come in helle!**
God let his soul never come in hell!
- 505 **And yet was he to me the mooste shrewe;**
And yet he was to me the greatest scoundrel;
- 506 **That feele I on my ribbes al by rewe,**
That feel I on my ribs one after another,
- 507 **And evere shal unto myn endyng day.**
And ever shall unto my final day.
- 508 **But in oure bed he was so fressh and gay,**
But in our bed he was so lively and gay,
- 509 **And therwithal so wel koude he me glose,**
And moreover he so well could deceive me,
- 510 **Whan that he wolde han my bele chose;**
When he would have my `pretty thing';
- 511 **That thogh he hadde me bete on every bon,**
That though he had beat me on every bone,
- 512 **He koude wynne agayn my love anon.**
He could win back my love straightway.
- 513 **I trowe I loved hym best, for that he**
I believe I loved him best, because he
- 514 **Was of his love daungerous to me.**
Was of his love standoffish to me.
- 515 **We wommen han, if that I shal nat lye,**
We women have, if I shall not lie,
- 516 **In this matere a queynte fantasye:**
In this matter a curious fantasy:
- 517 **Wayte what thyng we may nat lightly have,**
Note that whatever thing we may not easily have,
- 518 **Therafter wol we crie al day and crave.**
We will cry all day and crave for it.
- 519 **Forbede us thyng, and that desiren we;**
Forbid us a thing, and we desire it;
- 520 **Preesse on us faste, and thanne wol we fle.**
Press on us fast, and then will we flee.

- 521 **With daunger oute we al oure chaffare;**
 With niggardliness we spread out all our
 merchandise;
- 522 **Greet prees at market maketh deere ware,**
 A great crowd at the market makes wares
 expensive,
- 523 **And to greet cheep is holde at litel prys:**
 And too great a supply makes them of little value:
- 524 **This knoweth every womman that is wys.**
 Every woman that is wise knows this.
- 525 **My fifthe housbonde -- God his soule blesse! --**
 My fifth husband -- God bless his soul! --
- 526 **Which that I took for love, and no richesse,**
 Whom I took for love, and no riches,
- 527 **He som tyme was a clerk of Oxenford,**
 He was formerly a clerk of Oxford,
- 528 **And hadde left scole, and wente at hom to bord**
 And had left school, and came home to board
- 529 **With my gossib, dwellynge in oure toun;**
 With my close friend, dwelling in our town;
- 530 **God have hir soule! Hir name was Alisoun.**
 God have her soul! Her name was Alisoun.
- 531 **She knew myn herte, and eek my privetee,**
 She knew my heart, and also my secrets,
- 532 **Bet than oure parisshe preest, so moot I thee!**
 Better than our parish priest, as I may prosper!
- 533 **To hire biwreyed I my conseil al.**
 To her I revealed all my secrets.
- 534 **For hadde myn housbonde pissed on a wal,**
 For had my husband pissed on a wall,
- 535 **Or doon a thyng that sholde han cost his lyf,**
 Or done a thing that should have cost his life,
- 536 **To hire, and to another worthy wyf,**
 To her, and to another worthy wife,
- 537 **And to my nece, which that I loved weel,**
 And to my niece, whom I loved well,
- 538 **I wolde han toold his conseil every deel.**
 I would have told every one of his secrets.
- 539 **And so I dide ful often, God it woot,**

- And so I did very often, God knows it,
 540 **That made his face often reed and hoot**
 That made his face often red and hot
 541 **For verray shame, and blamed hymself for he**
 For true shame, and blamed himself because he
 542 **Had toold to me so greet a pryvetee.**
 Had told to me so great a secret.
- 543 **And so bifel that ones in a Lente --**
 And so it happened that once in a Springtime --
 544 **So often tymes I to my gossyb wente,**
 Since frequently I went to visit my close friend,
 545 **For evere yet I loved to be gay,**
 For I always loved to be gay,
 546 **And for to walke in March, Averill, and May,**
 And to walk in March, April, and May,
 547 **Fro hous to hous, to heere sondry talys --**
 From house to house, to hear various bits of
 gossip --
- 548 **That Jankyn clerk, and my gossyb dame Alys,**
 That Jankin the clerk, and my close friend dame
 Alys,
 549 **And I myself, into the feeldes wente.**
 And I myself, into the fields went.
- 550 **Myn housbonde was at Londoun al that Lente;**
 My husband was at London all that Spring;
 551 **I hadde the bettre leyser for to pleye,**
 I had the better opportunity to amuse myself,
 552 **And for to se, and eek for to be seye**
 And to see, and also to be seen
 553 **Of lusty folk. What wiste I wher my grace**
 By amorous folk. What did I know about where
 my good fortune
 554 **Was shapen for to be, or in what place?**
 Was destined to be, or in what place?
 555 **Therefore I made my visitaciouns**
 Therefore I made my visitations
 556 **To vigilies and to processiouns,**
 To religious feasts and to processions,
 557 **To prechyng eek, and to thise pilgrimages,**

- To preaching also, and to these pilgrimages,
 558 **To pleyes of myracles, and to mariages,**
 To plays about miracles, and to marriages,
 559 **And wered upon my gaye scarlet gytes.**
 And wore my gay scarlet robes.
 560 **This wormes, ne this motthes, ne this**
mytes,
 These worms, nor these moths, nor these mites,
 561 **Upon my peril, frete hem never a deel;**
 Upon my peril (I swear), chewed on them never a
 bit;
 562 **And wostow why? For they were used weel.**
 And know thou why? Because they were well
 used.

 563 **Now wol I tellen forth what happed me.**
 Now will I tell forth what happened to me.
 564 **I seye that in the feeldes walked we,**
 I say that in the fields we walked,
 565 **Til trewely we hadde swich daliance,**
 Until truly we had such flirtation,
 566 **This clerk and I, that of my purveiance**
 This clerk and I, that for my provision for the
 future
 567 **I spak to hym and seyde hym how that he,**
 I spoke to him and said to him how he,
 568 **If I were wydwe, sholde wedde me.**
 If I were a widow, should wed me.
 569 **For certainly -- I sey for no bobance --**
 For certainly -- I say this for no boast --
 570 **Yet was I nevere withouten purveiance**
 I was never yet without providing beforehand
 571 **Of mariage, n' of othere thynges eek.**
 For marriage, nor for other things also.
 572 **I holde a mouses herte nat worth a leek**
 I hold a mouse's heart not worth a leek
 573 **That hath but oon hole for to sterte to,**
 That has but one hole to flee to,
 574 **And if that faille, thanne is al ydo.**
 If that should fail, then all is lost.

- 575 **I bar hym on honde he hadde enchanted me --**
I falsely swore that he had enchanted me --
- 576 **My dame taughte me that soutiltee --**
My mother taught me that trick --
- 577 **And eek I seyde I mette of hym al nyght,**
And also I said I dreamed of him all night,
- 578 **He wolde han slayn me as I lay upright,**
He would have slain me as I lay on my back,
- 579 **And al my bed was ful of verray blood;**
And all my bed was full of real blood;
- 580 **`But yet I hope that ye shal do me good,**
`But yet I hope that you shall do me good,
- 581 **For blood bitokeneth gold, as me was taught.'**
For blood symbolizes gold, as I was taught.'
- 582 **And al was fals; I dremed of it right naught,**
And all was false; I dreamed of it not at all,
- 583 **But as I folwed ay my dames loore,**
But I followed always my mother's teaching,
- 584 **As wel of this as of othere thynges moore.**
As well in this as in other things more.
- 585 **But now, sire, lat me se what I shal seyn.**
But now, sir, let me see what I shall say.
- 586 **A ha! By God, I have my tale ageyn.**
A ha! By God, I have my tale again.
- 587 **Whan that my fourthe housbonde was on beere,**
When my fourth husband was on the funeral bier,
- 588 **I weep algate, and made sory cheere,**
I wept continuously, and acted sorry,
- 589 **As wyves mooten, for it is usage,**
As wives must do, for it is the custom,
- 590 **And with my coverchief covered my visage,**
And with my kerchief covered my face,
- 591 **But for that I was purveyed of a make,**
But because I was provided with a mate,
- 592 **I wepte but smal, and that I undertake.**
I wept but little, and that I affirm.
- 593 **To chirche was myn housbonde born a-morwe**
To church was my husband carried in the

morning

- 594 **With neighebores, that for hym maden sorwe;**
 By neighbors, who for him made sorrow;
- 595 **And Jankyn, oure clerk, was oon of tho.**
 And Jankin, our clerk, was one of those.
- 596 **As help me God, whan that I saugh hym go**
 As help me God, when I saw him go
- 597 **After the beere, me thoughte he hadde a paire**
 After the bier, I thought he had a pair
- 598 **Of legges and of feet so clene and faire**
 Of legs and of feet so neat and fair
- 599 **That al myn herte I yaf unto his hoold.**
 That all my heart I gave unto his keeping.
- 600 **He was, I trowe, twenty wynter oold,**
 He was, I believe, twenty years old,
- 601 **And I was fourty, if I shal seye sooth;**
 And I was forty, if I shall tell the truth;
- 602 **But yet I hadde alwey a coltes tooth.**
 But yet I had always a colt's tooth.
- 603 **Gat-tothed I was, and that bicam me weel;**
 With teeth set wide apart I was, and that became
- me well;
- 604 **I hadde the prente of seinte Venus seel.**
 I had the print of Saint Venus's seal.
- 605 **As help me God, I was a lusty oon,**
 As help me God, I was a lusty one,
- 606 **And faire, and riche, and yong, and wel bigon,**
 And fair, and rich, and young, and well fixed,
- 607 **And trewely, as myne housbondes tolde me,**
 And truly, as my husbands told me,
- 608 **I hadde the beste quoniam myghte be.**
 I had the best pudendum that might be.
- 609 **For certes, I am al Venerien**
 For certainly, I am all influenced by Venus
- 610 **In feelynge, and myn herte is Marciën.**
 In feeling, and my heart is influenced by Mars.
- 611 **Venus me yaf my lust, my likerousnesse,**
 Venus me gave my lust, my amorousness,
- 612 **And Mars yaf me my sturdy hardynesse;**
 And Mars gave me my sturdy boldness;

- 613 **Myn ascendent was Taur, and Mars therinne.**
My ascendant was Taurus, and Mars was therein.
- 614 **Allas, allas! That evere love was synne!**
Alas, alas! That ever love was sin!
- 615 **I folwed ay myn inclinacioun**
I followed always my inclination
- 616 **By vertu of my constellacioun;**
By virtue of the state of the heavens at my birth;
- 617 **That made me I koude noght withdrawe**
That made me that I could not withdraw
- 618 **My chambre of Venus from a good felawe.**
My chamber of Venus from a good fellow.
- 619 **Yet have I Martes mark upon my face,**
Yet have I Mars' mark upon my face,
- 620 **And also in another privee place.**
And also in another private place.
- 621 **For God so wys be my savacioun,**
For as God may be my salvation,
- 622 **I ne loved nevere by no discrecioun,**
I never loved in moderation,
- 623 **But evere folwede myn appetit,**
But always followed my appetite,
- 624 **Al were he short, or long, or blak, or whit;**
Whether he were short, or tall, or black-haired, or
blond;
- 625 **I took no kep, so that he liked me,**
I took no notice, provided that he pleased me,
- 626 **How poore he was, ne eek of what degree.**
How poor he was, nor also of what rank.
- 627 **What sholde I seye but, at the monthes ende,**
What should I say but, at the month's end,
- 628 **This joly clerk, Jankyn, that was so hende,**
This jolly clerk, Jankin, that was so courteous,
- 629 **Hath wedded me with greet solempnytee,**
Has wedded me with great solemnity,
- 630 **And to hym yaf I al the lond and fee**
And to him I gave all the land and property
- 631 **That evere was me yeven therbifoore.**
That ever was given to me before then.

- 632 **But afterward repented me ful soore;**
 But afterward I repented very bitterly;
- 633 **He nolde suffre nothyng of my list.**
 He would not allow me anything of my desires.
- 634 **By God, he smoot me ones on the lyst,**
 By God, he hit me once on the ear,
- 635 **For that I rente out of his book a leef,**
 Because I tore a leaf out of his book,
- 636 **That of the strook myn ere wax al deaf.**
 So that of the stroke my ear became all deaf.
- 637 **Stibourn I was as is a leonesse,**
 I was as stubborn as is a lioness,
- 638 **And of my tonge a verray jangleresse,**
 And of my tongue a true chatterbox,
- 639 **And walke I wolde, as I had doon biforn,**
 And I would walk, as I had done before,
- 640 **From hous to hous, although he had it sworn;**
 From house to house, although he had sworn the
 contrary;
- 641 **For which he often tymes wolde preche,**
 For which he often times would preach,
- 642 **And me of olde Romayn geestes teche;**
 And teach me of old Roman stories;
- 643 **How he Symplicius Gallus lefte his wyf,**
 How he, Simplicius Gallus, left his wife,
- 644 **And hire forsook for terme of al his lyf,**
 And forsook her for rest of all his life,
- 645 **Noght but for open-heveded he hir say**
 Because of nothing but because he saw her
 bare-headed
- 646 **Lookyng out at his dore upon a day.**
 Looking out at his door one day.
- 647 **Another Romayn tolde he me by name,**
 Another Roman he told me by name,
- 648 **That, for his wyf was at a someres game**
 Who, because his wife was at a midsummer revel
- 649 **Withouten his wityng, he forsook hire eke.**
 Without his knowledge, he forsook her also.
- 650 **And thanne wolde he upon his Bible seke**

- And then he would seek in his Bible
 651 **That ilke proverbe of Ecclesiaste**
 That same proverb of Ecclesiasticus
 652 **Where he comandeth and forbedeth faste**
 Where he commands and strictly forbids that
 653 **Man shal nat suffre his wyf go roule aboute.**
 Man should suffer his wife go wander about.
 654 **Thanne wolde he seye right thus, withouten**
doute:
 Then would he say right thus, without doubt:
- 655 **`Whoso that buyldeth his hous al of salwes,**
 `Whoever builds his house all of willow twigs,
 656 **And priketh his blynde hors over the falwes,**
 And spurs his blind horse over the open fields,
 657 **And suffreth his wyf to go seken halwes,**
 And suffers his wife to go on pilgrimages,
 658 **Is worthy to been hanged on the galwes!'**
 Is worthy to be hanged on the gallows!'
 659 **But al for nocht, I sette nocht an hawe**
 But all for nothing, I gave not a hawthorn berry
 660 **Of his proverbes n' of his olde sawe,**
 For his proverbs nor for his old sayings,
 661 **Ne I wolde nat of hym corrected be.**
 Nor would I be corrected by him.
 662 **I hate hym that my vices telleth me,**
 I hate him who tells me my vices,
 663 **And so doo mo, God woot, of us than I.**
 And so do more of us, God knows, than I.
 664 **This made hym with me wood al outrely;**
 This made him all utterly furious with me;
 665 **I nolde nocht forbere hym in no cas.**
 I would not put up with him in any way.
- 666 **Now wol I seye yow sooth, by Seint Thomas,**
 Now will I tell you the truth, by Saint Thomas,
 667 **Why that I rente out of his book a leef,**
 Why I tore a leaf out of his book,
 668 **For which he smoot me so that I was deef.**
 For which he hit me so hard that I was deaf.

669 **He hadde a book that gladly, nyght and day,**
He had a book that regularly, night and day,
670 **For his desport he wolde rede alway;**
For his amusement he would always read;
671 **He cleped it Valerie and Theofraste,**
He called it Valerie and Theophrastus,
672 **At which book he lough alwey ful faste.**
At which book he always heartily laughed.
673 **And eek ther was somtyme a clerk at Rome,**
And also there was once a clerk at Rome,
674 **A cardinal, that highte Seint Jerome,**
A cardinal, who is called Saint Jerome,
675 **That made a book agayn Jovinian;**
That made a book against Jovinian;
676 **In which book eek ther was Tertulan,**
In which book also there was Tertullian,
677 **Crisippus, Trotula, and Helowys,**
Crisippus, Trotula, and Heloise,
678 **That was abbesse nat fer fro Parys,**
Who was abbess not far from Paris,
679 **And eek the Parables of Salomon,**
And also the Parables of Salomon,
680 **Ovides Art, and bookes many on,**
Ovid's Art, and many other books,
681 **And alle these were bounden in o volume.**
And all these were bound in one volume.
682 **And every nyght and day was his custume,**
And every night and day was his custom,
683 **Whan he hadde leyser and vacacioun**
When he had leisure and spare time
684 **From oother worldly occupacioun,**
From other worldly occupations,
685 **To reden on this book of wikked wyves.**
To read in this book of wicked wives.
686 **He knew of hem mo legendes and lyves**
He knew of them more legends and lives
687 **Than been of goode wyves in the Bible.**
Than are of good women in the Bible.
688 **For trusteth wel, it is an impossible**
For trust well, it is an impossibility

- 689 **That any clerk wol speke good of wyves,**
That any clerk will speak good of women,
- 690 **But if it be of hooly seintes lyves,**
Unless it be of holy saints' lives,
- 691 **Ne of noon oother womman never the mo.**
Nor of any other woman in any way.
- 692 **Who peyntede the leon, tel me who?**
Who painted the lion, tell me who?
- 693 **By God, if wommen hadde writen stories,**
By God, if women had written stories,
- 694 **As clerkes han withinne hire oratories,**
As clerks have within their studies,
- 695 **They wolde han writen of men moore**
wikkednesse
They would have written of men more
wickedness
- 696 **Than al the mark of Adam may redresse.**
Than all the male sex could set right.
- 697 **The children of Mercurie and of Venus**
The children of Mercury (clerks) and of Venus
(lovers)
- 698 **Been in hir wirkyng ful contrarius;**
Are directly contrary in their actions;
- 699 **Mercurie loveth wysdam and science,**
Mercury loves wisdom and knowledge,
- 700 **And Venus loveth ryot and dispence.**
And Venus loves riot and extravagant
expenditures.
- 701 **And, for hire diverse disposicioun,**
And, because of their diverse dispositions,
- 702 **Ech falleth in otheres exaltacioun.**
Each falls in the other's most powerful
astronomical sign.
- 703 **And thus, God woot, Mercurie is desolat**
And thus, God knows, Mercury is powerless
- 704 **In Pisces, wher Venus is exaltat,**
In Pisces (the Fish), where Venus is exalted,
- 705 **And Venus falleth ther Mercurie is reysed.**
And Venus falls where Mercury is raised.
- 706 **Therefore no womman of no clerk is preysed.**

- Therefore no woman is praised by any clerk.
 707 **The clerk, whan he is oold, and may noght do**
 The clerk, when he is old, and can not do
 708 **Of Venus werkes worth his olde sho,**
 Any of Venus's works worth his old shoe,
 709 **Thanne sit he doun, and writ in his dotage**
 Then he sits down, and writes in his dotage
 710 **That wommen kan nat kepe hir mariage!**
 That women can not keep their marriage!
- 711 **But now to purpos, why I tolde thee**
 But now to the point, why I told thee
 712 **That I was beten for a book, pardee!**
 That I was beaten for a book, by God!
 713 **Upon a nyght Jankyn, that was oure sire,**
 Upon a night Jankin, that was master of our
 house,
 714 **Redde on his book, as he sat by the fire,**
 Read on his book, as he sat by the fire,
 715 **Of Eva first, that for hir wikkednesse**
 Of Eve first, how for her wickedness
 716 **Was al mankynde broght to wrecchednesse,**
 All mankind was brought to wretchedness,
 717 **For which that Jhesu Crist hymself was slayn,**
 For which Jesus Christ himself was slain,
 718 **That boghte us with his herte blood agayn.**
 Who bought us back with his heart's blood.
 719 **Lo, heere expres of womman may ye fynde**
 Lo, here clearly of woman you may find
 720 **That womman was the los of al mankynde.**
 That woman was the cause of the loss of all
 mankind.
- 721 **Tho redde he me how Sampson loste his heres:**
 Then he read me how Sampson lost his hair:
 722 **Slepynge, his lemman kitte it with hir sheres;**
 Sleeping, his lover cut it with her shears;
 723 **Thurgh which treson loste he bothe his yen.**
 Through which treason he lost both his eyes.
 724 **Tho redde he me, if that I shal nat lyen,**
 Then he read to me, if I shall not lie,

- 725 **Of Hercules and of his Dianyre,**
Of Hercules and of his Dianyre,
- 726 **That caused hym to sette hymself afyre.**
Who caused him to set himself on fire.
- 727 **No thyng forgat he the care and the wo**
He forgot not a bit of the care and the woe
- 728 **That Socrates hadde with his wyves two,**
That Socrates had with his two wives,
- 729 **How Xantippa caste pisse upon his heed.**
How Xantippa caste piss upon his head.
- 730 **This sely man sat stille as he were deed;**
This poor man sat still as if he were dead;
- 731 **He wiped his heed, namoore dorste he seyn,**
He wiped his head, no more dared he say,
- 732 **But `Er that thonder stynte, comth a reyn!**
But `Before thunder stops, there comes a rain!
- 733 **Of Phasipha, that was the queene of Crete,**
Of Phasipha, that was the queen of Crete,
- 734 **For shrewednesse, hym thoughte the tale**
swete;
For sheer malignancy, he thought the tale sweet;
- 735 **Fy! Spek namoore -- it is a grisly thyng --**
Fie! Speak no more -- it is a grisly thing --
- 736 **Of hire horrible lust and hir likyng.**
Of her horrible lust and her pleasure.
- 737 **Of Clitermystra, for hire lecherye,**
Of Clitermystra, for her lechery,
- 738 **That falsly made hire housbonde for to dye,**
That falsely made her husband to die,
- 739 **He redde it with ful good devocioun.**
He read it with very good devotion.
- 740 **He tolde me eek for what occasioun**
He told me also for what occasion
- 741 **Amphiorax at Thebes loste his lyf.**
Amphiorax at Thebes lost his life.
- 742 **Myn housbonde hadde a legende of his wyf,**
My husband had a legend of his wife,

- 743 **Eriphilem, that for an ouche of gold**
Eriphilem, that for a brooch of gold
- 744 **Hath prively unto the Grekes told**
Has secretly unto the Greeks told
- 745 **Wher that hir housbonde hidde hym in a place,**
Where her husband hid him in a place,
- 746 **For which he hadde at Thebes sory grace.**
For which he had at Thebes a sad fate.
- 747 **Of Lyvia tolde he me, and of Lucye:**
Of Livia told he me, and of Lucie:
- 748 **They bothe made hir housbondes for to dye,**
They both made their husbands to die,
- 749 **That oon for love, that oother was for hate.**
That one for love, that other was for hate.
- 750 **Lyvia hir housbonde, on an even late,**
Livia her husband, on a late evening,
- 751 **Empoysoned hath, for that she was his fo;**
Has poisoned, because she was his foe;
- 752 **Lucia, likerous, loved hire housbonde so**
Lucia, lecherous, loved her husband so much
- 753 **That, for he sholde alwey upon hire thynke,**
That, so that he should always think upon her,
- 754 **She yaf hym swich a manere love-drynke**
She gave him such a sort of love-drink
- 755 **That he was deed er it were by the morwe;**
That he was dead before it was morning;
- 756 **And thus algates housbondes han sorwe.**
And thus always husbands have sorrow.
- 757 **Thanne tolde he me how oon Latumyus**
Then he told me how one Latumius
- 758 **Compleyned unto his felawe Arrius**
Complained unto his fellow Arrius
- 759 **That in his gardyn growed swich a tree**
That in his garden grew such a tree
- 760 **On which he seyde how that his wyves thre**
On which he said how his three wives
- 761 **Hanged hemself for herte despitus.**
Hanged themselves for the malice of their hearts
- 762 **`O leeve brother,' quod this Arrius,**

- `O dear brother,' this Arrius said,
 763 **`Yif me a plante of thilke blissed tree,**
 `Give me a shoot of that same blessed tree,
 764 **And in my gardyn planted shal it bee.'**
 And in my garden shall it be planted.'
- 765 **Of latter date, of wyves hath he red**
 Of latter date, of wives has he read
 766 **That somme han slayn hir housbondes in hir**
bed,
 That some have slain their husbands in their bed,
 767 **And lete hir lecchour dighte hire al the nyght,**
 And let her lecher copulate with her all the night,
 768 **Whan that the corps lay in the floor upright.**
 When the corpse lay in the floor flat on its back.
 769 **And somme han dryve nayles in hir brayn,**
 And some have driven nails in their brains,
 770 **Whil that they slepte, and thus they had hem**
slayn.
 While they slept, and thus they had them slain.
 771 **Somme han hem yeve poysoun in hire drynke.**
 Some have given them poison in their drink.
 772 **He spak moore harm than herte may bithynke,**
 He spoke more harm than heart may imagine,
 773 **And therwithal he knew of mo proverbes**
 And concerning this he knew of more proverbs
 774 **Than in this world ther growen gras or herbes.**
 Than in this world there grow grass or herbs.
 775 **`Bet is,' quod he, `thyn habitacioun**
 `Better is,' he said, `thy habitation
 776 **Be with a leon or a foul dragoun,**
 Be with a lion or a foul dragon,
 777 **Than with a womman usynge for to chyde.**
 Than with a woman accustomed to scold.
 778 **Bet is,' quod he, `hye in the roof abyde,**
 Better is,' he said, `to stay high in the roof,
 779 **Than with an angry wyf down in the hous;**
 Than with an angry wife down in the house;
 780 **They been so wikked and contrarious,**
 They are so wicked and contrary,

- 781 **They haten that hir housbondes loven ay.'**
They always hate what their husbands love.'
- 782 **He seyde, `A womman cast hir shame away,**
He said, `A woman casts their shame away,
- 783 **Whan she cast of hir smok'; and forthermo,**
When she casts off her undergarment'; and
furthermore,
- 784 **`A fair womman, but she be chaast also,**
`A fair woman, unless she is also chaste,
- 785 **Is lyk a gold ryng in a sowes nose.'**
Is like a gold ring in a sow's nose.'
- 786 **Who wolde wene, or who wolde suppose,**
Who would believe, or who would suppose,
- 787 **The wo that in myn herte was, and pyne?**
The woe that in my heart was, and pain?
- 788 **And whan I saugh he wolde nevere fyne**
And when I saw he would never cease
- 789 **To reden on this cursed book al nyght,**
Reading on this cursed book all night,
- 790 **Al sodeynly thre leves have I plyght**
All suddenly have I plucked three leaves
- 791 **Out of his book, right as he radde, and eke**
Out of his book, right as he read, and also
- 792 **I with my fest so took hym on the cheke**
I with my fist so hit him on the cheek
- 793 **That in oure fyr he fil bakward adoun.**
That in our fire he fell down backwards.
- 794 **And he up stirte as dooth a wood leoun,**
And he leaped up as does a furious lion,
- 795 **And with his fest he smoot me on the heed**
And with his fist he hit me on the head
- 796 **That in the floor I lay as I were deed.**
That on the floor I lay as if I were dead.
- 797 **And whan he saugh how stille that I lay,**
And when he saw how still I lay,
- 798 **He was agast and wolde han fled his way,**
He was frightened and would have fled on his
way,
- 799 **Til atte laste out of my swogh I breyde.**

- Until at the last out of my swoon I awoke.
 800 **`O! hastow slayn me, false theef?' I seyde,**
 `O! hast thou slain me, false thief?' I said,
 801 **`And for my land thus hastow mordred me?**
 `And for my land thus hast thou murdered me?
 802 **Er I be deed, yet wol I kisse thee.'**
 Before I am dead, yet will I kiss thee.'

 803 **And neer he cam, and kneled faire adoun,**
 And near he came, and kneeled gently down,
 804 **And seyde, `Deere suster Alisoun,**
 And said, `Dear sister Alisoun,
 805 **As help me God, I shal thee nevere smyte!**
 So help me God, I shall never (again) smite thee!
 806 **That I have doon, it is thyself to wyte.**
 What I have done, it is thyself to blame (you
 drove me to it).
 807 **Foryeve it me, and that I thee biseke!**
 Forgive it me, and that I beseech thee!
 808 **And yet eftsoones I hitte hym on the cheke,**
 And yet immediately I hit him on the cheek,
 809 **And seyde, `Theef, thus muchel am I wreke;**
 And said, `Thief, thus much am I avenged;
 810 **Now wol I dye, I may no lenger speke.'**
 Now will I die, I may no longer speak.'
 811 **But atte laste, with muchel care and wo,**
 But at the last, with much care and woe,
 812 **We fille acorded by us selven two.**
 We made an agreement between our two selves.
 813 **He yaf me al the bridel in myn hond,**
 He gave me all the control in my hand,
 814 **To han the governance of hous and lond,**
 To have the governance of house and land,
 815 **And of his tonge, and of his hond also;**
 And of his tongue, and of his hand also;
 816 **And made hym brenne his book anon right tho.**
 And made him burn his book immediately right
 then.
 817 **And whan that I hadde geten unto me,**
 And when I had gotten unto me,

818 **By maistrie, al the soveraynetee,**
 By mastery, all the sovereignty,
 819 **And that he seyde, `Myn owene trewe wyf,**
 And that he said, `My own true wife,
 820 **Do as thee lust the terme of al thy lyf;**
 Do as you please the rest of all thy life;
 821 **Keep thyn honour, and keep eek myn estaat' --**
 Guard thy honor, and guard also my reputation' --
 822 **After that day we hadden never debaat.**
 After that day we never had an argument.
 823 **God helpe me so, I was to hym as kynde**
 As God may help me, I was to him as kind
 824 **As any wyf from Denmark unto Ynde,**
 As any wife from Denmark unto India,
 825 **And also trewe, and so was he to me.**
 And also true, and so was he to me.
 826 **I prey to God, that sit in magestee,**
 I pray to God, who sits in majesty,
 827 **So blesse his soule for his mercy deere.**
 So bless his soul for his mercy dear.
 828 **Now wol I seye my tale, if ye wol heere."**
 Now will I say my tale, if you will hear."

*Beholde the wordes bitwene the
 Somonour and the Frere*

829 **The Frere lough, whan he hadde herd al this;**
 The Friar laughed, when he had heard all this;
 830 **"Now dame," quod he, "so have I joye or blis,**
 "Now dame," he said, "as I may have joy or bliss,
 831 **This is a long preamble of a tale!"**
 This is a long preamble of a tale!"
 832 **And whan the Somonour herde the Frere gale,**
 And when the Summoner heard the Friar cry out,
 833 **"Lo," quod the Somonour, "Goddess armes two!**
 "Lo," said the Summoner, "By God's two arms!

- 834 **A frere wol entremette hym everemo.**
A friar will always intrude himself (in others' affairs).
- 835 **Lo, goode men, a flye and eek a frere**
Lo, good men, a fly and also a friar
- 836 **Wol falle in every dyssh and eek mateere.**
Will fall in every dish and also every discussion.
- 837 **What spekestow of preambulacioun?**
What speakest thou of perambulation?
- 838 **What! amble, or trotte, or pees, or go sit doun!**
What! amble, or trot, or keep still, or go sit down!
- 839 **Thou lettestoure disport in this manere."**
Thou spoil our fun in this manner."
- 840 **"Ye, woltow so, sire Somonour?" quod the Frere;**
"Yes, wilt thou have it thus, sir Summoner?" said the Friar;
- 841 **"Now, by my feith I shal, er that I go,**
"Now, by my faith I shall, before I go,
- 842 **Telle of a somonour swich a tale or two**
Tell of a summoner such a tale or two
- 843 **That alle the folk shal laughen in this place."**
That all the folk shall laugh in this place."
- 844 **"Now elles, Frere, I bishrewe thy face,"**
"Now otherwise, Friar, I curse thy face,"
- 845 **Quod this Somonour, "and I bishrewe me,**
Said this Summoner, "and I curse myself,
- 846 **But if I telle tales two or thre**
Unless I tell tales two or three
- 847 **Of freres er I come to Sidyngborne**
Of friars before I come to Siitingbourne
- 848 **That I shal make thyn herte for to morne,**
That I shall make thy heart to mourn,
- 849 **For wel I woot thy pacience is gon."**
For well I know thy patience is gone."
- 850 **Oure Hooste cride "Pees! And that anon!"**
Our Host cried "Peace! And that right now!"
- 851 **And seyde, "Lat the womman telle hire tale.**

- And said, "Let the woman tell her tale.
 852 **Ye fare as folk that dronken ben of ale.**
 You act like folk that are drunk on ale.
- 853 **Do, dame, telle forth youre tale, and that is
 best."**
 Do, dame, tell forth your tale, and that is best."
- 854 **"Al redy, sire," quod she, "right as yow lest,**
 "All ready, sir," she said, "right as you please,
 855 **If I have licence of this worthy Frere."**
 If I have permission of this worthy Friar."
- 856 **"Yis, dame," quod he, "tel forth, and I wol
 heere."**
 "Yes, dame," he said, "tell forth, and I will hear."

Heere endeth the Wyf of Bathe hir Prologe

**If you wish to test your knowledge of the Middle
 English, [click here](#).**

Or go to the [beginning](#) of this set of texts.

The Wife of Bath's Tale

Heere bigynneth the Tale of the Wyf of Bathe

- 857 **In th' olde dayes of the Kyng Arthour,**
In the old days of King Arthur,
- 858 **Of which that Britons speken greet honour,**
Of whom Britons speak great honor,
- 859 **Al was this land fulfild of fayerye.**
This land was all filled full of supernatural
creatures.
- 860 **The elf-queene, with hir joly compaignye,**
The elf-queen, with her jolly company,
- 861 **Daunced ful ofte in many a grene mede.**
Danced very often in many a green mead.
- 862 **This was the olde opinion, as I rede;**
This was the old belief, as I read;
- 863 **I speke of manye hundred yeres ago.**
I speak of many hundred years ago.
- 864 **But now kan no man se none elves mo,**
But now no man can see any more elves,
- 865 **For now the grete charitee and prayeres**
For now the great charity and prayers
- 866 **Of lymytours and othere hooly freres,**
Of licensed beggars and other holy friars,
- 867 **That serchen every lond and every stream,**
That overrun every land and every stream,
- 868 **As thikke as motes in the sonne-beem,**
As thick as specks of dust in the sun-beam,
- 869 **Blessyng halles, chambres, kichenes,**
boures,
Blessing halls, chambers, kitchens, bedrooms,
- 870 **Citees, burghes, castels, hye toures,**
Cities, towns, castles, high towers,
- 871 **Thropes, bernes, shipnes, dayeryes --**
Villages, barns, stables, dairies --
- 872 **This maketh that ther ben no fayeryes.**
This makes it that there are no fairies.
- 873 **For ther as wont to walken was an elf**

- 874 **For where an elf was accustomed to walk**
Ther walketh now the lymytour hymself
 There walks now the licensed begging friar
- himself
- 875 **In undermeles and in morwenynges,**
 In late mornings and in early mornings,
- 876 **And seyth his matyns and his hooly thynges**
 And says his morning prayers and his holy
- things
- 877 **As he gooth in his lymytacioun.**
 As he goes in his assigned district.
- 878 **Wommen may go saufly up and doun.**
 Women may go safely up and down.
- 879 **In every bussh or under every tree**
 In every bush or under every tree
- 880 **Ther is noon oother incubus but he,**
 There is no other evil spirit but he,
- 881 **And he ne wol doon hem but dishonour.**
 And he will not do them any harm except
- dishonor.
- 882 **And so bifel that this kyng Arthour**
 And so it happened that this king Arthur
- 883 **Hadde in his hous a lusty bacheler,**
 Had in his house a lusty bachelor,
- 884 **That on a day cam ridyng fro ryver,**
 That on one day came riding from hawking,
- 885 **And happed that, alone as he was born,**
 And it happened that, alone as he was born,
- 886 **He saugh a mayde walkyng hym biforn,**
 He saw a maiden walking before him,
- 887 **Of which mayde anon, maugree hir heed,**
 Of which maiden straightway, despite all she
- could do,
- 888 **By verray force, he rafte hire maydenhed;**
 By utter force, he took away her maidenhead;
- 889 **For which oppressioun was swich clamour**
 For which wrong was such clamor
- 890 **And swich pursute unto the kyng Arthour**
 And such demand for justice unto king Arthur

891 **That dampned was this knyght for to be deed,**
 That this knight was condemned to be dead,
 892 **By cours of lawe, and sholde han lost his heed**

--

By course of law, and should have lost his head

--

893 **Paraventure swich was the statut tho --**
 Perhaps such was the statute then --
 894 **But that the queene and other ladyes mo**
 Except that the queen and other ladies as well
 895 **So longe preyeden the kyng of grace**
 So long prayed the king for grace
 896 **Til he his lyf hym graunted in the place,**
 Until he granted him his life right there,
 897 **And yaf hym to the queene, al at hir wille,**
 And gave him to the queen, all at her will,
 898 **To chese wheither she wolde hym save or**
spille.

To choose whether she would him save or put to
 death.

899 **The queene thanketh the kyng with al hir**
myght,

The queen thanks the king with all her might,

900 **And after this thus spak she to the knyght,**
 And after this she spoke thus to the knight,
 901 **Whan that she saugh hir tyme, upon a day:**
 When she saw her time, upon a day:
 902 **"Thou standest yet," quod she, "in swich array**
 "Thou standest yet," she said, "in such
 condition,

903 **That of thy lyf yet hastow no suretee.**

That of thy life yet thou hast no assurance

904 **I grante thee lyf, if thou kanst tellen me**

I grant thee life, if thou canst tell me

905 **What thyng is it that wommen moost desiren.**

What thing it is that women most desire.

906 **Be war, and keep thy nekke-boon from iren!**

Beware, and keep thy neck-bone from iron

(axe)!

- 907 **And if thou kanst nat tellen it anon,**
And if thou canst not tell it right now,
- 908 **Yet wol I yeve thee leve for to gon**
Yet I will give thee leave to go
- 909 **A twelf-month and a day, to seche and leere**
A twelvemonth and a day, to seek to learn
- 910 **An answeere suffisant in this mateere;**
A satisfactory answer in this matter;
- 911 **And suretee wol I han, er that thou pace,**
And I will have, before thou go, a pledge
- 912 **Thy body for to yelden in this place."**
To surrender thy body in this place."
- 913 **Wo was this knyght, and sorwefully he siketh;**
Woe was this knight, and sorrowfully he sighs;
- 914 **But what! He may nat do al as hym liketh.**
But what! He can not do all as he pleases.
- 915 **And at the laste he chees hym for to wende**
And at the last he chose to leave
- 916 **And come agayn, right at the yeres ende,**
And come again, exactly at the year's end,
- 917 **With swich answeere as God wolde hym**
purveye;
With such answer as God would provide him;
- 918 **And taketh his leve, and wendeth forth his**
weye.
And takes his leave, and goes forth on his way.
- 919 **He seketh every hous and every place**
He seeks every house and every place
- 920 **Where as he hopeth for to fynde grace**
Where he hopes to have the luck
- 921 **To lerne what thyng wommen loven moost,**
To learn what thing women love most,
- 922 **But he ne koude arryven in no coost**
But he could not arrive in any region
- 923 **Wher as he myghte fynde in this mateere**
Where he might find in this matter
- 924 **Two creatures accordyng in-feere.**
Two creatures agreeing together.
- 925 **Somme seyde wommen loven best richesse,**

- 926 Some said women love riches best,
Somme seyde honour, somme seyde
jolynesse,
 Some said honor, some said gaiety,
 927 **Somme riche array, somme seyden lust**
abedde,
 Some rich clothing, some said lust in bed,
 928 **And oftetyme to be wydwe and wedde.**
 And frequently to be widow and wedded.
 929 **Somme seyde that oure hertes been moost**
esed
 Some said that our hearts are most eased
 930 **Whan that we been yflatered and yplesed.**
 When we are flattered and pleased.
 931 **He gooth ful ny the sothe, I wol nat lye.**
 He goes very near the truth, I will not lie.
 932 **A man shal wynne us best with flaterye,**
 A man shall win us best with flattery,
 933 **And with attendance and with bisynesse**
 And with attentions and with solicitude
 934 **Been we ylymed, bothe moore and lesse.**
 We are caught, every one of us.

 935 **And somme seyen that we loven best**
 And some say that we love best
 936 **For to be free and do right as us lest,**
 To be free and do just as we please,
 937 **And that no man repreve us of oure vice,**
 And that no man reprove us for our vices,
 938 **But seye that we be wise and no thyng nyce.**
 But say that we are wise and not at all silly.
 939 **For trewely ther is noon of us alle,**
 For truly there is not one of us all,
 940 **If any wight wol clawe us on the galle,**
 If any one will scratch us on the sore spot,
 941 **That we nel kike, for he seith us sooth.**
 That we will not kick back, because he tells us
 the truth.
 942 **Assay, and he shal fynde it that so dooth;**
 Try it, and whoever so does shall find it true;

- 943 **For, be we never so vicious withinne,**
For, be we never so vicious within,
- 944 **We wol been holden wise and clene of synne.**
We want to be considered wise and clean of sin.
- 945 **And somme seyn that greet delit han we**
And some say that we have great delight
- 946 **For to been holden stable, and eek secree,**
To be considered steadfast, and also (able to
keep a) secret,
- 947 **And in o purpos stedefastly to dwelle,**
And in one purpose steadfastly to remain,
- 948 **And nat biwreye thyng that men us telle.**
And not reveal things that men tell us.
- 949 **But that tale is nat worth a rake-stele.**
But that tale is not worth a rake handle.
- 950 **Pardee, we wommen konne no thyng hele;**
By God, we women can hide nothing;
- 951 **Witnesse on Myda -- wol ye heere the tale?**
Witness on Midas -- will you hear the tale?
- 952 **Ovyde, amonges othere thynges smale,**
Ovid, among other small matters,
- 953 **Seyde Myda hadde, under his longe heres,**
Said Midas had, under his long hair,
- 954 **Growynge upon his heed two asses eres,**
Two ass's ears, growing upon his head,
- 955 **The whiche vice he hydde as he best myghte**
The which vice he hid as he best could
- 956 **Ful subtilly from every mannes sighte,**
Very skillfully from every man's sight,
- 957 **That, save his wyf, ther wiste of it namo.**
That, except for his wife, there knew of it no
others.
- 958 **He loved hire moost, and trusted hire also;**
He loved her most, and trusted her also;
- 959 **He preyede hire that to no creature**
He prayed her that to no creature
- 960 **She sholde tellen of his disfigure.**
She should tell of his disfigurement.

961 **She swoor him, "Nay"; for al this world to**
wynne,
 She swore him, "Nay"; for all this world to win,
 962 **She nolde do that vileynye or synne,**
 She would not do that dishonor or sin,
 963 **To make hir housbonde han so foul a name.**
 To make her husband have so foul a reputation.
 964 **She nolde nat telle it for hir owene shame.**
 She would not tell it for her own shame.
 965 **But nathelees, hir thoughte that she dyde**
 But nonetheless, she thought that she would die
 966 **That she so longe sholde a conseil hyde;**
 If she should hide a secret so long;
 967 **Hir thoughte it swal so soore aboute hir herte**
 She thought it swelled so sore about her heart
 968 **That nedely som word hire moste asterte;**
 That necessarily some word must escape her;
 969 **And sith she dorste telle it to no man,**
 And since she dared tell it to no man,
 970 **Doun to a mareys faste by she ran --**
 She ran down to a marsh close by --
 971 **Til she cam there hir herte was afyre --**
 Until she came there her heart was afire --
 972 **And as a bitore bombleth in the myre,**
 And as a bittern bumbles in the mire,
 973 **She leyde hir mouth unto the water doun:**
 She laid her mouth down unto the water:
 974 **"Biwreye me nat, thou water, with thy soun,"**
 "Betray me not, thou water, with thy sound,"
 975 **Quod she; "to thee I telle it and namo;**
 She said; "to thee I tell it and no others;
 976 **Myn housbonde hath longe asses erys two!**
 My husband has two long asses ears!
 977 **Now is myn herte al hool; now is it oute.**
 Now is my heart all whole; now is it out.
 978 **I myghte no lenger kepe it, out of doute."**
 I could no longer keep it, without doubt."
 979 **Heere may ye se, thogh we a tyme abyde,**
 Here you may see, though we a time abide,
 980 **Yet out it moot; we kan no conseil hyde.**

- Yet out it must come; we can hide no secret.
 981 **The remenant of the tale if ye wol heere,**
 The remnant of the tale if you will hear,
 982 **Redeth Ovyde, and ther ye may it leere.**
 Read Ovid, and there you may learn it.
- 983 **This knyght, of which my tale is specially,**
 This knight, of whom my tale is in particular,
 984 **Whan that he saugh he myghte nat come**
therby --
 When he saw he might not come to that --
 985 **This is to seye, what wommen love moost --**
 This is to say, what women love most --
 986 **Withinne his brest ful sorweful was the goost.**
 Within his breast very sorrowful was the spirit.
 987 **But hoom he gooth; he myghte nat sojourne;**
 But home he goes; he could not linger;
 988 **The day was come that homward moste he**
tourne.
 The day was come that homeward he must turn.
 989 **And in his wey it happed hym to ryde,**
 And in his way he happened to ride,
 990 **In al this care, under a forest syde,**
 In all this care, near a forest side,
 991 **Wher as he saugh upon a daunce go**
 Where he saw upon a dance go
 992 **Of ladyes foure and twenty, and yet mo;**
 Ladies four and twenty, and yet more;
 993 **Toward the whiche daunce he drow ful yerne,**
 Toward the which dance he drew very eagerly,
 994 **In hope that som wysdom sholde he lerne.**
 In hope that he should learn some wisdom.
 995 **But certainly, er he cam fully there,**
 But certainly, before he came fully there,
 996 **Vanysshed was this daunce, he nyste where.**
 Vanished was this dance, he knew not where.
 997 **No creature saugh he that bar lyf,**
 He saw no creature that bore life,
 998 **Save on the grene he saugh sittynge a wyf --**
 Save on the green he saw sitting a woman --

- 999 **A fouler wight ther may no man devyse.**
There can no man imagine an uglier creature.
- 1000 **Agayn the knyght this olde wyf gan ryse,**
At the knight's coming this old wife did rise,
- 1001 **And seyde, "Sire knyght, heer forth ne lith no**
wey.
And said, "Sir knight, there lies no road out of
here.
- 1002 **Tel me what that ye seken, by youre fey!**
Tell me what you seek, by your faith!
- 1003 **Paraventure it may the bettre be;**
Perhaps it may be the better;
- 1004 **Thise olde folk kan muchel thyng," quod she.**
These old folk know many things," she said.
- 1005 **"My leeve mooder," quod this knyght, "certeyn**
"My dear mother," said this knight, "certainly
- 1006 **I nam but deed but if that I kan seyn**
I am as good as dead unless I can say
- 1007 **What thyng it is that wommen moost desire.**
What thing it is that women most desire.
- 1008 **Koude ye me wisse, I wolde wel quite youre**
hire."
If you could teach me, I would well repay you."
- 1009 **"Plight me thy trouthe heere in myn hand,"**
quod she,
"Pledge me thy word here in my hand," she
said,
- 1010 **"The nexte thyng that I requere thee,**
"The next thing that I require of thee,
- 1011 **Thou shalt it do, if it lye in thy myght,**
Thou shalt do it, if it lies in thy power,
- 1012 **And I wol telle it yow er it be nyght."**
And I will tell it to you before it is night."
- 1013 **"Have heer my trouthe," quod the knyght, "I**
grante."
"Have here my pledged word," said the knight, "I
agree."
- 1014 **"Thanne," quod she, "I dar me wel avante**

- "Then," she said, "I dare me well boast
 1015 **Thy lyf is sauf, for I wol stonde therby;**
 Thy life is safe, for I will stand thereby;
- 1016 **Upon my lyf, the queene wol seye as I.**
 Upon my life, the queen will say as I.
- 1017 **Lat se which is the proudeste of hem alle**
 Let's see which is the proudest of them all
- 1018 **That wereth on a coverchief or a calle**
 That wears a kerchief or a hairnet
- 1019 **That dar seye nay of that I shal thee teche.**
 That dares say `nay' of what I shall teach thee.
- 1020 **Lat us go forth withouten lenger speche."**
 Let us go forth without longer speech."
- 1021 **Tho rowned she a pistel in his ere,**
 Then she whispered a message in his ear,
- 1022 **And bad hym to be glad and have no fere.**
 And commanded him to be glad and have no
 fear.
- 1023 **Whan they be comen to the court, this knyght**
 When they are come to the court, this knight
- 1024 **Seyde he had holde his day, as he hadde**
hight,
 Said he had held his day, as he had promised,
- 1025 **And redy was his answe, as he sayde.**
 And his answer was ready, as he said.
- 1026 **Ful many a noble wyf, and many a mayde,**
 Very many a noble wife, and many a maid,
- 1027 **And many a wydwe, for that they been wise,**
 And many a widow, because they are wise,
- 1028 **The queene hirselt sittynge as a justise,**
 The queen herself sitting as a justice,
- 1029 **Assembled been, his answe for to heere;**
 Are assembled, to hear his answer;
- 1030 **And afterward this knyght was bode appeere.**
 And afterward this knight was commanded to
 appear.
- 1031 **To every wight comanded was silence,**
 Silence was commanded to every person,
- 1032 **And that the knyght sholde telle in audience**

- And that the knight should tell in open court
 1033 **What thyng that worldly wommen loven best.**
 What thing (it is) that worldly women love best.
- 1034 **This knyght ne stood nat stille as doth a best,**
 This knight stood not silent as does a beast,
- 1035 **But to his questioun anon answerde**
 But to his question straightway answered
- 1036 **With manly voys, that al the court it herde:**
 With manly voice, so that all the court heard it:
- 1037 **"My lige lady, generally," quod he,**
 "My liege lady, without exception," he said,
- 1038 **"Wommen desiren to have sovereynetee**
 "Women desire to have sovereignty
- 1039 **As wel over hir housbond as hir love,**
 As well over her husband as her love,
- 1040 **And for to been in maistrie hym above.**
 And to be in mastery above him.
- 1041 **This is youre mooste desir, thogh ye me kille.**
 This is your greatest desire, though you kill me.
- 1042 **Dooth as yow list; I am heer at youre wille."**
 Do as you please; I am here subject to your
 will."
- 1043 **In al the court ne was ther wyf, ne mayde,**
 In all the court there was not wife, nor maid,
- 1044 **Ne wydwe that contraried that he sayde,**
 Nor widow that denied what he said,
- 1045 **But seyden he was worthy han his lyf.**
 But said that he was worthy to have his life.
- 1046 **And with that word up stirte the olde wyf,**
 And with that word up sprang the old woman,
- 1047 **Which that the knyght saugh sittyng on the**
grene:
 Whom the knight saw sitting on the green:
- 1048 **"Mercy," quod she, "my sovereyn lady queene!**
 "Mercy," she said, "my sovereign lady queen!
- 1049 **Er that youre court departe, do me right.**
 Before your court departs, do me justice.
- 1050 **I taughte this answer unto the knyght;**
 I taught this answer to the knight;

- 1051 **For which he plighte me his trouthe there,**
For which he pledged me his word there,
- 1052 **The firste thyng that I wolde hym requere**
The first thing that I would ask of him
- 1053 **He wolde it do, if it lay in his myghte.**
He would do, if it lay in his power.
- 1054 **Bifore the court thanne preye I thee, sir**
knyght,"
Before the court then I pray thee, sir knight,"
- 1055 **Quod she, "that thou me take unto thy wyf,**
Said she, "that thou take me as thy wife,
- 1056 **For wel thou woost that I have kept thy lyf.**
For well thou know that I have saved thy life.
- 1057 **If I seye fals, sey nay, upon thy fey!"**
If I say false, say `nay', upon thy faith!"
- 1058 **This knyght answerde, "Allas and weylawey!**
This knight answered, "Alas and woe is me!
- 1059 **I woot right wel that swich was my biheste.**
I know right well that such was my promise.
- 1060 **For Goddes love, as chees a newe requeste!**
For God's love, choose a new request!
- 1061 **Taak al my good and lat my body go."**
Take all my goods and let my body go."
- 1062 **"Nay, thanne," quod she, "I shrewe us bothe**
two!
"Nay, then," she said, "I curse both of us two!
- 1063 **For thogh that I be foul, and oold, and poore**
For though I am ugly, and old, and poor
- 1064 **I nolde for al the metal, ne for oore**
I would not for all the metal, nor for ore
- 1065 **That under erthe is grave or lith above,**
That under earth is buried or lies above,
- 1066 **But if thy wyf I were, and eek thy love."**
Have anything except that I were thy wife, and
also thy love."
- 1067 **"My love?" quod he, "nay, my dampnacioun!**
"My love?" he said, "nay, my damnation!
- 1068 **Allas, that any of my nacioun**

- 1069 **Alas, that any of my family**
Sholde evere so foule disparaged be!"
 Should ever be so foully degraded!"
- 1070 **But al for noght; the ende is this, that he**
 But all for naught; the end is this, that he
- 1071 **Constreyned was; he nedes moste hire wedde,**
 Constrained was; he must by necessity wed her,
- 1072 **And taketh his olde wyf, and gooth to bedde.**
 And takes his old wife, and goes to bed.
- 1073 **Now wolden som men seye, paraventure,**
 Now would some men say, perhaps,
- 1074 **That for my necligence I do no cure**
 That because of my negligence I make no effort
- 1075 **To tellen yow the joye and al th' array**
 To tell you the joy and all the rich display
- 1076 **That at the feeste was that ilke day.**
 That was at the (wedding) feast that same day.
- 1077 **To which thyng shortly answeren I shal:**
 To which thing shortly I shall answer:
- 1078 **I seye ther nas no joye ne feeste at al;**
 I say there was no joy nor feast at all;
- 1079 **Ther nas but hevynesse and mucche sorwe.**
 There was nothing but heaviness and much
- sorrow.
- 1080 **For prively he wedded hire on morwe,**
 For he wedded her in private in the morning,
- 1081 **And al day after hidde hym as an owle,**
 And all day after hid himself like an owl,
- 1082 **So wo was hym, his wyf looked so foule.**
 So woeful was he, his wife looked so ugly.
- 1083 **Greet was the wo the knyght hadde in his**
thoght,
 Great was the woe the knight had in his thought,
- 1084 **Whan he was with his wyf abedde ybrought;**
 When he was brought to bed with his wife;
- 1085 **He walweth and he turneth to and fro.**
 He wallows and he turns to and fro.
- 1086 **His olde wyf lay smylynge everemo,**
 His old wife lay smiling evermore,

- 1087 **And seyde, "O deere housbonde, benedicitee!**
And said, "O dear husband, bless me!
- 1088 **Fareth every knyght thus with his wyf as ye?**
Does every knight behave thus with his wife as
you do?
- 1089 **Is this the lawe of kyng Arthures hous?**
Is this the law of king Arthur's house?
- 1090 **Is every knyght of his so dangerous?**
Is every knight of his so aloof?
- 1091 **I am youre owene love and youre wyf;**
I am your own love and your wife;
- 1092 **I am she which that saved hath youre lyf,**
I am she who has saved your life,
- 1093 **And, certes, yet ne dide I yow nevere unright;**
And, certainly, I did you never wrong yet;
- 1094 **Why fare ye thus with me this firste nyght?**
Why behave you thus with me this first night?
- 1095 **Ye faren lyk a man had lost his wit.**
You act like a man who had lost his wit.
- 1096 **What is my gilt? For Goddes love, tel it,**
What is my offense? For God's love, tell it,
- 1097 **And it shal been amended, if I may."**
And it shall be amended, if I can."
- 1098 **"Amended?" quod this knyght, "Allas, nay,
nay!**
"Amended?" said this knight, "Alas, nay, nay!
- 1099 **It wol nat been amended nevere mo.**
It will not be amended ever more.
- 1100 **Thou art so loothly, and so oold also,**
Thou art so loathsome, and so old also,
- 1101 **And therto comen of so lough a kynde,**
And moreover descended from such low born
lineage,
- 1102 **That litel wonder is thogh I walwe and wynde.**
That little wonder is though I toss and twist
about.
- 1103 **So wolde God myn herte wolde breste!"**
So would God my heart would burst!"

- 1104 **"Is this," quod she, "the cause of youre unreste?"**
 "Is this," she said, "the cause of your distress?"
- 1105 **"Ye, certeinly," quod he, "no wonder is."**
 "Yes, certainly," he said, "it is no wonder."
- 1106 **"Now, sire," quod she, "I koude amende al this,**
 "Now, sir," she said, "I could amend all this,
 1107 **If that me liste, er it were dayes thre,**
 If I pleased, before three days were past,
 1108 **So wel ye myghte bere yow unto me.**
 Providing that you might behave well towards
 me.
- 1109 **"But, for ye speken of swich gentillesse**
 "But, since you speak of such nobility
 1110 **As is descended out of old richesse,**
 As is descended out of old riches,
 1111 **That therefore sholden ye be gentil men,**
 That therefore you should be noble men,
 1112 **Swich arrogance is nat worth an hen.**
 Such arrogance is not worth a hen.
 1113 **Looke who that is moost vertuouse alway,**
 Look who is most virtuous always,
 1114 **Pryvee and apert, and moost entendeth ay**
 In private and public, and most intends ever
 1115 **To do the gentil dedes that he kan;**
 To do the noble deeds that he can;
 1116 **Taak hym for the grettest gentil man.**
 Take him for the greatest noble man.
 1117 **Crist wole we clayme of hym oure gentillesse,**
 Christ wants us to claim our nobility from him,
 1118 **Nat of oure eldres for hire old richesse.**
 Not from our ancestors for their old riches.
 1119 **For thogh they yeve us al hir heritage,**
 For though they give us all their heritage,
 1120 **For which we clayme to been of heigh parage,**
 For which we claim to be of noble lineage,
 1121 **Yet may they nat biquethe for no thyng**
 Yet they can not bequeath by any means

- 1122 **To noon of us hir vertuous lyvyng,**
To any of us their virtuous living,
- 1123 **That made hem gentil men ycalled be,**
That made them be called noble men,
- 1124 **And bad us folwen hem in swich degree.**
And commanded us to follow them in such matters.
- 1125 **"Wel kan the wise poete of Florence,**
"Well can the wise poet of Florence,
- 1126 **That highte Dant, speken in this sentence.**
Who is called Dante, speak on this matter.
- 1127 **Lo, in swich maner rym is Dantes tale:**
Lo, in such sort of rime is Dante's speech:
- 1128 **`Ful selde up riseth by his branches smale**
`Very seldom grows up from its small branches
- 1129 **Prowesse of man, for God, of his goodnesse,**
Nobility of man, for God, of his goodness,
- 1130 **Wole that of hym we clayme oure gentillesse';**
Wants us to claim our nobility from him';
- 1131 **For of oure eldres may we no thyng clayme**
For from our ancestors we can claim no thing
- 1132 **But temporel thyng, that man may hurte and mayme.**
Except temporal things, that may hurt and injure a man.
- 1133 **"Eek every wight woot this as wel as I,**
"Also every person knows this as well as I,
- 1134 **If gentillesse were planted natureelly**
If nobility were planted naturally
- 1135 **Unto a certeyn lynage doun the lyne,**
Unto a certain lineage down the line,
- 1136 **Pryvee and apert thanne wolde they nevere fyne**
Then in private and in public they would never cease
- 1137 **To doon of gentillesse the faire office;**
To do the just duties of nobility;
- 1138 **They myghte do no vileynye or vice.**
They could do no dishonor or vice.

- 1139 **"Taak fyr and ber it in the derkeste hous**
 "Take fire and bear it in the darkest house
- 1140 **Bitwix this and the mount of Kaukasous,**
 Between this and the mount of Caucasus,
- 1141 **And lat men shette the dores and go thenne;**
 And let men shut the doors and go away;
- 1142 **Yet wole the fyr as faire lye and brenne**
 Yet will the fire as brightly blaze and burn
- 1143 **As twenty thousand men myghte it biholde;**
 As if twenty thousand men might it behold;
- 1144 **His office natureel ay wol it holde,**
 Its natural function it will always hold,
- 1145 **Up peril of my lyf, til that it dye.**
 On peril of my life (I say), until it dies.
- 1146 **"Heere may ye se wel how that genterye**
 "Here may you see well that nobility
- 1147 **Is nat annexed to possessioun,**
 Is not joined with possession,
- 1148 **Sith folk ne doon hir operacioun**
 Since folk not do behave as they should
- 1149 **Alwey, as dooth the fyr, lo, in his kynde.**
 Always, as does the fire, lo, in its nature.
- 1150 **For, God it woot, men may wel often fynde**
 For, God knows it, men may well often find
- 1151 **A lordes sone do shame and vileynye;**
 A lord's son doing shame and dishonor;
- 1152 **And he that wole han pris of his gentrye,**
 And he who will have praise for his noble birth,
- 1153 **For he was boren of a gentil hous**
 Because he was born of a noble house
- 1154 **And hadde his eldres noble and vertuous,**
 And had his noble and virtuous ancestors,
- 1155 **And nel hymselfen do no gentil dedis**
 And will not himself do any noble deeds
- 1156 **Ne folwen his gentil auncestre that deed is,**
 Nor follow his noble ancestry that is dead,
- 1157 **He nys nat gentil, be he duc or erl,**
 He is not noble, be he duke or earl,
- 1158 **For vileyns synful dedes make a cherl.**

- For churlish sinful deeds make a churl.
- 1159 **For gentillesse nys but renomee**
For nobility is nothing but renown
- 1160 **Of thyne auncestres, for hire heigh bountee,**
Of thy ancestors, for their great goodness,
- 1161 **Which is a strange thyng to thy persone.**
Which is a thing not naturally part of thy person.
- 1162 **Thy gentillesse cometh fro God allone.**
Thy nobility comes from God alone.
- 1163 **Thanne comthoure verray gentillesse of**
grace;
Then our true nobility comes from grace ;
- 1164 **It was no thyng biquethe us withoure place.**
It was not at all bequeathed to us with our social
rank.
- 1165 **"Thenketh hou noble, as seith Valerius,**
"Think how noble, as says Valerius,
- 1166 **Was thilke Tullius Hostillius,**
Was that same Tullius Hostillius,
- 1167 **That out of poverté roos to heigh noblesse.**
That out of poverty rose to high nobility.
- 1168 **Reedeth Senek, and redeth eek Boece;**
Read Seneca, and read also Boethius;
- 1169 **Ther shul ye seen expres that it no drede is**
There shall you see clearly that it is no doubt
- 1170 **That he is gentil that dooth gentil dedis.**
That he is noble who does noble deeds.
- 1171 **And therefore, leeve housbonde, I thus**
conclude:
And therefore, dear husband, I thus conclude:
- 1172 **Al were it that myne auncestres were rude,**
Although it is so that my ancestors were rude,
- 1173 **Yet may the hye God, and so hope I,**
Yet may the high God, and so hope I,
- 1174 **Grante me grace to lyven vertuously.**
Grant me grace to live virtuously.
- 1175 **Thanne am I gentil, whan that I bigynne**
Then am I noble, when I begin

- 1176 **To lyven vertuously and weyve synne.**
To live virtuously and abandon sin.
- 1177 **"And ther as ye of poverte me repreeve,**
"And whereas you reprove me for poverty,
- 1178 **The hye God, on whom that we bileeve,**
The high God, on whom we believe,
- 1179 **In wilful poverte chees to lyve his lyf.**
In voluntary poverty chose to live his life.
- 1180 **And certes every man, mayden, or wyf**
And certainly every man, maiden, or woman
- 1181 **May understonde that Jhesus, hevene kyng,**
Can understand that Jesus, heaven's king,
- 1182 **Ne wolde nat chese a vicious lyvyng.**
Would not choose a vicious form of living.
- 1183 **Glad poverte is an honest thyng, certeyn;**
Glad poverty is an honest thing, certain;
- 1184 **This wole Senec and othere clerkes seyn.**
This will Seneca and other clerks say.
- 1185 **Whoso that halt hym payd of his poverte,**
Whoever considers himself satisfied with his
poverty,
- 1186 **I holde hym riche, al hadde he nat a sherte.**
I consider him rich, although he had not a shirt.
- 1187 **He that coveiteth is a povre wight,**
He who covets is a poor person,
- 1188 **For he wolde han that is nat in his myght;**
For he would have that which is not in his
power;
- 1189 **But he that noght hath, ne coveiteth have,**
But he who has nothing, nor covets to have
anything,
- 1190 **Is riche, although ye holde hym but a knave.**
Is rich, although you consider him but a knave.
- 1191 **Verray poverte, it syngeth proprely;**
True poverty, it rightly sings;
- 1192 **Juvenal seith of poverte myrily:**
Juvenal says of poverty merrily:
- 1193 **`The povre man, whan he goth by the weye,**
`The poor man, when he goes along the

roadway,

1194 **Bifore the theves he may syng and pleye.'**

Before the thieves he may sing and play.'

1195 **Poverte is hateful good and, as I gesse,**

Poverty is a hateful good and, as I guess,

1196 **A ful greet bryngere out of bisynesse;**

A very great remover of cares;

1197 **A greet amendere eek of sapience**

A great amender also of wisdom

1198 **To hym that taketh it in pacience.**

To him that takes it in patience.

1199 **Poverte is this, although it seme alenge:**

Poverty is this, although it may seem miserable:

1200 **Possessioun that no wight wol challenge.**

A possession that no one will challenge.

1201 **Poverte ful ofte, whan a man is lowe,**

Poverty very often, when a man is low,

1202 **Maketh his God and eek hymself to knowe.**

Makes him know his God and also himself.

1203 **Poverte a spectacle is, as thynketh me,**

Poverty is an eye glass, as it seems to me,

1204 **Thurgh which he may his verray freendes see.**

Through which one may see his true friends.

1205 **And therefore, sire, syn that I noght yow greve,**

And therefore, sir, since I do not injure you,

1206 **Of my poverte namoore ye me repreve.**

You (should) no longer reprove me for my

poverty.

1207 **"Now, sire, of elde ye repreve me;**

"Now, sir, of old age you reprove me;

1208 **And certes, sire, thogh noon auctoritee**

And certainly, sir, though no authority

1209 **Were in no book, ye gentils of honour**

Were in any book, you gentlefolk of honor

1210 **Seyn that men sholde an oold wight doon**

favour

Say that men should be courteous to an old

person

1211 **And clepe hym fader, for youre gentillesse;**

- And call him father, because of your nobility;
 1212 **And auctours shal I fynden, as I gesse.**
 And authors shall I find, as I guess.
- 1213 **"Now ther ye seye that I am foul and old,**
 "Now where you say that I am ugly and old,
 1214 **Than drede you noght to been a cokewold;**
 Than do not fear to be a cuckold;
 1215 **For filthe and eelde, also moot I thee,**
 For filth and old age, as I may prosper,
 1216 **Been grete wardeyns upon chastitee.**
 Are great guardians of chastity.
 1217 **But natheles, syn I knowe youre delit,**
 But nonetheless, since I know your delight,
 1218 **I shal fulfille youre worldly appetit.**
 I shall fulfill your worldly appetite.
- 1219 **"Chese now," quod she, "oon of thise thynges**
tweye:
 "Choose now," she said, "one of these two
 things:
 1220 **To han me foul and old til that I deye,**
 To have me ugly and old until I die,
 1221 **And be to yow a trewe, humble wyf,**
 And be to you a true, humble wife,
 1222 **And nevere yow displese in al my lyf,**
 And never displease you in all my life,
 1223 **Or elles ye wol han me yong and fair,**
 Or else you will have me young and fair,
 1224 **And take youre aventure of the repair**
 And take your chances of the crowd
 1225 **That shal be to youre hous by cause of me,**
 That shall be at your house because of me,
 1226 **Or in som oother place, may wel be.**
 Or in some other place, as it may well be.
 1227 **Now chese yourselven, wheither that yow**
liketh."
 Now choose yourself, whichever you please."
- 1228 **This knyght avyseth hym and sore siketh,**
 This knight deliberates and painfully sighs,

- 1229 **But atte laste he seyde in this manere:**
But at the last he said in this manner:
- 1230 **"My lady and my love, and wyf so deere,**
"My lady and my love, and wife so dear,
- 1231 **I put me in youre wise governance;**
I put me in your wise governance;
- 1232 **Cheseth youreself which may be moost
plesance**
Choose yourself which may be most pleasure
- 1233 **And moost honour to yow and me also.**
And most honor to you and me also.
- 1234 **I do no fors the wheither of the two,**
I do not care which of the two,
- 1235 **For as yow liketh, it suffiseth me."**
For as it pleases you, is enough for me."
- 1236 **"Thanne have I gete of yow maistrie," quod
she,**
"Then have I gotten mastery of you," she said,
- 1237 **"Syn I may chese and governe as me lest?"**
"Since I may choose and govern as I please?"
- 1238 **"Ye, certes, wyf," quod he, "I holde it best."**
"Yes, certainly, wife," he said, "I consider it best."
- 1239 **"Kys me," quod she, "we be no lenger wrothe,**
"Kiss me," she said, "we are no longer angry,
- 1240 **For, by my trouthe, I wol be to yow bothe --**
For, by my troth, I will be to you both --
- 1241 **This is to seyn, ye, bothe fair and good.**
This is to say, yes, both fair and good.
- 1242 **I prey to God that I moote sterven wood,**
I pray to God that I may die insane
- 1243 **But I to yow be also good and trewe**
Unless I to you be as good and true
- 1244 **As evere was wyf, syn that the world was
newe.**
As ever was wife, since the world was new.
- 1245 **And but I be to-morn as fair to seene**
And unless I am tomorrow morning as fair to be
seen

- 1246 **As any lady, emperice, or queene,**
As any lady, empress, or queen,
- 1247 **That is bitwixe the est and eke the west,**
That is between the east and also the west,
- 1248 **Dooth with my lyf and deth right as yow lest.**
Do with my life and death right as you please.
- 1249 **Cast up the curtyn, looke how that it is."**
Cast up the curtain, look how it is."
- 1250 **And whan the knyght saugh verrailly al this,**
And when the knight saw truly all this,
- 1251 **That she so fair was, and so yong therto,**
That she so was beautiful, and so young
- moreover,
- 1252 **For joye he hente hire in his armes two.**
For joy he clasped her in his two arms.
- 1253 **His herte bathed in a bath of blisse.**
His heart bathed in a bath of bliss.
- 1254 **A thousand tyme a-rewe he gan hire kisse,**
A thousand time in a row he did her kiss,
- 1255 **And she obeyed hym in every thyng**
And she obeyed him in every thing
- 1256 **That myghte doon hym plesance or likyng.**
That might do him pleasure or enjoyment.
- 1257 **And thus they lyve unto hir lyves ende**
And thus they live unto their lives' end
- 1258 **In parfit joye; and Jhesu Crist us sende**
In perfect joy; and Jesus Christ us send
- 1259 **Housbondes meeke, yonge, and fressh**
abedde,
Husbands meek, young, and vigorous in bed,
- 1260 **And grace t' overbyde hem that we wedde;**
And grace to outlive them whom we wed;
- 1261 **And eek I praye Jhesu shorte hir lyves**
And also I pray Jesus shorten their lives
- 1262 **That noght wol be governed by hir wyves;**
That will not be governed by their wives;
- 1263 **And olde and angry nygardes of dispence,**
And old and angry misers in spending,
- 1264 **God sende hem soone verray pestilence!**

God send them soon the very pestilence!

Heere endeth the Wyves Tale of Bathe

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