



George A. Smathers Libraries
Public Services Division/ Access Services
Interlibrary Loan

245 Library West
PO Box 117001
Gainesville, FL 32611-7001
352-273-2535
352-392-7598 Fax
illiad.uflib.ufl.edu/illiad/ill.html

Electronic Delivery Cover Sheet

If you receive a copy that is missing pages, smudged or unreadable, please contact the UF ILL Office so we may obtain a clean copy for you as quickly as possible.

NOTICE WARNING CONCERNING COPYRIGHT RESTRICTIONS

The copyright law of the United States (Title 17, United States Code) governs that making a photocopy or other reproductions of copyrighted materials. Under certain conditions specified in the law, libraries and archives are authorized to furnish a photocopy or other reproductions. One of these specified conditions is that the photocopy reproduction is not to be used for any purpose other than private study, scholarship, or research. If a user makes a request for, or later uses, a photocopy or reproduction for purposes in excess of fair use, that user may be liable for copyright infringement.

This institution reserves the right to refuse to accept a copying order if, in its judgment, fulfillment of the order would involve violation of copyright law.

This notice is posted in compliance with
Title 37 C.F.R., Chapter II, Part 201.14

GEOFFREY CHAUCER

THE
CANTERBURY
TALES

EDITED BY ROBERT BOENIG &
ANDREW TAYLOR



broadview editions

©2008 Robert Boenig and Andrew Taylor.

All rights reserved. The use of any part of this publication reproduced, transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, or stored in a retrieval system, without prior written consent of the publisher—or in the case of photocopying, a licence from Access Copyright (Canadian Copyright Licensing Agency), One Yonge Street, Suite 1900, Toronto, ON M5E 1E5—is an infringement of the copyright law.

Library and Archives Canada Cataloguing in Publication

Chaucer, Geoffrey, d. 1400

The Canterbury tales / Geoffrey Chaucer ; edited by Robert Boenig and Andrew Taylor.

(Broadview editions)

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 978-1-55111-484-2

I. Boenig, Robert, 1948- II. Taylor, Andrew, 1958-
III. Title. IV. Series.

PR1866.B64 2008

821'.1

C2008-901796-X

Broadview Press acknowledges the financial support of the Government of Canada through the Book Publishing Industry Development Program (BPIDP) for our publishing activities.

www.broadviewpress.com

Book design and composition by George Kirkpatrick

PRINTED IN CANADA

Broadview Press is an independent, international publishing house, incorporated in 1985. Broadview believes in shared ownership, both with its employees and with the general public; since the year 2000 Broadview shares have traded publicly on the Toronto Venture Exchange under the symbol BDP.

We welcome comments and suggestions regarding any aspect of our publications—please feel free to contact us at the addresses below or at broadview@broadviewpress.com.

North America:

PO Box 1243, Peterborough,
Ontario, Canada K9J 7H5

2215 Kenmore Ave.,
Buffalo, NY, USA 14207

Tel: (705) 743-8990;

Fax: (705) 743-8353

E-mail: customerservice@broadviewpress.com

UK, Ireland, and continental Europe:

NBN International
Estover Road
Plymouth, UK PL6 7PY

Tel: 44 (0) 1752 202300

Fax: 44 (0) 1752 202330

E-mail: enquiries@nbninternational.com

Australia and New Zealand:

UNIREPS,
University of New South Wales
Sydney, NSW, Australia 2052

Tel: 61 2 9664 0999

Fax: 61 2 9664 5420

E-mail: info.press@unsw.edu.au

63r

Of bigamy or of forgerie
 The choler men speke of it veynlye
 To heere the wife byng aun caldoun
 I hope he hadde synes mo than oon
 As godde god it were leueful to me
 To be iustified half so ofte as he
 Which iuste of god hadde he for alle his synes
 For myn synth othech. p in this world alyne is
 Goddoot this noble byng as to myght
 The luste myght has many a myghte fit
 With eke of hem so hel was hym on lyne
 Yllesed he god that I haue wedded synne
 Wel tene the wyte. Whan che he othech
 For godde I hel nat kepe me charyt in al
 Whan myn honfoude is fro the world ygon
 Som cypren with othech wedde me anon
 For thame that wylle othech I am free
 To wedde a gooder half they it thers me
 He othech to be wedded is no synne
 That is to be wedded than to bynne
 That telleth us thogh folk were inkyne
 Of sheches thureth any of bigamyne
 That hel Abraham was an hooly man
 And Jacob eke as forsoth as I kan
 And eke of hem hadde synes mo than oon
 And many another with also
 Whanne douch ye were in manere age
 That hye god defende mayage
 Sey expre god I may yow telleth me
 In these comanded he comynte
 I wote as hel as ye it is no synne
 Whan thapostel speeth of unydenhed
 He seith that theyr they of hadd he noon
 Man may consulte a woman to been con
 Out consulting is nat comandment
 He pene it in omye othene iugement
 For hadde god comanded maydenhed
 Whanne hadde he synnes weddyng with the ded
 And tere if they were no oed yowde
 Synne they of thame othech it gode
 I don't ne southe nat comanden are leche
 A thynge of thyn his maystey yaf noon boete
 The wite is set by of synnes
 Thate she so may. Who yenneth datt lat see
 But this word is nat taken of every wight
 But theyre god list gyue it of his myght
 That hel the apostel was a mayde
 But natheles thogh thame wote and othech

Fi aure no dicitur uolunt

ad si dicitur in e liban

et tu qm uolunt in dno

si accepit p dno no perrisi

et si unq die p dno no perrisi

et in a dno si uolunt in dno

quod est n dno qui p dno

quod est n dno qui p dno

quod est n dno qui p dno

quod est n dno qui p dno

quod est n dno qui p dno

quod est n dno qui p dno

quod est n dno qui p dno

quod est n dno qui p dno

quod est n dno qui p dno

quod est n dno qui p dno

The Wife of Bath's Prologue with accompanying glosses. Ellesmere Manuscript EL 26 C9 f. 63r. Reprinted by permission of The Huntington Library.

THE WIFE OF BATH'S PROLOGUE

THE PROLOGUE OF THE WYVES TALE OF BATHE

"EXPERIENCE, though noon auctoritee
 Were in this world, were right ynogh to me¹
 To speke° of wo° that is in mariage. *speak, woe*
 For lordynges,° sith° I twelve° yeer was of age, *lords, since, MS xij*
 Ythanked° be God that is eterne on lyve,° *thanked, eternally alive*
 Housbondes at chirche dore° I have had fyve.° *church door, five*
 For I so ofte have ywedded° bee.² *wedded, been*
 And alle were worthy men in hir° degree. *their*
 But me was toold certeyn° nat longe agoon° is, *certain, not long ago*
 That sith that Crist ne wente° nevere but onis° *did not go, once*
 To weddyng in the Cane° of Galilee³ *Cana*
 By the same ensample° thoughte me° *example, it seemed to me*
 That I ne sholde° wedded be but ones.⁴ *should not, once*
 Herkne eek° which a sharpe word for the *listen also*
 nones° *for the occasion*
 15 Biside° a welle Jhesus, God and man, *beside*
 Spak° in preeve° of the Samaritan;⁵ *spoke, rebuke*
 'THOU hast yhad° fyve housbondes,' quod° he, *have had, said*
 'And that man the which that hath now thee° *who now has you*
 Is noght thyn housbonde.' Thus seyde he certeyn.
 20 What that he mente therby,° I kan nat *meant by this*
 seyn.° *cannot say*
 But that I axe,° why that the fifthe man *ask*

Was noon housbonde to the Samaritan?
 How manye myghte she have in mariage?⁶
 Yet herde I nevere tellen° in myn age *never heard told*
 25 Upon this nombre° diffnicioun.° *number, definition*
 Men may devyne° and glosen⁷ up and down,° *guess, gloss, down*
 But wel I woot° expres° withoute lye,° *well I know, clearly, lie*
 God bad° us forto wexe and *commanded*
 multiplie.⁸ *to increase and multiply*
 That gentil° text kan° I understonde! *noble, can*
 30 Eek wel I woot, he seyde myn housbonde
 Sholde lete fader and mooder° and *should leave father and mother*
 take me.
 But of no nombre° menciouun made he° *number, did he make mention*
 Of bigamy° or of octogamy°. *bigamy, marriage to eight spouses*
 Why sholde° mien speke° of it vileynye?° *should, speak, villainy*
 35 Lo heere° the wise kyng Daun° Salamon.⁹ *hear, Master*
 I trowe° he hadde wyves mo° than oon.¹⁰ *believe, more, one*
 As wolde God,° it were leveful° unto me *if God allowed it, lawful*
 To be refresshed° half so ofte° as he, *refreshed, often*
 Which yifte° of God hadde he for alle hise wyvys.° *gift, wives*
 40 No man hath swich° that in this world alyve° is. *has such, alive*
 God woot,° this noble kyng, as to my *God knows*
 wit,° *as far as I know*
 The first nyght° had many a myrie° fit *night, merry*
 With ech° of hem,° so wel was hym° on *each, them, he was so lucky*
 lyve.
 Yblessed be God that I have wedded five!¹¹

1 "Experience, even if there were no written authority in the world, would be quite enough for me ..." Authority, in this sense, refers to the writings of learned men, especially the Fathers of the Church, such as Saint Jerome, or ancient philosophers.

2 Many manuscripts have "If I so ofte myghte have ywedded be," i.e., if these multiple marriages were indeed lawful.

3 The attendance of Christ at the wedding in Cana is recounted in John 2:1-11. A Latin gloss in the margin notes "In Cana Galilee."

4 There is a Latin gloss in the margin quoting Saint Jerome's *Against Jovinian*: "For by going once to a marriage he taught that one should be married only once." This work is one of Chaucer's major sources for the Wife of Bath's Prologue and forms part of the book that her fifth husband reads to her (see line 675).

5 Christ's rebuke of the Samaritan woman who had been wedded five times is recounted in John 4:1-42.

6 There is a Latin gloss in the margin from Jerome: "The number of wives is not defined, since, according to Paul, those who have wives [i.e., many wives] are as if they did not have them [i.e., were not truly married]." The gloss cites 1 Corinthians 7:29 in support.

7 Since crucial points in the Bible, and other religious, philosophical, or legal texts were explained in glosses (comments written in the margins or between the lines), glossing became a general term for interpreting.

8 God's commandment to increase and multiply is found in Genesis 1:28, as a Latin gloss in the margin notes.

9 The scribe has written "audi" (*hear* in Latin) above "here."

10 According to the Bible (1 Kings 11:33) King Solomon had seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines.

11 Some manuscripts contain the following six line passage:

"Of whiche I have pyked out the beste
 Bothe of here nether purs° and of here cheste.°
 Diverse scoles° maken parfyt clerkes°
 And diverse practyk° in many sondry werkes

their lower purse (testicles), money box
[Studying at] different universities, perfect scholars
practice

- 45 Welcome the sixte, whanevere he shal.^o *whenever he shall [arrive]*
 Forsothe,^o I wol nat kepe me chaast in al^{o1} *in truth, entirely chaste*
 Whan myn housbonde is fro^o the world ygon.^o *from, gone*
 Som^o Cristen^o man shal wedde me *some, Christian*
 anon,^o *immediately*
 For thanne^o th'apostle seith^{o2} I am free *then, the apostle says*
 50 To wedde, a Goddes half, where it liketh me.³
 He seith to be wedded is no synne.^o *sin*
 'Bet^o is to be wedded than to brynne.'^{o4} *better, burn*
 What rekketh me,^o thogh folk seye^o *what do I care, say*
 vileynye^o *villainy*
 Of shrewed^o Lameth^{o5} and of bigamy^{o?} *curse, bigamy*
 55 I woot wel^o Abraham^{o6} was an hooly^o man *know well, holy*
 And Jacob eek, as ferforth as I kan,^o *as far as I know*
 And ech of hem^o hadde wyves mo than two *them*
 And many another man also.
 Whanne^o saugh^o ye evere in manere age^o *when, saw, in any age*
 60 That hye^o God defende^o mariage *high, forbade*
 By expres^o word? I pray yow, telleth me. *specific*
 Or where comanded he virginitee?^o *virginity*
 I woot as wel as ye,^o it is no drede,⁷ *know as well as you*
 Whan th'apostel^o speketh of maydenhede.^o *the apostle (Paul), virginity*
 65 He seyde that precept^o therof^o hadde he *commandment, about*
 noon.^{o8} *none*
 Men may conseil^ole a womman to been oon,^o *counsel, single*
 But conseil^olyng is nat comandement.
 He putte it in oure owene juggement.^o *left it to our own judgment*
- For hadde^o God comanded maydenhede, *had*
 70 Thanne^o hadde he dampned^o weddyng with *then, damned*
 the dede.^o *in the act*
 And certain^o, if ther were no seed ysowe^o *certainly, sown*
 Virginitee, wherof thanne^o sholde^o it growe?^o *how then, should*
 Poul^o ne dorste nat^o comanden atte *Paul, dared not*
 leeste^o *command at least*
 A thyng of which his maister^o yaf^o noon *master, gave*
 heeste.^o *no command*
 75 The dart^{o9} is set up of virginitee:
 Cacche whoso may. Who renneth best, lat see!^{o10}
 BUT this word is nat taken of every wight.^o *does not apply to everyone*
 But theras God lust gyve it of his myght.^{o11}
 I woot wel the apostel was a mayde.^o *virgin*
 80 But natheles,^o thogh^o that he wroot^o and *nevertheless, though, wrote*
 sayde
 He wolde^o that every wight^o were swich^o as *wished, person, such*
 he,^{o12}
 Al nys but conseil^o to virginitee. *is not but advice*
 And for to been^o a wyf he yaf^o me leve^o *he, gave, leave*
 Of indulgence,^o so it is no repreve^o *by permission, reproach*
 85 To wedde me if my make^o dye^o *mate, should die*
 Withouten excepcioun^o of bigamy^{o.} *objection, bigamy*
 Al^o were it good no womman for to touche,^{o13} *Although*
 He mente^o as in his bed or in his couche.^o *meant, couch*
 For peril is bothe fyr^o and tow^o *fire, flax (flammable material)*
 t'assemble.^o *to mix*

Maken the workman parfit sekirly

Of five husbandes scoleiyng^o am I."

schooling

John Manly and Edith Rickert suggest that these lines are "a late Chaucerian insertion," i.e., part of a late rough draft of the poem.

- 1 There is a Latin gloss in the margin: "If, however, they cannot be chaste, let them marry" from 1 Corinthians 7:28.
- 2 St. Paul in 1 Corinthians 7:25-38 offers his views about the wisdom of marrying.
- 3 "To wed, by God's permission, wherever I wish." There is a Latin gloss in the margin: "For if the husband dies, the wife is free to marry whom she wishes."
- 4 This quotation is from 1 Corinthians 7:9. There is a Latin gloss in the margin citing the line.
- 5 Lamech is the first to marry two wives. See Genesis 4:19.
- 6 The patriarch Abraham, as recounted in the book of Genesis, was favored by God, yet he had more than one wife, as did his grandson Jacob. A Latin gloss in the margin notes: "Lamach, who first entered into bigamy, was a bloody and murderous man; Abraham was the first to enter trigamy; Jacob quatriginamy."
- 7 "It is no dread" is a filler here meaning roughly, "do not doubt it."
- 8 As the Latin gloss in the margin at line 73 notes, Paul admits that he could find no justification for his view in the Old Testament, but gave his judgment in its support. This statement is found in 1 Corinthians 7:25.
- 9 Apparently a spear was sometimes given as a prize for a race in England in the Middle Ages. Many editors prefer the reading "for virginity" (found in many other manuscripts), which makes virginity the competitor rather than the prize.
- 10 "Let whoever can catch it. Let's see who runs best." A Latin gloss in the margin cites the description of virginity as a prize in a race from Jerome's *Against Jovinian*.
- 11 "Except where God wishes, through his might, to impose this principle [of virginity]."
- 12 There is a Latin gloss in the margin quoting 1 Corinthians 7:7: "I wish, however, all men to be as myself."
- 13 There is a Latin gloss in the margin quoting 1 Corinthians 7:1: "It is good for a man not to touch a woman."

- 90 Ye knowe what this ensample° may resemble. *example*
 This is al and som,° that virginitee *the whole matter*
 Moore profiteth than weddyng in freletee.¹
 Freletee° clepe I° but if° that he and she *weakness, I call it, unless*
 Wolde lede° al hir lyf° in chastitee. *would lead, their life*
- 95 I GRAUNTE° it wel I have noon envie,° *grant, no envy*
 Thogh maydenhede preferre bigamye.²
 Hem liketh° to be clene,° body and goost.° *they prefer, pure, spirit*
 Of myn estaat° I nyl nat° make no *my condition, will not*
 boost.° *boast*
 For wel ye knowe, a lord in his houshold,
- 100 He nath nat° every vessel al of gold. *does not have*
 Somme been of tree° and doon° hir° *some are of wood, do, their*
 lord servyse.
 God clepeth° folk to hym in sondry wyse.° *calls, in different ways*
 And everich hath° of God a propre *everyone has*
 yifte³— *particular gift*
 Som this, som that, as hym liketh shifte.° *as he pleases to give*
- 105 VIRGINITEE is greet perfeccioun⁴
 And continence eek with devocioun.° *[religious] devotion*
 But Crist that of perfeccioun° is welle° *perfection, well (source)*
 Bad° nat° every wight° sholde° go *commanded, not, person, should*
 selle
 Al that he hadde and gyve° it to the poore *give*
- 110 And in swich wise° folwe hym° and his *such a manner, follow him*
 foore.⁵ *footsteps*
 He spak to hem that wolde lyve parfitly.° *would live perfectly*
 And, lordynges, by youre leve,° that am nat I! *leave*
 I wol bistowe° the flour° of myn° age *will bestow, flower, my*
 In the actes and in fruyt° of mariage. *fruit*
- 115 TELLE me also, to what conclusioun
 Were membres ymaad° of generacioun?⁶ *made*
- And for what profit° was a wight ywroght?⁷ *purpose, person made*
 Trusteth° right wel, they were nat maad° *believe me, not made*
 for noght.° *nothing*
 Glose whoso wole and seye bothe up and down,⁸
 120 That they were maad° for purgacioun° *made, releasing*
 Of uryne° and oure bothe thynges *urine*
 smale⁹ *our two small things (sexual organs)*
 And eek° to knowe° a femele° from a male *also, distinguish, female*
 And for noon oother cause, sey° ye no? *say*
 The experience° woot wel° it is *experience (in general) knows well*
 noght so.
- 125 So that the clerkes° be nat° with me wrothe,° *theologians, not, angry*
 I sey yis,° that they beth maked° for bothe. *say yes, are made*
 That is to seye,° for office and for ese° *say, pleasure*
 Of engendrure,¹⁰ ther we nat God *conception*
 displese.° *where do not displease*
 Why sholde men elles° in hir bookes sette° *otherwise, set down*
- 130 That a man shal yelde° to his wyf hire dette.¹¹ *yield, her debt*
 Now, wherwith° sholde° he make his *with what, should*
 paiement° *payment*
 If he ne used° his sely° instrument? *did not use, innocent*
 Thanne were they maad° upon a creature *made*
 To purge uryne° and for engendrure.° *release urine, conception*
- 135 BUT I seye noght° that every wight° is *say not, person*
 holde° *obligated*
 That hath swich harneys,° as I of tolde, *such equipment*
 To goon° and usen hem° in engendrure. *go, them*
 They shul° nat take of chastitee no cure.¹² *shall, attention*
 Crist was a mayde° and shapen° as a man, *virgin, formed*
- 140 And many a seint sith° the world bigan,° *since, began*
 Yet lyved they evere in parfit° chastitee. *perfect*
 I nyl nat envye° no virginitee. *will not envy*

1 "Remaining a virgin is better than marrying through weakness."

2 "Though virginity be preferred to bigamy."

3 There is a Latin gloss in the margin quoting 1 Corinthians 7:7.

4 There is a Latin gloss in the margin quoting Revelation 14:1-4.

5 The unusual word "foore" caused many scribes trouble and "i. [e.], stepes" is written above.

6 "Members of generation" refers here to sexual organs. A Latin gloss in the margin notes "Questio" to show that there is a question for debate here.

7 For this line Hengwrt reads, "And of so parfit wys a wight ywroght" (And in such a perfect manner a human being is made). Other manuscripts have "wright" instead of "wight" (made by such a perfect wright or artisan).

8 "Let whoever wishes to do so offer an interpretation and say both up and down."

9 Ellesmere reads "Of urine bothe and thynges smale," which makes no sense. The emendation is from Hengwrt.

10 The phrase "office and ease of engendrure" means for a purpose (that is, conceiving children) and pleasure of procreation.

11 Yielding one's spouse a debt was a euphemism for having sex and acknowledged that both partners owed each other a certain sexual fulfillment, lest sexual frustration drive one of them to adultery. The line is a quotation from 1 Corinthians 7:3.

12 For this line Hengwrt reads, "Thanne sholde men take of chastitee no cure."

- Lat hem° be breed° of pured whete° *let them, bread, pure wheat*
 seed,
 And lat° us wyves hoten° barly breed. *let, be called*
 145 And yet with barly breed, Mark¹ telle kan,
 Oure Lord refreshed° many a man. *gave food to*
 In swich° estaat° as God hath cleped *such, condition*
 us² *has called us*
 I wol persevere.° I nam nat precius.° *will remain, am not fastidious*
 In wyfhode I wol use myn instrument° *sexual organ*
 150 As frely° as my makere hath it sent. *freely*
 If I be daungerous,° God yeve° me sorwe.° *standoffish, give, sorrow*
 Myn housbonde shal it have bothe eve and morwe.
 Whan that hym list com forth and paye his dette.³
 An housbonde I wol have, I nyl nat lette,° *will not stop*
 155 Which shal° be bothe my dettour° and my *who shall, debtor*
 thral⁴ *slave*
 And have his tribulacioun° withal° *tribulation, also*
 Upon his flessch whil I am his wyf.
 I have the power duryng° al my lyf *during*
 Upon his propre° body and noght he. *own*
 160 Right thus the apostel⁵ tolde it unto me
 And bad° oure housbondes for to love us weel.° *commanded, well*
 Al this sentence me liketh every deel.⁶
 UP stirte° the Pardoner and that anon.° *jumped, immediately*
 "Now, Dame," quod he, "by God and by Seint John,"
 165 Ye been° a noble prechour° in this cas!⁷ *are, preacher, matter*
 I was aboute to wedde a wyf, allas!
 What sholde I bye it on my flessch so deere?⁷
 Yet hadde I lever° wedde no wyf to yeere!⁸ *rather, this year*
 "ABYDE,"° quod she, "my tale is nat bigonne.° *wait, not begun*
 170 Nay, thou shalt drynken° of another tonne° *drink, cask (of wine)*
 Er° that I go, shal savoure wors° than *before, [that] shall taste worse*
- ale!
 And whan that I have toold forth my tale
 Of tribulacioun that is in mariage,
 Of which I am expert in al myn age,° *throughout my life*
 175 This to seyn,° myself have been the whippe,° *say, whip*
 Than maystow chese wheither° thou wolt *you can choose whether*
 sippe° *will sip*
 Of that tonne that I shal abroche.° *open*
 Bewar of it er° thou to ny° approche.° *before, too near, approach*
 For I shal telle ensamples° mo° than ten. *examples, more*
 180 Whoso that wol nat bewar by othere men⁸
 By hym° shul° othere men corrected be. *him, shall*
 The same wordes writeth Protholomee.° *Ptolemy*
 Rede° it in his *Almageste* and take it there!⁹ *read*
 "DAME, I wolde praye° if youre wyl° it were," *would ask, will*
 185 Seyde this Pardoner, "as ye bigan
 Telle forth youre tale. Spareth° for no man, *spare*
 And teche us yonge men of youre praktike!¹⁰ *practice*
 "GLADLY, sires,° sith it may yow like.° *sirs, it may please you*
 But yet I praye° to al this compaignye, *ask*
 190 If that I speke after my fantasye,° *fancy*
 As taketh it nat agrief° that° I seye, *take it not wrong, what*
 For myn entente° is but for to pleye.° *my intent, play*
 Now sire, now wol I telle forth my tale.¹⁰
 As evere moote° I drynken wyn or ale, *might*
 195 I shal seye sooth° of tho housbondes that I *say [the] truth*
 hadde,
 As thre of hem were goode and two were badde.
 The thre men were goode and riche and olde.
 Unnethe° myghte° they the statut° holde *scarcely, might, regulation*
 In which that they were bounden° unto me.¹¹ *bound*
 200 Ye woot wel what I meene° of this, pardee.° *mean, by God*

1 The reference here is to John 6:9 and the miracle of the loaves and fishes, not to a passage in the Gospel of Mark.

2 The lines echoes 1 Corinthians 7:20, as noted by a Latin gloss in the margin.

3 "When he wishes to come forth and pay his debt." For the sexual nature of the "debt," see above, p. 143, note 11.

4 There are two Latin glosses in the margin quoting Jerome's *Against Jovinian*. The first is at line 155: "He who has a wife is said to be a debtor and to be uncircumcised, and a servant of his wife, and like a bad servant he is bound." The second is at 158: "And also, if you are a servant to your wife, do not be sad for this reason. Again, if you have married you have not sinned but those who do will have sorrow in the flesh. Again, a man does not have power over his own body, but his wife does. Again, men, love your wives."

5 The apostle here referred to is St. Paul, whose insights on marriage the Wife of Bath has been mentioning since she began to speak. In addition to the passage referred to above, p. 142, note 2, Paul's other major pronouncement on marriage is Ephesians 5:21-33.

6 "I like all this lesson [of Scripture], every part [of it]."

7 "Why should I pay so dearly for it with my flesh."

8 "The one who will not be warned [by examples offered] by others."

9 The aphorism is not found in the *Almagest*, the great astrological treatise of Claudius Ptolemy (second century AD), who gives his name to the Ptolemaic system, in which the sun revolves around the earth, but in the preface to one of the translations of his work.

10 There is an English gloss in the margin: "Bihoold how this goode wyf served hir iij firste housbondes which were goode olde men."

11 In other words, the three old husbands could not fulfill their obligation to pay the marriage debt. There is a Latin gloss in the margin from Jerome's *Against Jovinian*, 1:49: "Also the high priests of Athens, even to this day, emasculate themselves by taking hemlock."

- As help me God, I laughe whan I thynke
 How pitously anyght^o I made hem swynke!^o *at night, work*
 And by my fey,^o I tolde of it no stoor.^o *faith, set no store by it*
 They had me yeven^o hir^o gold and hir tresoor.^o *given, their, treasure*
 205 Me neded nat do lenger diligence¹
 To wynne hir love or doon hem reverence.^o *honor them*
 They loved me so wel, by God above,
 That I ne tolde no deyntee of hir
 love.^o *did not put any value on their love*
 A wys^o womman wol sette hire evere in *wise*
 oon^o *will always determine*
 210 To gete hire^o love theras^o she hath noon.^o *get herself, where, has none*
 But sith I hadde hem^o hoolly^o in myn hond *them, wholly*
 And sith they hadde me yeven al hir lond, *given, all their land*
 What sholde^o I taken heede^o hem for to *why should, bother*
 plese,^o *please*
 But if^o it were for my profit and myn ese?^o *unless, pleasure*
 215 I sette hem so a werk,^o by my fey,^o *to work, faith*
 That many a nyght they songen^o 'Weilawaye!^o *sang, alas*
 The bacon was nat^o fet^o for hem, I trowe,^o *not, fetched, believe*
 That som^o men han^o in Essex at Dunmowe.² *some, have*
 I governed hem so wel after my lawe,
 220 That ech^o of hem was ful blisful^o and fawe^o *each, very happy, eager*
 To brynge me gaye thynges^o fro the fayre.^o *pretty things, fair*
 They were ful glad whan I spak to hem faire,^o *nicely*
 For, God it woot,^o I chidde hem *knows*
 spitously!^o *scolded them spitefully*
 Now herkneth^o hou^o I baar me^o proprely, *listen, how, bore myself*
 225 Ye wise wyves that kan understonde.
 Thus shul ye speke and beren hem on honde.³
 For half so boldely kan ther no man
 Swere^o and lye^o as kan a womman. *swear, lie*
 I sey nat this by^o wyves that been wyse, *about*
 230 But if^o it be whan they hem *unless*
 mysavysē.^o *give themselves bad advice*
 A wys wyf, if that she kan hir good,^o *knows what is good for her*
 Shal bere^o hym on hond the cow is wood^{o4} *shall deceive, crazy*
 And take witnessse of hir owene mayde^o *own maid*
 Of hir^o assent, but herkneth^o how I *her, listen [to]*
- sayde:^o *how I spoke*
 235 'SIRE^o olde kaynard,^o is this thyn array?^o *Sir, fool, of behaving*
 Why is my neighebores wyf so gay?^o *well dressed*
 She is honoured over al ther she gooth.^o *wherever she goes*
 I sitte at hoom.^o I have no thrifty clooth.^o *home, proper clothing*
 What dostow^o at my neighebores hous? *are you doing*
 240 Is she so fair? Artow^o so amorous? *are you*
 What rowne^o ye with oure mayde,^o *whisper, maid*
 benedicite?^o *bless you*
 Sire olde lecchour,^o lat^o thy japes^o be! *sir old lecher, let, tricks*
 And if I have a gossib^o or a freend,^o *confidant, friend*
 Withouten gilt,^o thou chidest^o as a feend!^o *guilt, complain, fiend*
 245 If that I walke or pleye unto his hous,
 Thou comest hoom as dronken as a mous⁵
 And prechest^o on thy bench, with yvel *preach*
 preef!^o *bad luck to you*
 Thou seist^o to me it is a greet meschief^o *you say, great misfortune*
 To wedde a povre^o womman for costage.^o *poor, expense*
 250 And if she be riche and of heigh parage,^o *high lineage*
 Thanne^o seistow^o it is a tormentrie^o *then, you say, torment*
 To suffren^o hire pride and hire malencolie.^o *endure, sadness*
 And if she be fair, thou verray knave,^o *you true villain*
 Thou seyst that every honour^o wol hire have.^o *lecher, will have her*
 255 She may no while in chastitee^o abyde^o *chastity, remain*
 That is assailed^o upon ech a syde.^o *attacked, each side*
 THOU seyst that som folk desiren us for richesse,
 Somme for oure shape, somme for oure fairnesse
 And som for she kan synge and daunce^o *can sing and dance*
 260 And som for gentillesse^o and som for daliaunce,^o *nobility, flirtation*
 Som for hir handes and hir armes smale.^o *her slender arms*
 Thus goth^o al to the devel,^o by thy tale! *goes, devil*
 Thou seyst men may nat kepe^o a castel wal,^o *not keep, wall*
 It may so longe assailed been overal.
 265 AND if that she be foul, thou seist that she
 Coveiteth^o every man that she may se.^o *covets, see*
 For as a spaynel^o she wol on hym lepe,^o *spaniel, leap*
 Til that she fynde^o som man hire to chepe.^o *find, to buy her*
 Ne noon so grey goos gooth in the lake
 270 As, seistow, wol been withoute make.^{o6}

1 "I did not need to make any more effort."

2 The reference here is to a custom in the village of Dunmow of awarding a side of bacon to a married couple who did not quarrel for a year.

3 The expression "beren hem on honde" can mean either "to deceive them" or "to accuse them falsely." The Wife does both to her husbands.

4 "A wise woman can convince her husband that a tale-telling cowbird (a kind of jackdaw) [who tells him she has been unfaithful] is mad and use her own maid as a witness."

5 It is not clear why mice are thought to be drunk, but the expression was common in medieval England. Cf. modern "drunk as a skunk."

6 "There is no goose in the lake, no matter how grey, who does not have a mate." Another proverb.

- And seyst° it is an hard thyng° for to welde,° *you say, thing, control*
 A thyng that no man wole his thankes helde.° *willingly hold*
 Thus seistow, lorel,° whan° thow goost° to bedde *fool, when, go*
 And that no wys man nedeth° for to wedde, *needs*
 275 Ne° no man that entendeth unto *nor*
 hevene.° *intends [to go] to Heaven*
 With wilde thonder dynt° and firy *wild thunderclaps*
 leve° *fiery lightning*
 Moote° thy welked nekke° be tobroke!° *may, withered neck, broken*
 THOW seyst° that droppynge° houses and eek *you say, drippy*
 smoke
 And chidyng° wyves maken men to flee *nagging*
 280 Out of hir owene houses. A, benedicitee,° *bless you*
 What eyleth° swich an old man for to chide?° *ails, complain*
 THOW seyst° that we wyves wol° oure vices hide *you say, will*
 Til we be fast° and thanne we wol hem shewe.° *secure, show*
 Wel° may that be a proverbe of a shrewe!° *well, villain*
 285 THOU seist that oxen, asses, hors,° and houndes, *horses*
 They been assayd° at diverse stoundes.° *tried, different times*
 Bacyns,° lavours° er° that men hem *basins, bowls, before*
 bye,° *buy them*
 Spoones and stooles and al swich *household equipment*
 housbondrye,° *are, pots, clothing*
 And so been° pottes,° clothes,° and array. *do not try [them] out*
 290 But folk of wyves maken noon assay° *old foolish*
 Til they be wedded. Olde dotard° shrewe!
 Thanne seistow we wol oure vices shewe.
 THOU seist also that it displeth° me *displeases*
 But if° that thou wolt preyse° my beautee *unless, will praise*
 295 And but thou poure° alwey° upon my face *gaze, always*
 And clepe° me 'faire dame!' in every place, *call*
 And but° thou make a feeste° on thilke day° *unless, feast, the same*
 That I was born and make me fressh and gay,
 And but° thou do to my norice¹ honour° *unless, nurse, honor*
 300 And to my chambriere° withinne my bour° *chambermaid, bedroom*
- And to my fadres° folk° and his allyes: *father's, relatives*
 Thus seistow, olde barel° ful of lyes!° *barrel, lies*
 AND yet of oure apprentice Janekyn,²
 For his crise heer° shynynge° as gold so *curly hair, shining*
 fyn° *fine*
 305 And for he squiereth° me bothe up and doun, *escorts*
 Yet hastow° caught a fals° suspicioun.° *you have, false, suspicion*
 I wol° hym noght,° though thou were deed° *want, not, dead*
 tomorwe!° *tomorrow*
 BUT tel me, why hydestow° with *do you hide*
 sorwe° *with sorrow [to you]*
 The keyes° of my cheste° away fro° me? *keys, chest (safety box), from*
 310 It is my good° as wel as thyn,° pardee!° *possession, yours, by God*
 What wenestow to make an ydiot of oure dame?°³
 Now by that lord that called is Seint Jame,° *Saint James*
 Thou shalt nat° bothe, thogh° thou were wood,° *not, though, crazy*
 Be maister° of my body and of my good!° *master, possessions*
 315 That oon thou shalt forgo, maugree thyne eyen!⁴
 What nedeth° thee° of me to enquere° or *needs, you, inquire*
 spyen?° *spy*
 I trowe° thou woldest° loke° me in thy *believe, would, lock*
 chiste!⁵ *chest*
 Thou sholdest seye, 'Wyf, go wher thee liste.°
 Taak° youre disport!° I wol leve° no *take, enjoyment, will believe*
 talye.° *tales*
 320 I knowe yow for a trewe wyf, Dame Alys!
 We love no man that taketh kepe° or charge *takes keep*
 Wher that we goon.° We wol ben° at oure large.° *go, will be, free*
 OF alle men, blessed moot° he be, *might*
 The wise astrologien° Daun Protholome° *astronomer, Master Ptolemy*
 325 That seith this proverbe in his *Almageste*,
 'Of alle men his wysdom is the hyeste° *highest*
 That rekketh° nevere who hath the world in *who cares*
 honde.°⁷ *who possesses the world*
 By this proverbe thou shalt understonde:

1 Wealthy medieval people were attended to in their childhood by wet nurses, who often became for a time surrogate mothers.
 2 A Latin gloss in the margin notes the line from Jerome's *Against Jovinian* 1.47: "There is an estate manager with curly hair." Jerome says that the title "estate manager" is "a cloak for adultery."
 3 "What, do you expect to make an idiot of our lady?" "Oure dame" here is the Wife of Bath's reference to herself in the third person in her role of the lady of her old husband's household.
 4 "You must give up one of them, despite your eyes!" i.e., despite anything you can do.
 5 Medieval merchants used large locked chests to lock up their coins and their valuables.
 6 "You should say, 'Wife, go wherever you want.'"
 7 There is a gloss in the margin giving a version of this saying from a Latin translation of Ptolemy's *Almagest*.

- Have thou ynogh, what thar thee recche or care¹
- 330 How myrily° that othere folkes fare?° *merrily, behave*
 For certeyn,° olde dotard,° by youre leve,° *certain, old fool, leave*
 Ye shul° have queynte² right ynogh° at eve!³ *shall, enough, at night*
 He is to greet° a nygard° that wolde
 werne° *would refuse*
 A man to lighte his candle at his lanterne.
- 335 He shal have never the lasse° light, pardee!⁴ *less, by God*
 Have thou ynogh, thee thar nat pleyne thee.³
 THOU seyst also that if we make us gay
 With clothynge and with precious array,° *expensive adornment*
 That it is peril of oure chastitee.° *a danger to our chastity*
- 340 And yet with sorwe thou most enforce
 thee° *you must support yourself*
 And seye these wordes° in the Apostles⁴ name. *say these words*
 'In habit° maad° with chastitee and shame *clothing, made*
 Ye wommen shul apparaille yow,⁵° quod he. *dress yourselves*
 'And noght° in tressed heer° and gay
 perree,° *jewels*
- 345 As perles° ne with gold ne° clothes riche.⁶ *pearls, nor*
 After thy text° ne after thy rubriche° *your quotation, rubric*
 I wol nat wirche° as muchel as a gnat!⁵ *work*
 THOU seydest this, that I was lyk° a cat. *like*
 For whoso° wolde senge° a cattes skyn, *whoever, would singe*
- 350 Thanne wolde the cat wel dwellen in his in.° *lodgings*
 And if the cattes skyn° be slyk° and gay, *cat's skin, sleek*
 She wol nat dwelle° in house half a day, *will not remain*
 But forth she wole° er any° day be dawed° *will [go], before, dawned*
 To shewe hir skyn and goon° a caterwawed.⁶ *go*
- 355 This is to seye, if I be gay, sire shrewe,° *sir villain*
- I wol renne° out my borel° for to shewe! *will run, cheap clothing*
 SIRE olde fool, what eyleth° thee to spyen,° *ails, spy*
 Thogh thou preye° Argus⁷ with hise° hundred eyen° *ask, his, eyes*
 To be my wardecors,° as he kan° best. *bodyguard, can*
 360 In feith,° he shal nat kepe° me but [me] *faith, not keep*
 lest!⁸ *unless I want*
 Yet koude° I make his berd,° so moot° I *could, fool him, might*
 thee!⁸ *thrive*
 THOU seydest eek° that ther been thynges
 thre,⁹ *there are three things*
 The whiche thynges troublen° al this erthe *trouble*
 And that no wight° may endure the ferthe.° *no person, fourth*
- 365 O leewe sire shrewe!⁹ Jhesu shorte° thy *dear sir villain, shorten*
 lyf!⁹ *life*
 Yet prechestow° and seyst° an° hateful wyf *you preach, say, MS and*
 Yrekned is for oon° of these *is counted as one*
 meschances.° *these misfortunes*
 Been ther none othere° resemblances *there are no other*
 That ye may likne° youre parables to, *likened*
 370 But if a sely° wyf be oon° of tho?⁹ *innocent, one, those*
 THOU liknest° wommenes love to helle,¹⁰ *likened*
 To bareyne lond° ther° water may nat° *barren land, where, not*
 dwelle.
 THOU liknest it also to wilde fyr:¹¹
 The moore° it brenneth,° the moore it hath *more, burns*
 desir° *desires*
 375 To consumen° everythyng that brent wole *consume*
 be.° *will be burned*
 Thou seyst, right as wormes° shendeth° a tree,¹² *grubs, harm*
 Right so a wyf destroyeth hire housbond.

1 "If you have enough, why do you need to bother yourself or care?"

2 "Queynte" (elegant, clever, or pleasing thing) is a medieval euphemism for the female sexual organs. Cf. the Wife's use of "quonyam" (line 608), "bele chose" (lines 447, 510), and "chambre of Venus" (line 618).

3 "If you have enough, you do not need to complain for yourself."

4 The apostle here is again St. Paul. The following quotation comes from 1 Timothy 2:9 and is given in the Latin gloss in the margin.

5 "I will not follow ('work after') in the smallest way" or possibly, "any more than a gnat would." In medieval service books and books of devotion, rubrics (whose name comes from the red ink in which they were written) were directions about how to use the texts to which they referred either in communal worship or private devotion.

6 Caterwauling is the loud noise cats make while they are mating.

7 Argus, in Greek mythology, was the hundred-eyed guardian of Zeus's mistress Io and spy for Zeus's wife Hera. He was killed by Hermes.

8 "So mote I thee" or "So may I thrive" means little more than "indeed" or "by my word."

9 There is a Latin gloss in the margin from *Against Jovinian*, 1:28: "Also a hateful wife, if she has a good husband, [is the worst of all things that trouble the earth]."

10 There is a Latin gloss in the margin from *Against Jovinian* 1:28, quoting a sentence beginning "A woman's love is compared to hell."

11 Greek fire, a mixture consisting largely of naphtha, was used in naval warfare.

12 There is a Latin gloss in the margin from *Against Jovinian*, 1:28, quoting Proverbs 25:20, "like a worm in wood, so a wicked woman destroys her husband."

	This knowe they that been to wyves bonde. ^o	<i>are bound</i>	I wolde no lenger ^o in the bed abyde ^o	<i>longer, remain</i>
	LORDYNGES, right thus as ye have understonde ¹		410 If that I felte ^o his arm over my syde ^o	<i>felt, side</i>
380	Baar I stifly myne olde housbondes on honde, ²		Til he had maad his raunsoun unto me.	
	That thus they seyden ^o in hir dronkenesse.	<i>said</i>	Thanne wolde I suffre hym do his nycetee. ^{o4}	<i>foolishness</i>
	And al was fals, ^o but that I took witness	<i>false</i>	And therfore every man this tale I telle:	
	On Janekyn and on my nece ^o also.	<i>niece</i>	Wynne ^o whoso ^o may, for al is for to selle. ^o	<i>win, whoever, for sale</i>
	O Lord, the pyne ^o I dide hem ^o and the wo, ^o	<i>pain, [to] them, woe</i>	415 With empty hand men may none ^o haukes ^o lure,	<i>no, hawks</i>
385	Ful giltlees, ^o by Goddes sweete pyne! ^o	<i>completely guiltless, pain</i>	For wynnyng ^o wolde ^o I al his lust endure	<i>profit, would</i>
	For as an hors ^o I koude byte and whyne. ^o	<i>horse, whine</i>	And make me a feyned ^o appetit.	<i>pretended</i>
	I koude pleyne ^o thogh ^o I were in the gilt, ^o	<i>complain, though, guilty</i>	And yet in bacon ⁵ hadde I nevere delit. ^o	<i>delight</i>
	Or elles ^o oftentyme ^o hadde I been spilt. ^o	<i>else, often, destroyed</i>	That made me that evere I wolde hem chide,	
	Whoso comth ^o first to mille, ^o first	<i>whoever comes, mill</i>	420 For thogh ^o the Pope hadde seten hem	<i>though</i>
	grynt. ^o	<i>grinds</i>	biseide, ^o	<i>sat beside them</i>
390	I pleynd first, so was oure werre ^o ystynt. ^o	<i>war, stifled</i>	I wolde nat spare hem at hir owene bord. ^o	<i>table</i>
	They were ful glad to excuse hem ^o blyve ^o	<i>them, quickly</i>	For by my trouthe, I quitte hem, ^o word for word,	<i>requited them</i>
	Of thyng of which they nevere agilte hir lyve. ³		As helpe me verray ^o God omnipotent! ^o	<i>true, almighty</i>
	OF wenchis ^o wolde I beren hym on honde, ^o	<i>girls, accuse him</i>	Though I right now sholde make my testament,	
	Whan that for syk ^o unnethes ^o myghte he stonde.	<i>sickness, scarcely</i>	425 I ne owe hem ^o nat a word that it nys	<i>did not owe them</i>
395	Yet tikled ^o it his herte, ^o for that ^o he	<i>tickled, heart, because</i>	quit. ^o	<i>was not paid back</i>
	Wende ^o that I hadde of hym ^o so greet ^o	<i>thought, for him, great</i>	I broghte ^o it so aboute, by my wit,	<i>brought</i>
	chiertee. ^o	<i>love</i>	That they moste yeve it up ^o as for the beste	<i>had to give it up</i>
	I swoor ^o that al my walkyng ^o out by nyghte ^o	<i>swore, walking, night</i>	Or elles ^o hadde we nevere been in reste. ^o	<i>else, at rest</i>
	Was for tespye ^o wenchis that he dighte. ^o	<i>spy, had sex with</i>	For thogh ^o he looked as a wood leoun, ^o	<i>although, crazy lion</i>
400	Under that colour ^o hadde I many a myrthe, ^o	<i>excuse, mirth</i>	430 Yet sholde he faille of his conclusion. ^o	<i>intent</i>
	For al swich thyng was yeven ^o us in oure byrthe. ^o	<i>given, birth</i>	THANNE wolde I seye, 'Goodlief, taak keepe	
	Deceite, wepyng, spynnyng ^o God hath yeve ^o	<i>spinning, given</i>	How mekely ^o looketh ^o Wilkyn oure sheepe. ⁶	<i>meekly, looks</i>
	To wommen kyndely ^o whil ^o that they may	<i>naturally, while</i>	Com neer, ^o my spouse. Lat me ba thy	<i>come near</i>
	lyve. ^o	<i>live</i>	cheke. ^o	<i>kiss your cheek</i>
	And thus of o ^o thyng I avaunte ^o me:	<i>one, boast</i>	Ye sholde been al pacient and meke ^o	<i>meek</i>
	Atte ende, ^o I hadde the bettre ^o in ech	<i>at the end, better</i>	435 And han ^o a sweete, spiced conscience, ^o	<i>have, delicate conscience</i>
	degree ^o	<i>each instance</i>	Sith ye so preche ^o of Jobes pacience. ^o	<i>preach, Job's patience</i>
405	By sleighte, ^o or force, or by som maner	<i>deceit</i>	Suffreth alwey, ^o syn ye so wel kan preche,	<i>endure always</i>
	thyng, ^o	<i>manner [of] thing</i>	And but ^o ye do, certein ^o we shal yow	<i>unless, certainly</i>
	As by continueel murmure ^o or	<i>continual murmur</i>	teche ^o	<i>teach you</i>
	grucchyng. ^o	<i>complaining</i>	That it is fair to have a wyf in pees. ^o	<i>peace</i>
	Namely ^o abedde ^o hadden they	<i>especially, in bed</i>	440 Oon ^o of us two moste bowen, ^o doutelees, ^o	<i>one, must bow, doubtless</i>
	meschaunce. ^o	<i>misfortune</i>	And sith a man is moore resonable	
	Ther wolde I chide ^o and do hem no plesaunce. ^o	<i>nag, pleasure</i>	Than womman is, ye moste been suffrable. ^o	<i>you must be patient</i>

1 There is a Latin gloss in the margin from *Against Jovinian*, 1:28, "No one can know what a wife or a woman is unless he has endured her."

2 "I bore witness (baar ... on honde) firmly to my old husbands that they said this when they were drunk."

3 "Of a thing that they had never been guilty of in their lives."

4 "[Not] until he had paid his ransom (given me his money) would I allow him to do his foolishness (have sex with me)."

5 Bacon, of course, is old meat preserved by salting it.

6 "Then would I say, 'Sweetheart, note well, how meekly Willie, our sheep (i.e., her husband) looks.'"

What eyleth yow, ^o to grucche ^o thus and grone? ^o	<i>ails you, complain</i>	But, Lord Crist, whan that it remembreth me ^o	<i>when I remember</i>
Is it for ye wolde have my queynte ^o allone? ^o	<i>groan</i>	470 Upon my yowthe ^o and on my jolitee, ^o	<i>youth, jollity</i>
445 Wy, ^o taak ^o it al! Lo, have it everydeel! ^o Peter, I shrewe yow but ye love it weel! ¹	<i>female sexual organs</i>	It tikleth ^o me aboute myn herte roote. ^o	<i>tickles, heart's root</i>
For if I wolde selle my bele chose, I koude walke as fressh ^o as is a rose. ²	<i>alone</i>	Unto this day it dooth myn herte boote ^o	<i>does my heart good</i>
But I wol kepe it for youre owene tooth. ^o	<i>Why, take, every bit</i>	That I have had my world as in my tyme. ^o	<i>time</i>
450 Ye be ^o to blame, by God, I sey yow sooth! ^o	<i>own taste (pleasure)</i>	But age, allas, that al wole envenyme, ^o	<i>will poison all</i>
SWICHE manere wordes hadde we on honde. ³ Now wol ^o I speken ^o of my fourthe housbonde.	<i>you are</i>	475 Hath me biraft ^o my beautee and my pith. ^o	<i>stolen from me, strength</i>
MY fourthe housbonde was a revelour. ^{o4}	<i>say you [the] truth</i>	Lat ^o go! Farewel! The devel ^o go therwith! ^o	<i>let, devil, with it</i>
This is to seyn, ^o he hadde a paramour. ^o	<i>will, speak</i>	The flour ^o is goon. ^o Ther is namoore ^o to telle.	<i>flour, gone, no more</i>
455 And I was yong ^o and ful of ragerye, ^o	<i>party-goer</i>	The bren ^o as I best kan ^o now moste ^o I selle. ^o	<i>bran, can, must, sell</i>
Stibourne ^o and strong and joly ^o as a pye. ^o	<i>say, lover</i>	But yet to be right myrie ^o wol ^o I fonde. ^o	<i>merry, will, try</i>
Wel koude I daunce to an harpe smale ^o	<i>young, high spirits</i>	480 Now wol I tellen of my fourthe housbonde.	
And synge, ^o ywis, ^o as any nyghtyngale ^o	<i>stubborn, pretty, magpie</i>	I seye I hadde in herte ^o greet despit ^o	<i>heart, great anger</i>
Whan I had dronke a draughte ^o of sweete wyn. ^o	<i>small harp</i>	That he of any oother ^o had delit. ^o	<i>any other [woman], delight</i>
460 Metellius, ⁵ the foule cherl, the swyn, ^o	<i>sing, indeed, nightingale</i>	But he was quit, ^o by God and by Seint Joce! ⁹	<i>punished</i>
That with a staf ^o biraft ^o his wyf hir lyf,	<i>drunk a draught</i>	I made hym of the same wode ^o a croce. ^o	<i>wood, cross</i>
For ^o she drank wyn, thogh I hadde been his wyf,	<i>wine</i>	485 Nat ^o of my body in no foul manere ^o	<i>not, manner</i>
He sholde nat han daunted me fro drynke! ⁶	<i>swine</i>	But certein I made folk swich cheere, ^o	<i>hospitality</i>
And after wyn, on Venus ⁷ moste ^o I thynke. ^o	<i>club, stole from</i>	That in his owene grece ^o I made hym ^o frye ^o	<i>own grease, him, fry</i>
465 For also siker ^o as cold engendreth ^o hayl, ^o	<i>because</i>	For angre ^o and for verray jalousie. ^o	<i>anger, true jealousy</i>
A likerous ^o mouth moste ^o han a likerous tayl. ^o	<i>must, think</i>	By God, in erthe I was his purgatorie, ^o	<i>purgatory</i>
In wommen vinolent is no defence. ⁸	<i>as sure, causes, hail</i>	490 For which I hope his soule be in glorie.	
This knowen lecchours ^o by experience.	<i>lecherous, must have</i>	For God it woot, ^o he sat ful ofte ^o and song	<i>knows it, very often</i>
	<i>tail</i>	Whan that his shoo ^o ful bitterly hym	<i>shoe</i>
	<i>lechers</i>	wrong. ^o	<i>hurt him very bitterly</i>
		Ther was no wight ^o save God and he that wiste ^o	<i>person</i>
		In many wise ^o how soore ^o I hym twiste. ^o	<i>who knew</i>
		495 He deyde ^o whan ^o I cam fro ^o Jerusalem	<i>ways, sorely, tormented him</i>
		And lith ygrave ^o under the roode	<i>died, when, came from</i>
		beem. ^{o10}	<i>lies buried</i>
			<i>beam of the cross</i>

1 "Peter" here is not the old man's name; it is an oath: "By St. Peter!, I curse you unless you love it well," i.e., do you ever love it well.

2 In other words, if I sold myself sexually, I could dress myself beautifully with the proceeds.

3 "We were occupied (had in hand) by this kind of conversation."

4 There is an English gloss in the margin: "Of the condicioun of the fourthe housbonde of the goode wyf and how she served hym."

5 This reference is to an old story dating back to ancient Rome. A Latin gloss in the margin quotes the line "Metellius killed his own wife, whom he struck with his staff because she had drunk wine" and provides the reference to book 6 of Valerius Maximus (first century AD), i.e., to his *Facta et dicta memorabilia* (*Memorable Facts and Deeds*), a collection of short stories for orators.

6 "He should not have prevented me from drink."

7 In Roman mythology, Venus was the goddess of love. Here the Wife just means that once he was a little drunk her husband turned his mind to sex.

8 "There is no defense in drunken women," i.e., they are defenseless.

9 St. Judoc (St. Joyce) was a seventh-century prince in Brittany who gave up his succession to the throne to become a priest. He was also famous for going on a pilgrimage to Rome.

10 By this the Wife of Bath means that her fourth husband was buried inside the local parish church under the cross-beam of the cross near the high altar, a place reserved for only the most influential members of a parish.

	Al is his tombe° noght° so curyus°	<i>tomb, not, elaborate</i>	And hadde left scole° and wente at hom° to	<i>school, home</i>
	As was the sepulcre° of hym° Daryus°,	<i>tomb, him, Darius</i>	bord°	<i>to rent a room</i>
	Which that Appeles wroghte° subtilly. ¹	<i>made, subtly</i>	With my gossib°, dwellynge in oure toun.	<i>confidant</i>
500	It nys° but wast to burye° hym preciously°.	<i>is not, bury, expensively</i>	530 God have hir soule! Hir name was Alisoun.	
	Lat hym° farewel! God yeve° his soule reste.	<i>let him, give</i>	She knew myn herte and eek my privetee°	<i>secrets</i>
	He is now in his grave and in his cheste°.	<i>coffin</i>	Bet° than oure parisshe preest, as moot° I thee! ²	<i>better, may, thrive</i>
	Now of my fifthe housbonde wol I telle. ²		To hire° biwreyed° I my conseil° al.	<i>her, revealed, counsel</i>
	God lete° his soule nevere come in Helle!	<i>let</i>	For hadde myn housbonde pissed on a wal°	<i>wall</i>
505	And yet was he to me the mooste shrewe°.	<i>most villainous</i>	535 Or doon a thyng that sholde han° cost his lyf,	<i>should have</i>
	That feele° I on my ribbes° al by rewe°	<i>feel, ribs, in a row</i>	To hire and to another worthy wyf	
	And evere shal unto myn endyng day. ³		And to my nece°, which that I loved weel°,	<i>niece, well</i>
	But in oure bed he was ful fressh and gay.		I wolde han toold° his conseil°	<i>would have told, counsel</i>
	And therewithal so wel koude° he me glose°,	<i>could, flatter</i>	everydeel°.	<i>every bit</i>
510	Whan that he wolde han° my bele chose, ⁴	<i>would have</i>	And so I dide ful often, God it woot! ⁵	<i>God knows it</i>
	That thogh° he hadde me bet° on every bon°,	<i>though, beaten, bone</i>	540 That made his face ful often reed and hoot°	<i>hot</i>
	He koude wynne agayn° my love anon°.	<i>win again, immediately</i>	For verray° shame, and blamed hymself, for he	<i>true</i>
	I trowe° I loved hym° best for that he	<i>believe, him</i>	Had toold to me so greet a pryvetee.	
	Was of his love daungerous° to me.	<i>standoffish</i>	AND so bifel° that ones° in a Lente, ⁶	<i>it happened, once, Lent</i>
515	We wommen han°, if that I shal nat lye°,	<i>have, shall not lie</i>	So oftentymes° I to my gossyb° wente.	<i>often, confidant</i>
	In this matere° a queynte fantasye°.	<i>matter, quaint fantasy</i>	545 For evere yet I loved to be gay	
	Wayte°, what° thyng we may nat lightly°	<i>know [that], whatever, easily</i>	And for to walke in March, Averill°, and May	<i>April</i>
	have,		Fro hous to hous to heere sondry talys°.	<i>various tales</i>
	Therafter wol° we crie° al day and crave!	<i>after it will, cry</i>	That Jankyn clerk° and my gossyb Dame Alys	<i>student</i>
	Forbede° us thyng°, and that desiren° we.	<i>forbid, [a] thing, desire</i>	And I myself into the feeldes° wente.	<i>fields</i>
520	Preesse° on us faste, and thanne wol we fle°.	<i>press, then we will escape</i>	550 Myn housbonde was at Londoun al the Lente.	
	With daunger oute we al oure chaffare;		I hadde the bettre leysere° for to pleye	<i>better opportunity</i>
	Greet prees at market maketh deere ware. ⁵		And for to se° and eek for to be seye°	<i>see, be seen</i>
	And to greet cheepe° is holde° at litel	<i>too much merchandise, held</i>	Of lusty folk. What wiste I wher my grace	
	prys°.	<i>little price</i>	Was shapen for to be or in what place? ⁷	
	This knoweth every womman that is wys.		555 Therfore I made my visitaciouns°	<i>visits</i>
525	MY fifthe housbonde, God his soule blesse,		To vigilies and to processions, ⁸	
	Which that I took for love and no richesse,		To prechyng° eek and to thise pilgrimages,	<i>preaching</i>
	He somtyme° was a clerk° of Oxenford°	<i>once, student, Oxford</i>	To pleyes° of myracles and to mariages°	<i>plays, marriages</i>

1 The legendary tomb of Darius the Mede, fashioned by the Jewish sculptor Appeles, was famous for its beauty. A Latin gloss in the margin notes: "Appeles made a marvelous work in the tomb of Darius," and provides the source, Walter of Chatillon's twelfth-century epic on Alexander the Great, the *Alexandrid*.

2 There is an English gloss in the margin: "Of the fifthe housbonde of this wyf and hou she bar hire ayens hym" (bore herself against him).

3 I.e., he beat her, as she makes clear further on.

4 See p. 147, note 2.

5 Either "Where [we are greeted with] scorn, we [put] out all our goods (i.e., are anxious to sell)" or "We [put] out all our goods with [a show of] scorn (i.e., as if we did not care if anyone bought them)." The following lines provide the reason for doing this: "A great crowd at the market makes for expensive goods."

6 Lent is the period in the late winter to early spring when Christians prepare for Easter with fasting and penance.

7 "How could I know where or in what place my good luck was destined to be?" or possibly (to avoid the redundancy) "How could I know whether (wher can mean either *where* or *whether*) I was destined to have good luck, or where?"

8 "To vigils and to processions." Vigils were church services held on the evening before the feast day of a saint. Ceremonial processions formed part of the service on the day itself.

	And wered° upon my gaye scarlet gytes.°	wore, red robes	I wepte° but smal,° and that I undertake.°	wept, little, attest
560	Thise wormes, ne° thise motthes,° ne thise mytes°	nor, moths mites	To chirche° was myn housbonde born amorwe,°	church in the morning
	Upon my peril frete° hem never a deel.°	eat, never a bit	With neighebores° that for hym maden sorwe.°	neighbors, sorrow
	And wostow° why? For they were used weel.°	do you know, well	595 And Jankynoure clerk was oon of tho.°	one of those
	Now wol I tellen forth what happed me.°	happened [to] me	As help me God, whan° that I saugh° hym go	when, saw
	I seye that in the feeldes walked we		After the beere,° me thoughte° he hadde a paire	bier, I thought
565	Til trewely° we hadde swich° daliance,°	truly, such, flirtation	Of legges and of feet so clene° and faire,°	neat, attractive
	This clerk and I, that of my purveiance°	foresight	That al myn herte I yaf° unto his hoold.°	gave, possession
	I spak to hym and seyde° hym how that he,	said [to]	600 He was, I trowe,° a twenty wynter oold.	believe
	If I were wydwe,° sholde° wedde me.	widowed, should	And I was fourty, if I shal seye sooth.°	say the truth
	For certainly I sey for no bobance,°	pride	And yet I hadde alwey° a coltes° tooth.	always, colt's (youthful)
570	Yet was I nevere withouten purveiance		Gat-tothed° I was, and that bicam me weel.°	gap-toothed appeared to my favor
	Of mariage n'of° othere thynges° eek.	nor of, affairs	I hadde the prente° of Seint Venus seel.°	imprint, seal
	I holde a mouses herte° nat worth a leek	mouse's heart	605 As help me God, I was a lusty oon	
	That hath but oon hole forto sterte to,°	escape to	And faire and riche and yong and wel bigon.°	well established
	And if that faille,° thanne is al ydo.° ¹	should fail, completely done for	And trewely, as myne housbondes tolde me,	
575	I BAR hym on honde° he hadde enchanted me.	convinced him	I hadde the beste "quonyam"° myghte° be.	sexual organ, might
	My dame° taughte me that soutiltee.°	mother, trick	For certes, I am al venerien ³ .	
	And eek I seyde I mette° of hym al nyght	dreamed	610 In feelynge,° and myn herte is marciens. ⁴	feeling
	He wolde han slayn° me as I lay upright,°	have killed, lay on my back	Venus me yaf° my lust, my likerousnesse,°	gave, lecherousness
	And al my bed was ful of verray° blood.	true	And Mars yaf me my sturdy hardynesse.°	courage
580	But yet I hope that he shal do me good,		Myn ascendent was Taur, and Mars therinne. ⁵	
	For blood bitokeneth° gold, as me° was taught. ²	signifies, to me	Allas! Allas! That evere love was synne!°	sin
	And al was fals!° I dremed° of it right naught.°	false, dreamed not at all	615 I folwed ay° myn inclinacioun°	followed ever, inclination
	But I folwed ay° my dammes loore,°	followed ever, mother's teaching	By vertu° of my constellacioun,°	power, constellation
	As wel° of this as othere thynges° moore.°	well, matters, more	That made me I koude noght withdrawe°	could not withhold
585	BUT now sire, lat me se° what I shal seyn.°	let me see, say	My chambre of Venus° from a good felawe.°	sexual organ, fellow
	Aha! By God, I have my tale ageyn!°	again	Yet have I Martes° mark upon my face—	Mars's
	WHAN that my fourthe housbonde was on beere,°	bier	620 And also in another privee° place.	private
	I weepe° algate° and made sory cheere,°	wept, continuously, sorry face	For God so wys° be my savacioun,°	wise, salvation
	As wyves mooten,° for it is usage,°	must, custom	I ne loved nevere° by no discrecioun	never loved
590	And with my coverchief° covered my visage.°	kerchief, face	But evere folwed° myn appetit,°	ever followed, appetite
	But for that° I was purveyed of° a make,° ^{because, provided with, mate}		Al° were he short or long° or blak or whit.	whether or not, tall

1 The mouse who has only one hole to escape to appears in the *Romance of the Rose* (line 13150), whose character La Vielle, the old woman who knows all about love, is one of the models for the Wife of Bath, and various proverbs. "Not worth a leek" means worth nothing at all.

2 Blood could serve as a token or symbol of gold, which was often described as red.

3 In astrology, one who is influenced by the planet Venus—in other words, prone to love.

4 In astrology, one who is influenced by the planet Mars—in other words, warlike.

5 At the moment when the wife was born the constellation of stars known as Taurus (the Bull) was coming over the horizon ("ascendant") along with the planet Mars. There is a Latin gloss in the margin beginning at line 609 explaining that if a woman is born with Venus and Mars ascending together she will be unchaste. The gloss gives the source as *Mansor Amphorisoun*, i.e., a little known astrological treatise identified by Skeat as *Aphorismorum*, or *Aphorisms of Almansor*, which survives in a seventeenth-century edition.

- 625 I took no kepe,^o so that he liked me,^o *did not care, pleased me*
 How poore^o he was ne eek^o of what degree. *poor, nor also*
 WHAT sholde I seye, but at the monthes ende,
 This joly^o clerk Jankyn that was so hende^o *pretty, handy*
 Hath wedded me with greet solempnytee.^o *ceremony*
- 630 And to hym yaf^o I al the lond^o and fee^o *gave, land, property*
 That evere^o was me yeven^o therbifoore.^o *ever, given, before this*
 But afterward repented me ful soore!^o *I regretted it sorely*
 He nolde suffre nothyng of my list.¹
 By God, he smoot^o me ones^o on the lyst,^o *hit, once, ear*
- 635 For that^o I rente^o out of his book a leef,^o *because, tore, page*
 That of the strook^o myn ere wax al *stroke*
 deef.^o *ear grew completely deaf*
 Stibourne^o I was as is a leonesse^o *stubborn, lioness*
 And of my tonge^o a verray jangleresse.^o *tongue, true ceaseless talker*
 And walke I wolde^o as I had doon biforn^o *would, done before*
- 640 From hous to hous, although he had it sworn.^o *forbidden*
 For which he often tymes wolde preche^o *often times would preach*
 And me of olde Romayn geestes^{o2} teche^o *Roman stories, teach*
 How he, Symplicius Gallus, lefte his wyf
 And hire forsook^o for terme of al his *abandoned*
 lyf,^o *the rest of his life*
- 645 Noght but for open heveded, he hir say,³
 Lookynge^o out at his dore^o upon a day. *looking, door*
 ANOTHER Romayn tolde he me by name,
 That, for^o his wyf was at a someres *because*
 game^o *summer's entertainment*
 Withouten his wityng,^o he forsook hire eke.^o *knowledge, also*
- 650 And thanne wolde he upon his Bible seke^o *seek*
 That ilke^o proverbe of Ecclesiaste⁴ *same*
 Where he comandeth and forbedeth faste^o *forbids firmly*
 Man shal nat suffre^o his wyf go roule^o aboute. *not allow, wander*
 Thanne wolde he seye right thus, withouten doute:^o *doubt*
- 655 'WHOSO that buyldeth his hous al of salwes⁵
 And priketh^o his blynde hors^o over the *spurs, blind horse*
 falwes^o *fields*
 AND suffreth^o his wyf to go seken^o halwes^o *allows, seek, shrines*
 Is worthy to been^o hanged on the galwes.^{6o6} *be, galls*
 But al for noght! I sette^o noght an hawe^o *valued, hawthorn berry*
- 660 Of his proverbes nòf^o his olde lawe. *nor of*
 Ne^o I wolde nat^o of hym^o corrected be. *nor, would not, by him*
 I hate hym that my vices telleth me,^o *tells me [about]*
 And so doo^o mo,^o God woot,^o of us than I. *do, more, God knows*
 This made hym with me wood^o al outrely,^o *crazy, entirely*
- 665 I nolde noght^o forbere^o hym^o in no cas. *would not, endure, him*
 Now wol I seye yow sooth,^o by Seint Thomas,⁷ *tell you the truth*
 Why that I rente^o out of his book a leef,^o *tore, page*
 For which he smoot^o me so that I was deef.^o *hit, deaf*
 HE hadde a book that gladly, nyght and day,
 670 For his desport^o he wolde rede alway.^o *fun, read always*
 He cleped^o it Valerie and Theofraste,⁸ *called*
 At which book he lough alwey ful faste.^o *laughed always very much*
 AND eek^o ther was somtyme^o a clerk^o at *also, once, theologian*
 Rome,
 A cardinal that highte^o Seint Jerome,⁹ *was named*
- 675 That made a book,¹⁰ Agayn Jovinian,

1 "He would not allow anything I desired."

2 Like the reference to Metellius above in line 460, the following are old misogynistic or anti-matrimonial stories dating back to ancient Rome. There is a Latin gloss in the margin at line 643 referring to the source for the story of Symplicius Gallus, Valerius Maximus (see p. 149, note 5).

3 "Just because he saw her bare-headed."

4 The reference is to Ecclesiasticus, 25:34.

5 "Whoever builds his house of all willow branches." A Latin gloss in the margin notes that this is a proverb.

6 A Latin gloss in the margin cites Ecclesiasticus 25:34: "Do not give ... to a woman the indulgence of gadding about."

7 There are three possible candidates for this St. Thomas: Thomas the Apostle, mentioned in the gospels; St. Thomas Aquinas, the thirteenth-century theologian (though his second name was more often used than not); and St. Thomas Becket, whose shrine the Canterbury pilgrims are journeying to visit. Thomas the Apostle was often referred to as "Thomas of India." Becket is the likely reference.

8 The Wife of Bath is actually referring to two separate works, often bound together into one volume in the Middle Ages—the *Dissuasio Valerii ad Rufinum* by the English scholar and courtier Walter Map (c. 1140–c. 1208) and the *Golden Book of Marriages* by Theophrastus, a supposed disciple of Aristotle. Theophrastus's work survives only in the lengthy quotations in Jerome's *Against Jovinian*. All three books were full of stories attacking women and discouraging men from marrying.

9 St. Jerome lived in the late fourth and early fifth centuries and was a major theologian who wrote many influential works, including the one referred to here. Jerome's greatest work was translating the Bible into Latin.

10 Like Jankyn's *Valerie and Theofraste*, this book is a composite of several different works. Tertullian was an early third-century theologian who wrote several treatises about the value of virginity. Crisippus was mentioned in Jerome's treatise referred to in line 671, but none of his works survive. Trotula was a female doctor who taught medicine at the University of Salerno in the eleventh century and wrote a treatise about gynecology. Heloise tried to persuade her lover Abelard not to marry her, giving typical anti-matrimonial reasons. She eventually became the abbess of the Paraclete, a convent of

In which book eek ther was Tertulan, Crisippus, Trotula, and Helowys That was abbesse nat fer fro Parys, ^o And eek the <i>Parables of Salomon</i> ,	<i>not far from Paris</i>	Therefore no womman of no clerk ^o is preyed. The clerk, whan he is oold ^o and may noght ^o do Of Venus werkes ^o worth his olde sho, ^o Thanne sit he doun and writ in his dotage ^o	<i>theologian</i> <i>old, not</i> <i>Venus's works (sex), shoe</i> <i>old age</i>
680 Ovides ^o <i>Art</i> , and bookes many on. ^o And alle thise ^o were bounden in o ^o volume. And every nyght and day was his custume ^o Whan ^o he hadde leyser ^o and vacacioun ^o	<i>Ovid's, many another book</i> <i>these, bound into one</i> <i>habit</i> <i>when, had leisure</i> <i>opportunity</i>	710 That wommen kan nat kepe hir mariage. ^o BUT now to purpos ^o why I tolde thee That I was beten ^o for a book, pardee. ^o Upon a nyght Jankyn that was oure sire ^o Redde ^o on his book as he sat by the fire	<i>marriage</i> <i>to the reason</i> <i>beaten, by God</i> <i>our [household's] master</i> <i>read</i>
From oother ^o worldly occupacioun ^o 685 To reden ^o on this <i>Book of Wikked Wyves</i> . ¹ He knew of hem mo legendes and lyves ^o Than been ^o of goode wyves in the Bible. For, trusteth wel, ^o it is an impossible ^o That any clerk ^o wol speke ^o good of wyves	<i>other, occupation</i> <i>read</i> <i>stories and biographies</i> <i>than are</i> <i>trust well, it is impossible</i> <i>theologian, will speak</i>	715 Of Eva ^o first, that for hir wikkednesse Was al mankynde broght to wrecchednesse, For which Crist hymself was slayn, ^o That boghte ^o us with his herte blood agayn. ^o Lo heere, ^o expres ^o of womman may ye fynde,	<i>Eve</i> <i>killed</i> <i>who bought</i> <i>again</i> <i>hear, specifically</i>
690 But if it be of hooly seintes lyves. ^o Ne noon oother ^o womman never the mo. ^o Who peynted ^o the leoun, ² tel me who? By God, if wommen hadde writen stories As clerkes han ^o withinne hire oratories, ^o	<i>holy saints' lives</i> <i>nor any other, more</i> <i>painted</i> <i>have, inside their chapels</i>	720 That womman was the los ^o of al mankynde. THO ^o redde ^o he me how Sampson ⁶ loste hise heres ^o Slepyng ^o . His lemman ^o kitte ^o it with hir sheres, ^o Thurgh ^o which tresoun ^o loste he bothe hise eyen. ^o	<i>loss</i> <i>there, read</i> <i>his hairs</i> <i>sleeping, lover, cut</i> <i>scissors</i> <i>through, betrayal</i> <i>eyes</i>
695 They wolde han writen of men moore ^o wikkednesse ^o Than al the mark of Adam ^o may redesse. ^o The children of Mercurie and Venus ^o Been in hir wirkyng ful contrarius. ³ Mercurie loveth ^o wysdam ^o and science, ^o	<i>more</i> <i>wickedness</i> <i>all the male gender</i> <i>compensate for</i> <i>i.e., scholars and lovers</i> <i>loves, wisdom, knowledge</i>	725 Of Hercules and of his Dianyre, ⁷ That caused hym to sette hymself afyre. ^o NOTHYNG forgat he ^o the sorwe and wo That Socrates hadde with hise wyves two, How Xantippa caste pisse ^o upon his heed. ^o	<i>then read, not lie</i> <i>on fire</i> <i>he did not at all forget</i> <i>threw urine, head</i>
700 And Venus loveth ryot ^o and dispence. ^o And for hire diverse disposicioun, ^o Ech falleth in othere exaltacioun. ^{o4} And thus, God woot, ^o Mercurie is desolat ^o In Pisces, ^o wher Venus is exaltat. ^o	<i>parties, squandering money</i> <i>their diverse natures</i> <i>exaltation</i> <i>God knows, desolate</i> <i>Pisces (Zodiac sign), exalted</i>	730 This sely ^o man sat stille ^o as he were deed. ^o He wiped his heed. Namooore dorste he seyn ^o But, 'Er that thonder stynte, comth a reyn. ^o OF Phasifpha, that was the queene of Crete,	<i>innocent, quietly, dead</i> <i>No more dared he say</i> <i>Before thunder stops comes rain</i>
705 And Venus falleth ther ^o Mercurie is reysed. ^{o5}	<i>falls where, raised</i>		

nuns near Paris. Her arguments against marriage are preserved in Abelard's *Historia calamitatum* or *History of My Misfortunes* and in their letters, but Chaucer probably knew her only through *The Romance of the Rose*. Solomon's *Parables* is the book of Proverbs from the Bible. Ovid's *Art of Love* concludes with a long argument about why it is prudent to avoid love.

1 This is the title for the whole compendium volume mentioned above.

2 In medieval versions of the fable of Aesop, a man and a lion were having a dispute about who was the stronger. For proof, the man showed the lion a picture of a man killing a lion, and the lion then asked the man who painted the lion. The implication is that the painting was biased and a different picture, painted by a lion, would look different. Then the lion ate the man. A Latin gloss in the margin asks "Who painted the lion?"

3 In addition to influencing the body's humors (see General Prologue, lines 413 ff.), the planets were thought to govern various parts of the body and various trades. Mercury was the planet of scholars and merchants, so "the children of Mercury" here just means scholars, who, in their ways of doing things are completely at odds with lovers.

4 A Latin gloss in the margin notes "Each one falls where the other is exalted." A second gloss three lines later explains the astrological concept of "exaltation," the sign of the zodiac in which one planet's influence is strongest and that of an opposing planet is weakest, quoting Almansor's *Aphorisms* (see p. 151, note 5).

5 A Latin gloss above the word "reysed" notes "that is, in [the sign of] Virgo."

6 The reference is to Judges 16:15-22.

7 Deianira was the wife of Hercules and inadvertently caused his death by giving him a poisoned shirt that she thought would keep him faithful.

- For shrewednesse^o hym thoughte^o the
tale swete.^o *nastiness, he thought* *sweet*
- 735 Fy!^o Spek namoore!^o It is a grisly^o thyng, *Fie, speak no more, horrible*
Of hire horrible lust^o and hir likyng!¹ *pleasure*
- OF Clitermystra,² for hire lecherye,
That falsly^o made hire housbonde for to dye,^o *falsely, die*
He redde it with ful good devocioun.^o *much devotion*
- 740 HE tolde me eek for what occasioun^o *occasion*
Amphiorax at Thebes loste his lyf.³
Myn housbonde hadde a legende^o of his wyf, *story*
ERIPHILEM, that for an ouche^o of gold *brooch*
Hath prively^o unto the Grekes^o told *secretly, Greeks*
- 745 Wher that hir housbonde hidde hym^o in a place, *hid himself*
For which he hadde at Thebes sory^o grace. *sorry*
OF Lyvia tolde he me and of Lucye.⁴
They bothe made hir housbondes for to
dye^o— *caused their husbands to die*
That oon^o for love, that oother was for hate. *one*
- 750 Lyvia hir housbonde upon an even^o late *evening*
Empoysoned^o hath, for^o that she was his fo.^o *poisoned, because, foe*
Lucia likerous^o loved hire housbonde so, *lustfully*
That, for he sholde^o alwey^o upon hire *so that he should, always*
thynke,
She yaf hym^o swich a manere love *gave him*
drynke^o *type of love potion*
- 755 That he was deed^o er^o it were by the morwe.^o *dead, before, morning*
And thus algates^o housbondes han sorwe.^o *always, have sorrow*
THANNE tolde he me how that oon^o Latumyus⁵ *one*
Compleyned unto his felawe^o Arrius *friend*
That in his gardyn growed swich a tree
- 760 On which he seyde how that hise wyves thre
- Hanged himself^o for herte despitus.^o *themselves, cruel heart*
'O leeve^o brother,' quod this Arrius, *dear*
'Yif^o me a plante^o of thilke^o blissed^o tree, *give, seedling, that, blessed*
And in my gardyn planted it shal bee!^o *shall be*
- 765 OF latter date of wyves hath he red,
That somme han slayn hir housbondes in hir bed
And lete hir lecchour dighte hire al the nyght⁶
Whan that the corps^o lay in the floor upright. *body*
AND somme han dryve nayles^o in hir *have driven nails*
brayn^{o7} *their brain*
- 770 Whil that they slepte, and thus they han hem slayn.
SOMME han hem yeve poyson in hire drynke.⁸
He spak moore harm than herte may bithynke.^o *consider*
And therwithal^o he knew of mo proverbes *with all this*
Than in this world ther growen gras or herbes.
- 775 'Bet^o is,' quod he, 'thyn habitacioiun^o *better, your dwelling place*
Be with a leoun or a foul dragoun
Than with a womman usynge for to chyde.^o *who is accustomed to nag*
Bet is,' quod he, 'hye^o in the roof abyde^o *high, live*
Than with an angry wyf doun in the hous.
- 780 They been^o so wikked and contrarious.^o *are, disagreeable*
They haten that hir housbondes loveth ay.⁹
He seyde, 'A womman cast^o hir shame away *throws*
Whan she cast of hir smok. And forthermo,¹⁰
A fair womman but^o she be chaast^o also *unless, chaste*
785 Is lyk^o a gold ryng in a sowes^o nose.¹¹ *like, pig's*
Who wolde leeve or who wolde suppose^o *would believe*
The wo that in myn herte was and pyne?^o *pain*
AND whan I saugh he wolde nevere fyne^o *stop*
To reden on this cursed book al nyght,
790 Al sodeynly^o thre leves^o have I plyght^o *suddenly, pages, torn*

1 In Greek mythology, Queen Pasiphae of Crete had sex with a bull and gave birth to the monster Minotaur.

2 Clytemnestra and her lover Aegisthus murdered her husband Agamemnon when he returned from the Trojan war.

3 Amphiarus hid so he would not have to fight in war, but his hiding place was betrayed by his wife Eriphyle, and he was killed in battle. There is a Latin gloss in the margin quoting the reference to Pasiphae, Clytemnestra, and Eriphyle in Jerome's *Against Jovinian*.

4 Livia was either Augustus's wife, who poisoned several prominent Romans (including her own husband) for political gain; or Livilla, Livia's granddaughter, who poisoned her husband at the instigation of her lover Sejanus. Lucilla poisoned her husband, the Roman philosopher Lucretius (c. 99–c. 55 BCE), author of *On the Nature of Things*, with a love potion intended to increase his desire for her.

5 The incident related below is another misogynistic story from ancient Rome, for which Chaucer's source is probably Walter Map's *Dissuasio Valerii* (see p. 152, note 8).

6 "And let her lover have sex with her all night."

7 The reference here is perhaps to Judges 4:17–22.

8 "Some have given them poison in their drink."

9 "They always hate what their husbands love."

10 "When she throws off her undergarment. And furthermore."

11 There is a Latin gloss in the margin quoting the original saying from Proverbs 11:22.

Out of his book, right as he radde. And eke
 I with my fest° so took° hym on the cheke,° *fist, hit, cheek*
 That in oure fyr he fil bakward adoun.° *fell down backwards*
 And he up stirte° as dooth° a wood leoun,° *jumps, does, crazy lion*
 795 And with his fest° he smoot° me on the heed,° *fist, hit, head*
 That° in the floor° I lay as I were deed.° *so that, on the floor, dead*
 And whan he saugh how stille° that I lay, *quietly*
 He was agast° and wolde han fled his way.° *afraid, have fled away*
 Til atte laste° out of my swogh° I breyde.° *at the last, faint, awoke*
 800 'O hastow slayn° me, false thief?° I seyde. *have you killed, thief*
 'And for my land thus hastow° mordred° me! *have you, murdered*
 Er I be deed,° yet wol I kisse thee.' *before I am dead*
 AND neer° he cam and kneled faire° adoun *near, kneeled pleasantly*
 And seyde, 'Deere suster° Alisoun, *dear sister*
 805 As help me God, I shal thee nevere smyte!
 That I have doon,° it is thyself to wyte.° *what I have done, to blame*
 Foryeve° it me, and that I thee biseke.° *forgive, beg you*
 And yet eftsoones° I hitte hym on the cheke *once more*
 And seyde, 'Theef, thus muchel° am I wreke.° *much, avenged*
 810 Now wol I dye. I may no lenger speke.'
 But atte laste° with muchel° care and wo, *at the last, much*
 We fille acorded° by usselven° two. *came to an agreement, ourselves*
 He yaf° me al the bridel° in myn hond° *gave, bridle, my hand*
 To han° the governance° of hous° and lond° *have, control, house, land*
 815 And of his tonge° and his hond also, *tongue*
 And made hym brenne his book anon° right
 tho.° *there*
 And whan that I hadde geten° unto me *had gotten*
 By maistrie° al the soveraynetee,° *mastery, sovereignty*
 And that he seyde, 'Myn owene trewe wyf,
 820 Do as thee lust to terme of al thy lyf.¹
 Kepe thyn honour and keepe eek myn estaat.° *my estate*
 After that day we hadden never debaat.° *never had disagreement*
 God helpe me so, I was to hym as kynde
 As any wyf from Denmark unto Ynde° *India*
 825 And also trewe, and so was he to me.
 I prey° to God that sit in magestee,° *pray, who sits in majesty*

So blesse his soule° for his mercy deere.° *soul, dear*
 Now wol I seye° my tale, if ye wol heere.° *tell, will hear*

BIHOLDE THE WORDES BITWENE
 THE SOMONOUR AND THE FRERE²

THE Frere° lough° whan he hadde herd al this. *Friar, laughed*
 830 "Now Dame," quod he, "so have I joye or blis,° *bliss*
 This is a long preamble° of a tale!" *preamble (prologue)*
 And whan the Somonour herde the Frere gale,° *speak up*
 "Lo," quod the Somonour, "Goddess armes two!³
 A frere wol entremette hym evere mo!⁴
 835 Lo, goode men, a flye° and eek a frere *fly*
 Wol falle in every dyssh and mateere!⁵
 What spekestow of preambulacioun?° *what do you say of preambuling*
 What! Amble or trotte° or pees° or go sit down!° *trot, pace, down*
 Thou° lettest° oure disport° in this manere.° *you, spoil, fun, manner*
 840 "YE, woltow so,° sire Somonour?" quod the Frere. *will you [say] so*
 "Now by my feith,° I shal° er° that I go *faith, shall, before*
 Telle of a somonour swich a tale or two,
 That alle the folk shal laughen in this place!"
 "Now elles,° Frere, I bishrewe° thy face!" *otherwise, curse*
 845 Quod this Somonour, "and I bishrewe me
 But° if I telle tales two or thre° *unless, three*
 Of freres er° I come to Sidingborne!⁶ *before*
 That I shal make thyn herte for to morne,° *be sorry*
 For wel I woot° thy pacience° is gon.° *well I know, patience, gone*
 850 OURE Hoost cride, "Pees,° and that anon!"° *peace, immediately*
 And seyde, "Lat the womman telle hire tale.
 Ye fare° as folk that dronken were of ale! *you behave*
 Do, Dame, telle forth youre tale, and that is best."
 "ALREDY,° sire,°" quod she, "right as yow lest,° *ready, sir, you wish*
 855 If I have licence of this worthy Frere."
 "Yis, dame," quod he, "tel forth, and I wol heere."

HEERE ENDETH THE WYF OF BATHE HIR PROLOGE
 AND BIGYNNETH HIR TALE⁷

1 "Do as you wish as long as you live."

2 "Behold the words between the Summoner and the Friar."

3 "God's two arms." This is an oath like those uniformly condemned by the Church.

4 "A friar will always put himself in the middle [of things]."

5 "Will fall into every dish and matter."

6 Sittingbourne is a small town about forty miles from London on the road to Canterbury.

7 "Here ends the Wife of Bath's Prologue and [here] begins her tale."

es of King Arthur
it entons speken greet honou
land full of of fraunce
we sub by uly compaignie
a grene mede
as qede
reies ago
one Alies mo
and praijes
looly fieres
d eney freem
come hem
kidenes boues
ye domes
daijes
no fraijes
was an elf
my hyn self
eiujes
his looly thinges
in
us dmi
p tree
us but he
t dillouy
Arthur



Detail, opening page of the Prologue to *The Wife of Bath's Tale*. Ellesmere Manuscript EL 26 C9 f. 72r. Reprinted by permission of The Huntington Library.

THE WIFE OF BATH'S TALE

IN tholde° dayes of Kyng Arthour, *the old*
 Of which that Britons spoken greet honour,
 Al was this land fulfild° of fairye.¹ *filled up with*
 860 The Elf Queene with hir joly compaignye° *jolly company*
 Daunced ful ofte° in many a grene mede.° *very often, green meadow*
 This was the olde opinion as I rede.° *read*
 I speke of manye hundred yeres ago.
 But now kan° no man se none elves mo.° *can, no more elves*
 865 For now the grete charitee and prayeres° *charity and prayers*
 Of lymytours² and othere hooly freres° *holy friars*
 That serchen° every lond° and every stream° *search, land, stream*
 As thikke as motes° in the sonne beem,° *dust particles, sunbeam*
 Blessyng° halles, chambres,° kichenes,° *blessing, rooms, kitchens*
 boures,° *bedrooms*
 870 Citees, burghes,° castels, hye toures,° *fortified cities, high towers*
 Thropes,° bernes,° shipnes,° dayeryes°— *villages, barns, stables, dairies*
 This maketh° that ther been° no fairyes. *causes it, there are*
 For theras° wont° to walken° was an elf, *where, accustomed, walk*
 Ther walketh now the lymytour° hymself *friar*
 875 In undermeles and in morwenynges,° *late and early mornings*
 And seyth° his matyns° and his hooly *says, morning service*
 thynges° *prayers*
 As he gooth° in his lymytacioun.° *goes about, limited area*
 Wommen may go saufly° up and doun° *safely, down*
 In every bussh or under every tree.
 880 Ther is noon oother° incubus³ but he. *no other*
 And he ne wol doon hem but
 dishonour.° *will do them [nothing] but dishonor*
 AND so bifel° that this Kyng Arthour *it happened*
 Hadde° in hous° a lusty bacheler° *had, house, young knight*
 That on a day cam ridynge° fro ryver° *came riding, from [a] river*
 885 And happed° that allone° as he was born, *happened, alone*
 He saugh a mayde° walkynge hym *maid*
 biforn,° *walking in front of him*
 Of which mayde anon, maugree hir heed,° *against her will*
 By verray° force birafte hire *true*
 maydenhed,° *stole from her her virginity*

For which oppressioun° was swich° *oppression, such*
 clamour° *outcry*
 890 And swich pursute° unto the Kyng Arthour, *appeal*
 That dampned° was this knyght for to be deed° *condemned, dead*
 By cours° of lawe, and sholde han° lost his heed. *course, should have*
 Paraventure° swich was the statut° tho,° *by chance, law, then*
 But that the queene and othere ladyes mo
 895 So longe preyden° the kyng of grace,° *requested, mercy*
 Til he his lyf hym graunted° in the place *granted*
 And yaf° hym to the queene al at hir wille° *gave, will*
 To chese° wheither° she wolde hym save or *choose, whether*
 spille.° *kill*
 THE queene thanketh the kyng with al hir myght
 900 And after this thus spak she to the knyght
 Whan that she saugh hir tyme° upon a day, *saw her time*
 “Thou standest yet,” quod she, “in swich array,° *condition*
 That of thy lyf yet hastow° no suretee.° *have you, certainty*
 I grante thee lyf if thou kanst° tellen me *can*
 905 What thyng is it that wommen moost desiren.
 Bewar° and keepe thy nekke boon° from *beware, neckbone*
 iren!° *iron*
 And if thou kanst nat tellen° it anon, *cannot tell*
 Yet shal I yeve° thee leve° for to gon° *give, leave, go*
 A twelf month° and a day to seche° and leere° *for a year, seek, learn*
 910 An answee suffisant° in this mateere.° *sufficient, matter*
 And suretee° wol I han er° that thou *guarantee, will I have before*
 pace°— *leave*
 Thy body for to yelden° in this place.” *yield (i.e., return)*
 Wo° was this knyght, and sorwefully he siketh,° *sad, sighs*
 But he may nat do al as hym liketh.° *as he wishes*
 915 And at the laste he chees° hym for to wende° *chooses, go*
 And come agayn° right at the yeres° ende *again, year's*
 With swich answee as God wolde° hym *would*
 purveye° *provide him*
 And taketh his leve and wendeth° forth his weye. *goes*
 HE seketh every hous and every place
 920 Whereas° he hopeth for to fynde° grace *where, find*
 To lerne what thyng wommen loven moost.
 But he ne koude arryven° in no coost,° *arrive, region*

1 “Fairye” is a term which here loosely refers to the supernatural beings from the mythical Otherworld known as elves or fairies. Though they have no place in the dominant medieval Christian ideology, such beings maintained a hold on people’s imaginations through folktale and legend.

2 A “lymytour,” as the word partially suggests, was a friar who was licensed to preach in a limited area in a parish or county.

3 In folklore, an incubus was a devilish spirit who would appear to women in dreams and thereby impregnate them.

- Wheras he myghte fynde in this mateere
 Two creatures accordyng^o in feere.^o *agreeing, together*
- 925 SOMME seyde^o wommen loven best richesse. *some said*
 Somme seyde honour. Somme seyde jolynesse,^o *jollity*
 Somme riche array.^o Somme seyden lust abedde^o *clothing, in bed*
 And oftetyme^o to be wydwe^o and wedde.^o *often, widowed, married*
- 930 SOMME seyde that oure hertes been moost esed^o *most refreshed*
 Whan that we been yflatered^o and yplesed.^{o1} *are flattered, pleased*
 HE gooth ful ny the sothe, I wol nat lye!²
 A man shal wynne^o us best with flaterye^o *shall win, flattery*
 And with attendance^o and with bisynesse, *attention*
 Been we^o ylymed³ bothe moore and lesse. *we are*
- 935 AND somme seyn that we loven best
 For to be free and so do right as us lest^o *just as we wish*
 And that no man repreve us^o of oure vice *complain to us*
 But seye that we be wise and nothyng nyce.^o *not foolish*
 For trewely, ther is noon^o of us alle *none*
- 940 If any wight^o wol^o clawe^o us on the galle^o *person, will, claw, a sore*
 That we nel kike,^o for he seith^o us sooth.^o *will not kick, says, truth*
 Assay^o and he shal fynde it that so dooth.^o *try, does so*
 For be^o we never so vicious^o withinne,^o *are, wicked, within*
 We wol been holden wise^o and clene of
 synne.^o *free of sin*
- 945 AND somme seyn that greet delit^o han^o we *great delight, have*
 For to been holden^o stable and eek secree,^o *considered, also discreet*
 And in^o purpos stedefastly^o to dwelle *one, steadfastly*
 And nat biwreye^o thyng^o that men us telle. *not betray, something*
 But that tale is nat worth a rake-stele!^o *handle of a rake*
- 950 Pardee, we wommen konne nothyng hele!⁴
 Witnesse on Myda.⁵ Wol ye heere the tale?
 Ovyde^o amonges^o othere thyngs smale^o *Ovid, among, small works*
 Seyde Myda^o hadde^o under his longe heres^o *Midas, had, hairs*
 Growyng^o upon his heed two asses eres,^o *growing, ears*
- 955 The which vice he hydde^o as he best myghte^o *hid, might*
 Ful subtilly^o from every mannes sighte,^o *very carefully, man's sight*
- That save his wyf, ther wiste^o of it namo.^o *knew, no more*
 He loved hire moost and triste^o hire also. *trusted*
 He preyde^o hire that to no creature *asked*
 960 She sholde tellen^o of his disfigure.^o *would tell, disfigurement*
 SHE swoor^o hym nay^o for al this world to wynne.^o *swore, no, gain*
 She nolde^o do that vileynye^o or synne^o *would not, villainy, sin*
 To make hir housbonde han^o so foul a name. *have*
 She nolde nat^o telle it for hir owene shame. *would not*
 965 But natheless,^o hir thoughte that
 she dyde,^o *she thought would die*
 That she so longe sholde^o a conseil^o hyde.^o *should, counsel, hide*
 Hir thoughte it swal so soore aboute hir herte⁶
 That nedely som word hire moste asterte.⁷
 And sith^o she dorste^o telle it to no man, *since, dare*
 970 Doun to a mareys^o faste by^o she ran, *marsh, close by*
 Til she cam there^o hir herte was afyre.^o *where, on fire*
 And as a bitore^o bombleth^o in the *bittern (small heron), calls*
 myre,^o *mud*
 She leyde^o hir mouth unto the water doun. *laid*
 "Biwreye^o me nat, thou water, with thy soun,"^o *betray, sound*
 975 Quod she, "To thee I telle it and namo.^o *nobody else*
 Myn housbonde hath longe asses erys^o two!
 asses' ears
 Now is myn herte al hool.^o Now is it oute. *whole*
 I myghte no lenger kepe it out of doute."^o *without doubt*
 Heere may ye se thogh we a tyme^o abyde,^o *for a time, wait*
 980 Yet out it moot.^o We kan no conseil hyde. *must [go]*
 The remenant of the tale if ye wol heere,
 Redeth Ovyde,^o and ther ye may it leere.^o *Ovid, learn*
 THIS knyght of which my tale is specially,
 Whan that he saugh he myghte nat^o come therby, *might not*
 985 This is to sey, what wommen love moost,
 Withinne his brest ful sorweful^o was the goost.^o *very sorrowful, spirit*
 But hoom he gooth.^o He myghte nat sojourne.^o *goes, not delay*
 The day was come that homward moste^o he tourne.^o *must, turn*
 And in his wey it happed^o hym to ryde *happened*

1 A Latin gloss in the margin notes "Titus Liveus," indicating that this opinion can be found in the writings of Titus Livius (59 BCE–17 AD), presumably in his famous *History of Rome*.

2 "He gets very near the truth, I will not lie."

3 "Limed." Lime was used to form a sticky paste that was spread on sticks to catch birds.

4 "By God, we women know nothing about how to hold [a secret]."

5 Midas's story, which the Wife of Bath recounts below, is found in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Book 11, although in Ovid's version it is the king's barber, not his wife, who whispers the secret.

6 "It seemed to her that it became so sorely swollen around her heart."

7 "That by necessity some word had to blurt out from her."

- 990 In al this care under a forest syde
 Whereas° he saugh° upon a daunce^{o1} go *where, saw, dance*
 Of ladyes foure and twenty and yet mo,
 Toward the which daunce he drow ful yerne° *drew very eagerly*
 In hope that som wysdom sholde° he lerne. *should*
- 995 But certeinly er° he cam fully there, *before*
 Vanysshed was this daunce he nyste° where. *did not know*
 No creature saugh he that bar lyf,° *bore life*
 Save on the grene° he saugh sittynge° a wyf. *green (meadow), sitting*
 A fouler wight° ther may no man devyse.° *uglier person, imagine*
- 1000 Agayn° the knyght this olde wyf gan ryse° *towards, rose*
 And seyde, "Sire Knyght, heer forth ne lith° no wey.° *lies, road*
 Tel me what that ye seken by youre fey.° *faith*
 Paraventure° it may the bettre° be. *perhaps, better*
 Thise° olde folk kan muchel thyng,"° quod *these, know many things*
 she.
- 1005 "MY leeve mooder,"° quod this knyght *dear mother*
 certeyn,° *certainly*
 "I nam° but deed but if° that I kan seyn° *am not, unless, can say*
 What thyng it is that wommen moost desire.
 Koude ye me wisse, I wolde wel quite youre hire."²
 "PLIGHT° me thy trouthe° heere° in myn hand," *pledge, word, here*
 quod she.
- 1010 "The nexte thyng that I requere thee,° *ask of you*
 Thou shalt it do if it lye in thy myght,° *your might*
 And I wol telle it yow° er it be nyght." *to you*
 "HAVE heer° my trouthe," quod the knyght. *here*
 "I grante."
- "THANNE," quod she, "I dar° me wel avante.° *dare, well boast*
 1015 Thy lyf is sauf,° for I wol stonde therby.° *safe, by it*
 Upon my lyf the queene wol seye as I.
 Lat se° which is the proudeste of hem alle *let's see*
 That wereth° on a coverchief° or a calle° *wears, kerchief, hairnet*
 That dar seye nay° of that I shal thee teche.° *dare says no, teach*
- 1020 Lat us go forth withouten lenger speche."° *longer speech*
 Tho° rowned° she a pistel° in his ere° *then, whispered, lesson, ear*
 And bad hym° to be glad and have no fere.° *commanded him, fear*
 WHAN they be comen° to the court, this knyght *they have arrived*
 Seyde he had holde° his day as he hadde hight° *kept, had promised*
- 1025 And redy was his answer, as he sayde.
 Full° many a noble wyf and many a mayde *very*
- And many a wydwe,° for that they been° wise, *widow, are*
 The queene° herself sittynge as *[with] the queen*
 justise,° *sitting as a judge*
 Assembled been° his answeere for to heere. *are gathered*
- 1030 And afterward this knyght was bode appeere.° *commanded to appear*
 To every wight comanded was silence
 And that the knyght sholde° telle in *should*
 audience° *in [their] hearing*
 What thyng that worldly wommen loven best.
 This knyght ne stood nat stille° as doth a *did not stand quietly*
 best,° *best*
- 1035 But to his questioun anon° answerde *immediately*
 With manly voys° that al the court it herde. *voice*
 "MY lige° lady generally," quod he, *sovereign*
 "Wommen desiren have sovereynetee° *desire to have sovereignty*
 As wel° over hir housbond as hir love *well*
- 1040 And for to been in maistrie hym above.° *to be in control over him*
 This is youre mooste desir,° thogh ye me kille. *greatest desire*
 Dooth as yow list.° I am at youre wille." *do as you wish*
 IN al the court ne was ther° wyf ne mayde *there was neither*
 Ne wydwe° that contraried that° he *widow, disagreed with what*
 sayde
- 1045 But seyden° he was worthy han his lyf.° *said, have his life*
 AND with that word up stirte° the olde wyf *up jumped*
 Which that the knyght saugh sittynge in the grene.° *meadow*
 "Mercy," quod she, "my sovereyn° lady queene! *sovereign*
 Er° that youre court departe, do me right. *before*
- 1050 I taughte this answeere unto the knyght,
 For which he plighte° me his trouthe° there. *promised, word*
 The firste thyng I wolde° hym requere,° *would, require of him*
 He wolde it do if it lay in his myght.
 Bifore the court thanne preye° I thee, Sire Knyght," *ask*
- 1055 Quod she, "that thou me take unto thy wyf.
 For wel thou woost° that I have kept° thy lyf. *you know, saved*
 If I seye fals,° sey nay,° upon thy fey!"° *say false, no, faith*
 THIS knyght answerde, "Allas° and weylaway! *Alas*
 I woot° right wel that swich was my biheste.° *know, promise*
- 1060 For Goddes love, as chees° a newe requeste! *choose*
 Taak° al my good,° and lat° my body go!" *take, possessions, let*
 "NAY thanne,"° quod she, "I shrewe° us bothe *no then, curse*
 two,

1 One traditional way mortals encounter elves is in the woods at night, where they are performing a ritual dance.

2 "If you could inform me, I would pay you back well."

- For thogh° that I be foul, oold, and poore, *though* 1100 Thou art so loothly° and so oold° also *ugly, old*
 I nolde° for al the metal° ne for oore° *would not, [precious] metal, ore*
 1065 That under erthe° is grave° or lith° above *earth, buried, lies*
 But if thy wyf I were and eek thy love!"
 "My love!" quod he. "Nay, my dampnacioun!° *damnation*
 Allas, that any of my nacioun° *family*
 Sholde evere so foule disparaged° be!" *badly shamed*
 1070 But al for noght!° Thend° is this: that he *nothing, the end*
 Constreynd° was. He nedes moste hire *compelled*
 wedde° *had to marry her*
 And taketh his olde wyf and gooth to bedde.
 Now wolden som men seye paraventure° *perhaps*
 That for my negligence° I do no cure° *negligence, do not care*
 1075 To tellen yow the joye and al th'array° *the arrangements*
 That at the feeste° was that ilke° day *feast, same*
 To which thyng shortly answer I shal.
 I seye ther nas no° joye ne feeste at al. *was no*
 Ther nas° but hevynesse and muche sorwe.° *was nothing, depression,*
 1080 For prively he wedded hire on a morwe,° *morning*
 And al day after hidde hym° as an owle.° *hid himself, owl*
 So wo° was hym,° his wyf looked so foule. *sorrowful, him*
 GREET was the wo the knyght hadde in his thought
 Whan he was with his wyf abedde ybrought.¹ *brought to bed*
 1085 He walweth,° and he turneth to and fro. *writes about*
 His olde wyf lay smylunge° evere mo *smiling*
 And seyde, "O deere housbonde, benedicitee!° *bless you*
 Fareth° every knyght thus with his wyf as ye?
 Is this the lawe of Kyng Arthures hous?
 1090 Is every knyght of his so dangerous?° *standoffish*
 I am youre owene love and youre wyf.
 I am she which that saved hath youre lyf.
 And certes, yet ne dide° I yow nevere unright.° *did not, injustice*
 Why fare° ye thus with me this firste nyght? *behave*
 1095 Ye faren° lyk a man had lost his wit. *behave*
 What is my gilt?° For Goddes love, tel it, *guilt*
 And it shal been amended° if I may." *fixed*
 "AMENDED!" quod this knyght. "Allas, nay! Nay!
 It wol nat been amended nevere mo.° *forever more*
- 1105 "YE, certainly," quod he, "no wonder is!"
 "Now sire," quod she, "I koude amende° al this *could fix*
 If that me liste° er° it were dayes thre,° *if I wished, before, three days*
 So wel ye myghte bere yow unto me.²
 BUT for ye speken° of swich gentillesse³ *you speak, such nobility*
 1110 As is descended out of old richesse,
 That therfore sholden° ye be gentilmen, *should*
 Swich arrogance is nat° worth an hen! *not*
 Looke who that is moost vertuouus alway,
 Pryvee° and apert° and moost entendeth *private, open*
 ay° *always tries most*
 1115 To do the gentil dedes° that he kan.⁴ *noble deeds, can*
 Taak hym° for the grettest gentilman. *take him*
 Crist wole° we clayme° of hym oure gentillesse, *will, claim*
 Nat of oure eldres° for hire old richesse. *ancestors*
 For thogh they yeve us al hir° heritage, *their*
 1120 For which we clayme° to been° of heigh *claim, be,*
 parade,° *high lineage*
 Yet may they nat biquethe° for nothyng° *not bequeath, nothing*
 To noon° of us hir° vertuouus lvyng.° *none, their, living*
 That made hem° gentilmen ycalled be° *them, be called*
 And bad us folwen hem° in swich° *requested us to follow them, such*
 degree.
 1125 WEL kan° the wise poete of Florence *well can*
 That highte Dant° speken in this sentence.° *is named Dante, matter*
 Lo, in swich maner rym° is Dantes tale: *such a kind of rhyme*
 'Ful selde° up riseth° by his branches smale° *seldom, rises, small*
 Prowesse° of man.⁵ For God of his goodnesse *strength*
 1130 Wole° that of hym we clayme° oure gentillesse.¹ *wishes, claim*
 For of oure eldres° may we nothyng clayme *ancestors*
 But temporel thyng° that man may hurte and *temporal things*
 mayme.° *harm*

1 In medieval weddings, it was the custom for the guests to escort the bride and groom to their bedroom.

2 "Provided that you might behave yourself well towards me."

3 "Gentillesse" is the quality that makes someone a gentleman or woman. In the Middle Ages it normally implied distinguished birth but also refined manners and moral virtue. There is a Latin gloss in the margin "About generosity."

4 "Look for whoever is always most virtuous in private and in public and always strives to do the most noble deeds."

5 "The excellence of a man seldom extends to the further branches [of his family tree]," i.e., the sons are seldom worthy of the father. Dante said something similar to the old woman's comment in his *Convivio*, 4 and in *Purgatorio* 7:121.

- Eek every wight woot° this as wel as I. *every person knows*
 If gentillesse were planted naturelly° *implanted by nature*
 1135 Unto a certeyn lynage° doun the *particular lineage*
 lyne,° *down the line [of generations]*
 Pryvee nor apert thanne wolde they nevere fyne° *stop*
 To doon° of gentillesse the faire office.¹ *do*
 They myghte do no vileynye° or vice. *villainy*
 TAAK° fyr° and ber° it in the derkeste° hous *take, fire, carry, darkest*
 1140 Bitwix° this and the mount of Kaukasous° *between, Caucasus*
 And lat men shette° the dores° and go thenne,° *shut, doors, go away*
 Yet wole° the fyr as faire lye° and brenne° *will, blaze, burn*
 As twenty thousand men myghte it biholde.° *behold*
 His° office natureel ay° wol it holde, *its, ever*
 1145 Up peril of my lyf, til that it dye.²
 HEERE may ye se wel how that gentrye³
 Is nat annexed° to possessioun, *linked*
 Sith folk ne doon hir operacioun° *do not behave*
 Alwey as dooth the fyr, lo, in his kynde.° *according to its nature*
 1150 For God it woot,° men may wel° often fynde° *God knows it, well, find*
 A lordes sone° do shame and vileynye,° *son, villainy*
 And he that wole han° pris° of his gentrye, *will have, honor*
 For he was born of a gentil hous° *noble house*
 And hadde hise eldres° noble and vertuous *his ancestors*
 1155 And nel hymselfen° do no gentil dedis° *will not himself, deeds*
 Ne folwen° his gentil auncestre that deed° is. *nor follow, dead*
 He nys nat° gentil be he duc° or erl,° *is not, duke, earl*
 For vileyns° synful dedes° make a *villainous, sinful deeds*
 cherl.° *churl*
 For gentillesse nys° but renomee° *is not, renown*
 1160 Of thyne auncestres for hire heigh bountee,° *their high goodness*
 Which is a strange thyng to thy persone.° *thing alien to your person*
 Thy gentillesse cometh fro God allone.
 Thanne comth oure verray gentillesse of grace.
 It was nothyng biquethe us° with oure *by no means bequeathed to us*
 place.
- 1165 THENKETH how noble as seith Valerius
 Was thilke° Tullius Hostillius,⁴ *that*
 That out of poverte roos° to heigh noblesse. *rose*
 Reed Senek° and redeth eek Boece.⁵ *Seneca, Boethius*
 Ther shul ye seen expres° that no drede° is *specifically, doubt*
 1170 That he is gentil that dooth gentil dedis.
 And therfore, leeve° housbonde, I thus conclude, *dear*
 Al° were it that myne auncestres weren rude,° *although, of low birth*
 Yet may the hye° God—and so hope I— *high*
 Grante me grace to lyven° vertuously. *live*
 1175 Thanne am I gentil whan that I bigynne° *begin*
 To lyven° vertuously and weyre synne.° *live, avoid sin*
 AND theras° ye of poverte me repreeve,⁶ *since, reproach*
 The hye° God on whom that we bileeve° *high, believe*
 In wilful poverte° chees° to lyve his lyf. *voluntary poverty, chose*
 1180 And certes, every man, mayden, or wyf
 May understonde that Jhesus Hevene kyng° *king of Heaven*
 Ne wolde nat chesen° vicious° lyvynge. *would not choose, evil*
 Glad° poverte is an honeste° thyng, certeyn.⁷ *joyful, virtuous*
 This wole° Senec and othere clerkes° seyn.° *will, writers, say*
 1185 Whoso that halt hym payd of his poverte,⁸
 I holde hym° riche, al° hadde he nat a *consider him, though*
 sherte.° *shirt*
 He that coveiteth° is a povere wight,° *covets, poor person*
 For he wolde han that° is nat in his *would have what*
 myght.
 But he that nocht hath ne coveiteth
 have° *has nothing and does not covet*
 1190 Is riche, although ye holde hym° but a knave. *consider him*
 VERRAY poverte,° it syngeth° properly. *true poverty, sings*
 Juvenal⁹ seith of poverte myrily,° *merrily*
 ‘The povre man, whan he goth by the weye,° *goes along the road*
 Bifore the theves° he may synge and pleye.’ *thieves*
 1195 Poverte is hateful good and, as I gesse,¹⁰
 A ful greet bryngere° out of bisynesse,° *very great remover, anxiety*

1 “Then they would never stop [*fyne*] doing the fair office of gentle deeds, either in private or in public.”

2 “Upon my life, it will always perform its natural function (i.e., burn) until it dies.”

3 A Latin gloss in the margin notes “Exemplum,” showing that here there is a moral example.

4 Tullius Hostillius in ancient Rome started life as a peasant and rose to become king. The story is told by the Roman writer Valerius Maximus (see p. 149, note 5).

5 See Boethius’s *Consolation of Philosophy*, book 3, prose 6 and meter 3.

6 There is a Latin gloss in the margin: “On poverty.”

7 A Latin gloss in the margin quotes the saying and notes that it comes from the epistles of Seneca, the Stoic philosopher (c. 5 BCE–65 AD).

8 “Whoever considers himself satisfied with his poverty.” There is a Latin gloss in the margin that closely follows lines 1186–90 and notes a similar moral in Revelation 3:17. The source for this Latin passage has not been identified, and it may in fact be based directly on Chaucer’s own text.

9 There is a Latin gloss in the margin that quotes and identifies Chaucer’s source, the *Satires* of the Roman poet Juvenal (first century AD).

10 A Latin gloss in the margin cites a discussion of poverty attributed to the Roman philosopher Secundus that is found in the thirteenth-century encyclopedia of Vincent of Beauvais, beginning “poverty is a hateful good.”

	A greet amendere° eek of sapience°	<i>improver, wisdom</i>	I put me in youre wise governance.	
	To hym that taketh° it in pacience.°	<i>takes, patience</i>	Cheseth youreself which may be moost plesance°	<i>most pleasant</i>
	Poverté is this, although it seme° alenge,°	<i>seem, wretched</i>	And moost honour to yow and me also.	
1200	Possessioun° that no wight° wol chalenge.°	<i>possession, person will claim</i>	I do no fors° the wheither of the two,	<i>I do not care</i>
	Poverté ful ofte° whan a man is lowe	<i>very often</i>	1235 For as yow liketh, it suffiseth me.”	
	Maketh° his God and eek hymself to knowe. ¹	<i>causes</i>	“THANNE have I gete° of yow maistrie,” quod she,	<i>gotten</i>
	Poverté a spectacle is, as thynketh me,°	<i>as it seems to me</i>	“Syn I may chese and governe as me lest?”°	<i>as I wish</i>
	Thurgh° which he may hise° verray freendes° see.	<i>through, his true friends</i>	“YE° certes, wyf,” quod he, “I holde it best.”	<i>yes</i>
1205	And therefore sire, syn that I noght yow greve,°	<i>do not grieve you</i>	“Kys me,” quod she, “we be no lenger wrothe.°”	<i>no longer angry</i>
	Of my poverté namoore° ye me repreve.°	<i>no more, reproach</i>	1240 For by my trouthe,° I wol be to yow bothe.	<i>truth</i>
	Now sire, of elde° ye repreve me, ²	<i>old age</i>	This is to seyn, ye bothe° fair and good.	<i>indeed both</i>
	And certes, sire, thogh noon auctoritee	<i>nobles</i>	I prey° to God that I moote° sterven wood°	<i>pray, might, die crazy</i>
1210	Seyn that men sholde an oold wight doon favour°	<i>do honor</i>	But° I to yow be also good and trewe	<i>unless</i>
	And clepe° hym fader for youre gentillesse.	<i>call</i>	As evere was wyf, syn that the world was newe.	
	And auctours° shal I fynden,° as I gesse.	<i>authors, find</i>	1245 And but° I be tomorn° as fair to seene°	<i>unless, tomorrow, see</i>
	Now ther° ye seye that I am foul° and old. ³	<i>where, ugly</i>	As any lady, emperice,° or queene	<i>empress</i>
1215	Than drede° you noght° to been a cokewold.°	<i>fear, not, cuckold</i>	That is bitwixe° the est° and eke the west,	<i>between, east</i>
	For filthe° and eelde,° also moot I thee,°	<i>filthy, old age, might I thrive</i>	Dooth° with my lyf and deth right as yow lest.°	<i>do, just as you wish</i>
	Been grete wardeyns upon chastitee.°	<i>guardians of chastity</i>	Cast up the curtyñ.° Looke how that it is.”	<i>curtain</i>
	But nathelees,° syn I knowe youre delit,°	<i>nevertheless, delight</i>	1250 AND whan the knyght saugh veraily al this,	
	I shal fulfille youre worldly appetit.°	<i>appetite</i>	That she so fair was and so yong therto,	
	CHESE° now,” quod she, “oon of this thynges tweye:°	<i>choose these two things</i>	For joye he hente hire° in hise armes two.	<i>held her</i>
1220	To han° me foul and old til that I deye°	<i>have, until I die</i>	His herte° bathed in a bath of blisse.	<i>heart</i>
	And be to yow a trewe, humble wyf		A thousand tyme arewe° he gan hire kisse.°	<i>in a row, kissed her</i>
	And nevere yow displese° in al my lyf,	<i>displease you</i>	1255 And she obeyed hym in everythyng That myghte doon hym plesance or likyng.°	<i>do him pleasure or enjoyment</i>
	Or elles° ye wol han° me yong and fair	<i>else, will have</i>	AND thus they lyve unto hir lyves ende	
	And take youre aventure° of the repair°	<i>chance, visiting</i>	In parfit° joye. And Jhesu Crist us sende	<i>perfect</i>
1225	That shal be to youre hous bycause of me		Housbondes meeke,° yonge, and fressh abedde°	<i>meeke, in bed</i>
	Or in som oother place may wel be. ⁴		And grace to t’overbyde hem° that we wedde.	<i>control them</i>
	Now chese yourselven wheither that yow liketh.°	<i>whichever pleases you</i>	And eek I pray Jhesu shorte hir lyves°	<i>shorten their lives</i>
	THIS knyght avyseth° hym and sore siketh.°	<i>considers, sorely sighs</i>	That nat wol be° governed by hir wyves.	<i>will not be</i>
1230	But atte laste° he seyde in this manere,	<i>at the last</i>	And olde and angry nygardes° of dispence,°	<i>skinflints, spending</i>
	“My lady and my love and wyf so deere,		God sende hem soone verray pestilence!°	<i>true plague</i>

HEERE ENDETH THE WYVES TALE OF BATHE⁵

1 There is a Latin gloss in the margin that refers to the story of the Stoic philosopher Crates of Thebes, who threw his gold into the sea lest it destroy him. The story comes from Jerome's *Against Jovinian* 2:9.

2 There is a Latin gloss in the margin: “On old age.”

3 There is a Latin gloss in the margin: “On foulness.”

4 “And take your chances (*aventure*) of the visiting (*repair*) [i.e., by lovers] at your house, or perhaps in some other places, in order to see me.”

5 “Here ends the Wife of Bath's Tale.”

CHAUCER'S RETRACTION

HEERE TAKETH THE MAKERE OF THIS BOOK HIS LEVE

Now preye° I to hem° alle that herkne° this litel° tretys°¹ or rede°, that if ther be any-
thyng in it that liketh hem°, that therof they thanken oure Lord Jhesu Crist, of whom
procedeth al wit and al goodnesse. And if ther be anythyng that displese hem, I preye
hem also that they arrette° it to the defaute° of myn unkonnyng° and nat to my wyl°,
that wolde ful fayn° have seyde better, if I hadde had konnyng°. For oure book seith, "Al
that is writen is writen for oure doctrine."² And that is myn entente°.

Wherefore I biseke° yow mekely° for the mercy of God that ye preye° for me, that Crist
have mercy on me and foryeve° me my giltes°, and namely° of my translacions and
enditynges° of worldly vanitees°, the whiche I revoke in my retracciouns—as is *The Book
of Troilus*, *The Book also of Fame*, *The Book of the Five and Twenty Ladies*,³ *The Book of
the Duchesse*, *The Book of Seint Valentynes Day of the Parlement of Briddes*,⁴ *The Tales of
Caunterbury* (thilke° that sownen into synne°), *The Book of the Leoun*,⁴ and many another
book (if they were in my remembrance) and many a song and many a lecherous° lay°—
that Crist for his grete mercy foryeve° me the synne°.

But of the translacioun of Boece°, *De Consolacioun*⁵ and othere bookes of legendes of
seintes° and omelies° and moralitee and devocioun, that thanke I oure Lord Jhesu Crist
and his blisful mooder° and alle the seintes of Hevene, bisekyng° hem° that they from
hennes forth° unto my lyves° ende sende me grace to biwayle° my giltes° and to studie° to
the salvacioun of my soule and graunte me grace of verray° penitence, confessioun, and
satisfaccioun to doon° in this present lyf thurgh the benigne° grace of hym that is Kyng of
kynges and preest° over alle preestes, that boghte us with the precious blood of his herte°,
so that I may been oon° of hem° at the Day of Doome° that shulle° be saved. *Qui cum
patre*, etc.⁶

ask, them, listen to, little, treatise, read
pleases them

ascribe, default, my ignorance, will
very gladly, knowledge
instruction, my intent

ask, meekly, pray
forgive, sins, especially
writings, acts of folly

Parliament of Fowls
those, tend towards sin
lecherous, song
forgive, sin

Boethius
moral stories of saints, homilies
mother, asking them
henceforth, life's, lament, sins, take thought
true
do, kind
priest, heart
one, them, Judgment Day, shall

HEERE IS ENDED THE BOOK OF THE TALES OF CAUNTERBURY

COMPILED BY GEFREY CHAUCER,

OF WHOS SOULE JHESU CRIST HAVE MERCY,

AMEN.

- 1 The reference to the "little treatise" has provoked much discussion. The Parson's Tale, while far from little, could rightly be classified as a treatise (indeed, the Parson calls it so himself at line 957), but this would be an odd term for the *Canterbury Tales* as a whole.
- 2 2 Timothy 3:16.
- 3 This must be the *Legend of Good Women*, which Chaucer allegedly wrote to make amends for insulting women by writing the story of Criseyde's betrayal of Troilus. The surviving copies of the *Legend of Good Women*, however, preserve only ten stories, although there are some contemporary references which suggest the work might once have included several more.
- 4 This text, probably a translation of the *Dit de Leon* by the French court poet Guillaume de Machaut (c. 1300–77), one of Chaucer's major early influences, does not survive.
- 5 This is the famous treatise of the late Roman scholar and statesman, Boethius, *The Consolation of Philosophy*.
- 6 The full liturgical phrase that Chaucer includes here is *Qui cum patre et spiritu sancto vivit et regnat deus per omnia secula. Amen*, translated, "Who with the Father and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, God forever and ever, Amen."