The Wife of Bath's [Prologue](http://sites.fas.harvard.edu/~chaucer/teachslf/wbt-par.htm" \l "PROLOGUE) and [Tale](http://sites.fas.harvard.edu/~chaucer/teachslf/wbt-par.htm#TALE)

An Interlinear Translation

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**The Wife of Bath's Prologue**

*The Prologe of the Wyves Tale of Bathe*

1       **"Experience, though noon auctoritee**  
                "Experience, though no written authority  
2       **Were in this world, is right ynogh for me**  
                Were in this world, is good enough for me  
3       **To speke of wo that is in mariage;**  
                To speak of the woe that is in marriage;  
4       **For, lordynges, sith I twelve yeer was of age,**  
                For, gentlemen, since I was twelve years of age,  
5       **Thonked be God that is eterne on lyve,**  
                Thanked be God who is eternally alive,  
6       **Housbondes at chirche dore I have had fyve --**  
                I have had five husbands at the church door --  
7       **If I so ofte myghte have ywedded bee --**  
                If I so often might have been wedded --  
8       **And alle were worthy men in hir degree.**  
                And all were worthy men in their way.  
9       **But me was toold, certeyn, nat longe agoon is,**  
                But to me it was told, certainly, it is not long ago,  
10       **That sith that Crist ne wente nevere but onis**  
                That since Christ went never but once  
11       **To weddyng, in the Cane of Galilee,**  
                To a wedding, in the Cana of Galilee,  
12       **That by the same ensample taughte he me**  
                That by that same example he taught me  
13       **That I ne sholde wedded be but ones.**  
                That I should be wedded but once.  
14       **Herkne eek, lo, which a sharp word for the nones,**  
                Listen also, lo, what a sharp word for this purpose,  
15       **Biside a welle, Jhesus, God and man,**  
                Beside a well, Jesus, God and man,  
16       **Spak in repreeve of the Samaritan:**  
                Spoke in reproof of the Samaritan:  
17       **`Thou hast yhad fyve housbondes,' quod he,**  
                `Thou hast had five husbands,' he said,  
18       **`And that ilke man that now hath thee**  
                `And that same man that now has thee  
19       **Is noght thyn housbonde,' thus seyde he certeyn.**  
                Is not thy husband,' thus he said certainly.  
20       **What that he mente therby, I kan nat seyn;**  
                What he meant by this, I can not say;  
21       **But that I axe, why that the fifthe man**  
                But I ask, why the fifth man  
22       **Was noon housbonde to the Samaritan?**  
                Was no husband to the Samaritan?  
23       **How manye myghte she have in mariage?**  
                How many might she have in marriage?  
24       **Yet herde I nevere tellen in myn age**  
                I never yet heard tell in my lifetime  
25       **Upon this nombre diffinicioun.**  
                A definition of this number.  
26       **Men may devyne and glosen, up and doun,**  
                Men may conjecture and interpret in every way,  
27       **But wel I woot, expres, withoute lye,**  
                But well I know, expressly, without lie,  
28       **God bad us for to wexe and multiplye;**  
                God commanded us to grow fruitful and multiply;  
29       **That gentil text kan I wel understonde.**  
                That gentle text I can well understand.  
30       **Eek wel I woot, he seyde myn housbonde**  
                Also I know well, he said my husband  
31       **Sholde lete fader and mooder and take to me.**  
                Should leave father and mother and take to me.  
32       **But of no nombre mencion made he,**  
                But he made no mention of number,  
33       **Of bigamye, or of octogamye;**  
                Of marrying two, or of marrying eight;  
34       **Why sholde men thanne speke of it vileynye?**  
                Why should men then speak evil of it?

35       **Lo, heere the wise kyng, daun Salomon;**  
                Lo, (consider) here the wise king, dan Salomon;  
36       **I trowe he hadde wyves mo than oon.**  
                I believe he had wives more than one.  
37       **As wolde God it leveful were unto me**  
                As would God it were lawful unto me  
38       **To be refresshed half so ofte as he!**  
                To be refreshed half so often as he!  
39       **Which yifte of God hadde he for alle his wyvys!**  
                What a gift of God he had because of all his wives!  
40       **No man hath swich that in this world alyve is.**  
                No man that in this world is alive has such (a gift).  
41       **God woot, this noble kyng, as to my wit,**  
                God knows, this noble king, according to my judgment,  
42       **The firste nyght had many a myrie fit**  
                The first night had many a merry fit  
43       **With ech of hem, so wel was hym on lyve.**  
                With each of them, so well things went for him in his lifetime.  
44       **Yblessed be God that I have wedded fyve!**  
                Blessed be God that I have wedded five!  
44a       **[Of whiche I have pyked out the beste,**  
                [Of which I have picked out the best,  
44b       **Bothe of here nether purs and of here cheste.**  
                Both of their lower purse (scrotum) and of their strongbox.  
44c       **Diverse scoles maken parfyt clerkes,**  
                Differing schools make perfect clerks,  
44d       **And diverse practyk in many sondry werkes**  
                And differing practice in many various works  
44e       **Maketh the werkman parfyt sekirly;**  
                Makes the workman truly perfect;  
44f       **Of fyve husbondes scoleiyng am I.]**  
                Of five husbands' schooling am I.]  
45       **Welcome the sixte, whan that evere he shal.**  
                Welcome the sixth, whenever he shall appear.  
46       **For sothe, I wol nat kepe me chaast in al.**  
                For truly, I will not keep myself chaste in everything.  
47       **Whan myn housbonde is fro the world ygon,**  
                When my husband is gone from the world,  
48       **Som Cristen man shal wedde me anon,**  
                Some Christian man shall wed me straightway,  
49       **For thanne th' apostle seith that I am free**  
                For then the apostle says that I am free  
50       **To wedde, a Goddes half, where it liketh me.**  
                To wed, by God's side (I swear), wherever it pleases me.  
51       **He seith that to be wedded is no synne;**  
                He says that to be wedded is no sin;  
52       **Bet is to be wedded than to brynne.**  
                It is better to be wedded than to burn.  
53       **What rekketh me, thogh folk seye vileynye**  
                What do I care, though folk speak evil  
54       **Of shrewed Lameth and his bigamye?**  
                Of cursed Lamech and his bigamy?  
55       **I woot wel Abraham was an hooly man,**  
                I know well Abraham was a holy man,  
56       **And Jacob eek, as ferforth as I kan;**  
                And Jacob also, insofar as I know;  
57       **And ech of hem hadde wyves mo than two,**  
                And each of them had more than two wives,  
58       **And many another holy man also.**  
                And many another holy man also.  
59       **Wher can ye seye, in any manere age,**  
                Where can you find, in any historical period,  
60       **That hye God defended mariage**  
                That high God forbad marriage  
61       **By expres word? I pray yow, telleth me.**  
                By express word? I pray you, tell me.  
62       **Or where comanded he virginitee?**  
                Or where commanded he virginity?  
63       **I woot as wel as ye, it is no drede,**  
                I know as well as you, it is no doubt,  
64       **Th' apostel, whan he speketh of maydenhede,**  
                The apostle, when he speaks of maidenhood,  
65       **He seyde that precept therof hadde he noon.**  
                He said that he had no precept concerning it.  
66       **Men may conseille a womman to been oon,**  
                Men may advise a woman to be one,  
67       **But conseillyng is no comandement.**  
                But advice is no commandment.  
68       **He putte it in oure owene juggement;**  
                He left it to our own judgment;  
69       **For hadde God comanded maydenhede,**  
                For had God commanded maidenhood,  
70       **Thanne hadde he dampned weddyng with the dede.**  
                Then had he damned marriage along with the act (of procreation).  
71       **And certes, if ther were no seed ysowe,**  
                And certainly, if there were no seed sown,  
72       **Virginitee, thanne wherof sholde it growe?**  
                Then from what should virginity grow?  
73       **Poul dorste nat comanden, atte leeste,**  
                In any case, Paul dared not command  
74       **A thyng of which his maister yaf noon heeste.**  
                A thing of which his master gave no command.  
75       **The dart is set up for virginitee;**  
                The prize is set up for virginity;  
76       **Cacche whoso may, who renneth best lat see.**  
                Catch it whoever can, let's see who runs best.

77       **But this word is nat taken of every wight,**  
                But this word does not apply to every person,  
78       **But ther as God lust gyve it of his myght.**  
                But where God desires to give it by his power.  
79       **I woot wel that th' apostel was a mayde;**  
                I know well that the apostle was a virgin;  
80       **But nathelees, thogh that he wroot and sayde**  
                But nonetheless, though he wrote and said  
81       **He wolde that every wight were swich as he,**  
                He would that every person were such as he,  
82       **Al nys but conseil to virginitee.**  
                All is nothing but advice to (adopt) virginity.   
83       **And for to been a wyf he yaf me leve**  
                And he gave me leave to be a wife   
84       **Of indulgence; so nys it no repreve**  
                By explicit permission; so it is not blameful  
85       **To wedde me, if that my make dye,**  
                To wed me, if my mate should die,  
86       **Withouten excepcion of bigamye.**  
                Without objection on the grounds of bigamy.  
87       **Al were it good no womman for to touche --**  
                Although it would be good to touch no woman --  
88       **He mente as in his bed or in his couche,**  
                He meant in his bed or in his couch,  
89       **For peril is bothe fyr and tow t' assemble;**  
                For it is perilous to assemble both fire and flax;  
90       **Ye knowe what this ensample may resemble.**  
                You know what this example may apply to.  
91       **This is al and som: he heeld virginitee**  
                This is the sum of it: he held virginity  
92       **Moore parfit than weddyng in freletee.**  
                More perfect than wedding in weakness.  
93       **Freletee clepe I, but if that he and she**  
                Weakness I call it, unless he and she  
94       **Wolde leden al hir lyf in chastitee.**  
                Would lead all their life in chastity.

95       **I graunte it wel; I have noon envie,**  
                I grant it well; I have no envy,  
96       **Thogh maydenhede preferre bigamye.**  
                Though maidenhood may have precedence over a second marriage.  
97       **It liketh hem to be clene, body and goost;**  
                It pleases them to be clean, body and spirit;  
98       **Of myn estaat I nyl nat make no boost,**  
                Of my state I will make no boast,  
99       **For wel ye knowe, a lord in his houshold,**  
                For well you know, a lord in his household,  
100       **He nath nat every vessel al of gold;**  
                He has not every utensil all of gold;  
101       **Somme been of tree, and doon hir lord servyse.**  
                Some are of wood, and do their lord service.  
102       **God clepeth folk to hym in sondry wyse,**  
                God calls folk to him in various ways,  
103       **And everich hath of God a propre yifte --**  
                And each one has of God an individual gift --  
104       **Som this, som that, as hym liketh shifte.**  
                Some this, some that, as it pleases Him to provide.

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

115       **Telle me also, to what conclusion**  
                Tell me also, to what purpose  
116       **Were membres maad of generacion,**  
                Were members of generation made,  
117       **And of so parfit wys a [wright] ywroght?**  
                And by so perfectly wise a Workman wrought?  
118       **Trusteth right wel, they were nat maad for noght.**  
                Trust right well, they were not made for nothing.  
119       **Glose whoso wole, and seye bothe up and doun**  
                Interpret whoever will, and say both up and down  
120       **That they were maked for purgacioun**  
                That they were made for purgation  
121       **Of uryne, and oure bothe thynges smale**  
                Of urine, and both our small things   
122       **Were eek to knowe a femele from a male,**  
                Were also to know a female from a male,  
123       **And for noon oother cause -- say ye no?**  
                And for no other cause -- do you say no?  
124       **The experience woot wel it is noght so.**  
                The experience knows well it is not so.  
125       **So that the clerkes be nat with me wrothe,**  
                Provided that the clerks be not angry with me,  
126       **I sey this: that they maked ben for bothe;**  
                I say this: that they are made for both;  
127       **That is to seye, for office and for ese**  
                That is to say, for urination and for ease  
128       **Of engendrure, ther we nat God displese.**  
                Of procreation, in which we do not displease God.  
129       **Why sholde men elles in hir bookes sette**  
                Why else should men set in their books   
130       **That man shal yelde to his wyf hire dette?**  
                That man shall pay to his wife her debt?  
131       **Now wherwith sholde he make his paiement,**  
                Now with what should he make his payment,  
132       **If he ne used his sely instrument?**  
                If he did not use his blessed instrument?   
133       **Thanne were they maad upon a creature**  
                Then were they made upon a creature  
134       **To purge uryne, and eek for engendrure.**  
                To purge urine, and also for procreation.

135       **But I seye noght that every wight is holde,**  
                But I say not that every person is required,  
136       **That hath swich harneys as I to yow tolde,**  
                That has such equipment as I to you told,  
137       **To goon and usen hem in engendrure.**  
                To go and use them in procreation.  
138       **Thanne sholde men take of chastitee no cure.**  
                Then should men have no regard for chastity.  
139       **Crist was a mayde and shapen as a man,**  
                Christ was a virgin and shaped like a man,  
140       **And many a seint, sith that the world bigan;**  
                And many a saint, since the world began;  
141       **Yet lyved they evere in parfit chastitee.**  
                Yet lived they ever in perfect chastity.  
142       **I nyl envye no virginitee.**  
                I will envy no virginity.  
143       **Lat hem be breed of pured whete-seed,**  
                Let them be bread of pure wheat-seed,  
144       **And lat us wyves hoten barly-breed;**  
                And let us wives be called barley-bread;  
145       **And yet with barly-breed, Mark telle kan,**  
                And yet with barley-bread, Mark can tell it,  
146       **Oure Lord Jhesu refresshed many a man.**  
                Our Lord Jesus refreshed many a man.  
147       **In swich estaat as God hath cleped us**  
                In such estate as God has called us  
148       **I wol persevere; I nam nat precius.**  
                I will persevere; I am not fussy.  
149       **In wyfhod I wol use myn instrument**  
                In wifehood I will use my instrument  
150       **As frely as my Makere hath it sent.**  
                As freely as my Maker has it sent.  
151       **If I be daungerous, God yeve me sorwe!**  
                If I be niggardly, God give me sorrow!  
152       **Myn housbonde shal it have bothe eve and morwe,**  
                My husband shall have it both evenings and mornings,  
153       **Whan that hym list come forth and paye his dette.**  
                When it pleases him to come forth and pay his debt.  
154       **An housbonde I wol have -- I wol nat lette --**  
                A husband I will have -- I will not desist --  
155       **Which shal be bothe my dettour and my thral,**  
                Who shall be both my debtor and my slave,  
156       **And have his tribulacion withal**  
                And have his suffering also   
157       **Upon his flessh, whil that I am his wyf.**  
                Upon his flesh, while I am his wife.  
158       **I have the power durynge al my lyf**  
                I have the power during all my life  
159       **Upon his propre body, and noght he.**  
                Over his own body, and not he.  
160       **Right thus the Apostel tolde it unto me,**  
                Right thus the Apostle told it unto me,  
161       **And bad oure housbondes for to love us weel.**  
                And commanded our husbands to love us well.  
162       **Al this sentence me liketh every deel" --**  
                All this sentence pleases me every bit" --

163       **Up stirte the Pardoner, and that anon;**  
                Up sprang the Pardoner, and that at once;  
164       **"Now, dame," quod he, "by God and by Seint John!**  
                "Now, madam," he said, "by God and by Saint John!  
165       **Ye been a noble prechour in this cas.**  
                You are a noble preacher in this case.  
166       **I was aboute to wedde a wyf; allas!**  
                I was about to wed a wife; alas!  
167       **What sholde I bye it on my flessh so deere?**  
                Why should I pay for it so dearly on my flesh?  
168       **Yet hadde I levere wedde no wyf to-yeere!"**  
                Yet would I rather wed no wife this year!"

169       **"Abyde!" quod she, "my tale is nat bigonne.**  
                "Wait!" she said, "my tale is not begun.  
170       **Nay, thou shalt drynken of another tonne,**  
                Nay, thou shalt drink from another barrel,  
171       **Er that I go, shal savoure wors than ale.**  
                Before I go, which shall taste worse than ale.  
172       **And whan that I have toold thee forth my tale**  
                And when I have told thee forth my tale  
173       **Of tribulacion in mariage,**  
                Of suffering in marriage,   
174       **Of which I am expert in al myn age --**  
                Of which I am expert in all my life --   
175       **This is to seyn, myself have been the whippe --**  
                This is to say, myself have been the whip --  
176       **Than maystow chese wheither thou wolt sippe**  
                Than may thou choose whether thou will sip  
177       **Of thilke tonne that I shal abroche.**  
                Of that same barrel that I shall open.  
178       **Be war of it, er thou to ny approche;**  
                Beware of it, before thou too near approach;  
179       **For I shal telle ensamples mo than ten.**  
                For I shall tell examples more than ten.  
180       **`Whoso that nyl be war by othere men,**  
                `Whoever will not be warned by (the examples of) other men,  
181       **By hym shul othere men corrected be.'**  
                Shall be an example by which other men shall be corrected.'  
182       **The same wordes writeth Ptholomee;**  
                The same words writes Ptholomy;  
183       **Rede in his Almageste, and take it there."**  
                Read in his Almagest, and take it there."

184       **"Dame, I wolde praye yow, if youre wyl it were,"**  
                "Madam, I would pray you, if it were your will,"  
185       **Seyde this Pardoner, "as ye bigan,**  
                Said this Pardoner, "as you began,  
186       **Telle forth youre tale, spareth for no man,**  
                Tell forth your tale, refrain for no man,  
187       **And teche us yonge men of youre praktike."**  
                And teach us young men of your practice."

188       **"Gladly," quod she, "sith it may yow like;**  
                "Gladly," she said, "since it may please you;  
189       **But yet I praye to al this compaignye,**  
                But yet I pray to all this company,  
190       **If that I speke after my fantasye,**  
                If I speak according to my fancy,  
191       **As taketh not agrief of that I seye,**  
                Do not be annoyed by what I say,  
192       **For myn entente nys but for to pleye.**  
                For my intention is only to amuse.

193       **Now, sire, now wol I telle forth my tale.**  
                Now, sir, now will I tell forth my tale.  
194       **As evere moote I drynken wyn or ale,**  
                As ever may I drink wine or ale,  
195       **I shal seye sooth; tho housbondes that I hadde,**  
                I shall speak the truth; those husbands that I had,  
196       **As thre of hem were goode, and two were badde.**  
                Three of them were good, and two were bad.  
197       **The thre were goode men, and riche, and olde;**  
                The three were good men, and rich, and old;  
198       **Unnethe myghte they the statut holde**  
                Hardly might they the statute hold (pay the debt)  
199       **In which that they were bounden unto me.**  
                In which they were bound unto me.  
200       **Ye woot wel what I meene of this, pardee!**  
                You know well what I mean of this, by God!  
201       **As help me God, I laughe whan I thynke**  
                So help me God, I laugh when I think  
202       **How pitously a-nyght I made hem swynke!**  
                How pitifully at night I made them work!  
203       **And, by my fey, I tolde of it no stoor.**  
                And, by my faith, I set no store by it.  
204       **They had me yeven hir lond and hir tresoor;**  
                They had given me their land and their treasure;  
205       **Me neded nat do lenger diligence**  
                I needed not work hard any longer  
206       **To wynne hir love, or doon hem reverence.**  
                To win their love, or do them reverence.  
207       **They loved me so wel, by God above,**  
                They loved me so well, by God above,  
208       **That I ne tolde no deyntee of hir love!**  
                That I reckoned little of their love!  
209       **A wys womman wol bisye hire evere in oon**  
                A wise woman will be constantly busy  
210       **To gete hire love, ye, ther as she hath noon.**  
                To get their love, yes, when she has none.  
211       **But sith I hadde hem hoolly in myn hond,**  
                But since I had them wholly in my hand,  
212       **And sith they hadde me yeven al hir lond,**  
                And since they had me given all their land,  
213       **What sholde I taken keep hem for to plese,**  
                Why should I take care to please them,  
214       **But it were for my profit and myn ese?**  
                Unless it were for my profit and my pleasure?  
215       **I sette hem so a-werke, by my fey,**  
                I set them so to work, by my faith,  
216       **That many a nyght they songen `Weilawey!'**  
                That many a night they sang `Woe is me!'  
217       **The bacon was nat fet for hem, I trowe,**  
                The bacon was not fetched for them, I believe,  
218       **That som men han in Essex at Dunmowe.**  
                That some men have in Essex at Dunmowe.  
219       **I governed hem so wel, after my lawe,**  
                I governed them so well, according to my law,  
220       **That ech of hem ful blisful was and fawe**  
                That each of them was very blissful and eager  
221       **To brynge me gaye thynges fro the fayre.**  
                To bring me gay things from the fair.  
222       **They were ful glad whan I spak to hem faire,**  
                They were very glad when I spoke to them pleasantly,  
223       **For, God it woot, I chidde hem spitously.**  
                For, God knows it, I cruelly scolded them.

224       **Now herkneth hou I baar me proprely,**  
                Now listen how well I conducted myself,  
225       **Ye wise wyves, that kan understonde.**  
                You wise wives, that can understand.  
226       **Thus shulde ye speke and bere hem wrong on honde,**  
                Thus should you speak and accuse them wrongfully,  
227       **For half so boldely kan ther no man**  
                For half so boldly can there no man  
228       **Swere and lyen, as a womman kan.**  
                Swear and lie, as a woman can.  
229       **I sey nat this by wyves that been wyse,**  
                I do not say this concerning wives that are wise,  
230       **But if it be whan they hem mysavyse.**  
                Unless it be when they are ill advised.  
231       **A wys wyf, if that she kan hir good,**  
                A wise wife, if she knows what is good for her,  
232       **Shal beren hym on honde the cow is wood,**  
                Shall deceive him by swearing the bird is crazy,   
233       **And take witnesse of hir owene mayde,**  
                And prove it by taking witness of her own maid   
234       **Of hir assent. But herkneth how I sayde:**  
                Who is in league with her. But listen how I spoke:

235       **`Sire olde kaynard, is this thyn array?**  
                `Sir old doddering fool, is this thy doing?   
236       **Why is my neighebores wyf so gay?**  
                Why is my neighbor's wife so gay?  
237       **She is honoured overal ther she gooth;**  
                She is honored everywhere she goes;  
238       **I sitte at hoom; I have no thrifty clooth.**  
                I sit at home; I have no decent clothing.  
239       **What dostow at my neighebores hous?**  
                What dost thou at my neighbor's house?  
240       **Is she so fair? Artow so amorous?**  
                Is she so fair? Art thou so amorous?  
241       **What rowne ye with oure mayde? Benedicite!**  
                What do you whisper with our maid? Bless me!  
242       **Sire olde lecchour, lat thy japes be!**  
                Sir old lecher, let thy tricks be!   
243       **And if I have a gossib or a freend,**  
                And if I have a close friend or an acquaintance,  
244       **Withouten gilt, thou chidest as a feend,**  
                Innocently, thou scold like a fiend,  
245       **If that I walke or pleye unto his hous!**  
                If I walk or go unto his house to amuse myself!  
246       **Thou comest hoom as dronken as a mous,**  
                Thou comest home as drunk as a mouse,  
247       **And prechest on thy bench, with yvel preef!**  
                And preach on thy bench, bad luck to you!  
248       **Thou seist to me it is a greet meschief**  
                Thou sayest to me it is a great misfortune  
249       **To wedde a povre womman, for costage;**  
                To wed a poor woman, because of expense;  
250       **And if that she be riche, of heigh parage,**  
                And if she be rich, of high birth,  
251       **Thanne seistow that it is a tormentrie**  
                Then thou sayest that it is a torment  
252       **To soffre hire pride and hire malencolie.**  
                To put up with her pride and her angry moods.  
253       **And if that she be fair, thou verray knave,**  
                And if she be fair, thou utter knave,  
254       **Thou seyst that every holour wol hire have;**  
                Thou sayest that every lecher wants to have her;  
255       **She may no while in chastitee abyde,**  
                She can not remain chaste for any length of time,   
256       **That is assailled upon ech a syde.**  
                Who is assailed on every side.

257       **Thou seyst som folk desiren us for richesse,**  
                Thou sayest some folk desire us for riches,  
258       **Somme for oure shap, and somme for oure fairnesse,**  
                Some for our shape, and some for our fairness,  
259       **And som for she kan outher synge or daunce,**  
                And one because she can either sing or dance,  
260       **And som for gentillesse and daliaunce;**  
                And some because of noble descent and flirtatious talk;  
261       **Som for hir handes and hir armes smale;**  
                Some because of their hands and their slender arms;  
262       **Thus goth al to the devel, by thy tale.**  
                Thus goes all to the devil, according to you.  
263       **Thou seyst men may nat kepe a castel wal,**  
                Thou sayest men may not defend a castle wall,  
264       **It may so longe assailled been overal.**  
                It may so long be assailed on all sides.

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

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

282       **Thow seyst we wyves wol oure vices hide**  
                Thou sayest we wives will hide our vices   
283       **Til we be fast, and thanne we wol hem shewe --**  
                Until we be securely tied (in marriage), and then we will them show --  
284       **Wel may that be a proverbe of a shrewe!**  
                Well may that be a proverb of a scoundrel!

285       **Thou seist that oxen, asses, hors, and houndes,**  
                Thou sayest that oxen, asses, horses, and hounds,  
286       **They been assayed at diverse stoundes;**  
                They are tried out a number of times;  
287       **Bacyns, lavours, er that men hem bye,**  
                Basins, wash bowls, before men them buy,  
288       **Spoones and stooles, and al swich housbondrye,**  
                Spoons and stools, and all such household items,  
289       **And so been pottes, clothes, and array;**  
                And so are pots, clothes, and adornments;  
290       **But folk of wyves maken noon assay,**  
                But folk of wives make no trial,  
291       **Til they be wedded -- olde dotard shrewe! --**  
                Until they are wedded -- old doddering scoundrel! --  
292       **And thanne, seistow, we wol oure vices shewe.**  
                And then, sayest thou, we will show our vices.

293       **Thou seist also that it displeseth me**  
                Thou sayest also that it displeases me  
294       **But if that thou wolt preyse my beautee,**  
                Unless thou will praise my beauty,  
295       **And but thou poure alwey upon my face,**  
                And unless thou peer always upon my face,  
296       **And clepe me "faire dame" in every place.**  
                And call me "dear lady" in every place.  
297       **And but thou make a feeste on thilke day**  
                And unless thou make a feast on that same day  
298       **That I was born, and make me fressh and gay;**  
                That I was born, and make me happy and gay;  
299       **And but thou do to my norice honour,**  
                And unless thou do honor to my nurse,  
300       **And to my chamberere withinne my bour,**  
                And to my chambermaid within my bedchamber,  
301       **And to my fadres folk and his allyes --**  
                And to my father's folk and his allies --  
302       **Thus seistow, olde barel-ful of lyes!**  
                Thus sayest thou, old barrelful of lies!

303       **And yet of oure apprentice Janekyn,**  
                And yet of our apprentice Janekin,  
304       **For his crispe heer, shynynge as gold so fyn,**  
                Because of his curly hair, shining like gold so fine,  
305       **And for he squiereth me bothe up and doun,**  
                And because he familiarly attends me everywhere,  
306       **Yet hastow caught a fals suspecioun.**  
                Yet hast thou caught a false suspicion.  
307       **I wol hym noght, thogh thou were deed tomorwe!**  
                I do not want him, though thou were dead tomorrow!

308       **But tel me this: why hydestow, with sorwe,**  
                But tell me this: why hidest thou, bad luck to you,  
309       **The keyes of thy cheste awey fro me?**  
                The keys of thy strongbox away from me?  
310       **It is my good as wel as thyn, pardee!**  
                It is my property as well as thine, by God!  
311       **What, wenestow make an ydiot of oure dame?**  
                What, think thou to make a fool of the lady of the house?  
312       **Now by that lord that called is Seint Jame,**  
                Now by that lord that is called Saint James,  
313       **Thou shalt nat bothe, thogh that thou were wood,**  
                Thou shalt not both, though thou were crazy with anger,  
314       **Be maister of my body and of my good;**  
                Be master of my body and of my property;  
315       **That oon thou shalt forgo, maugree thyne yen.**  
                One of them thou must give up, despite anything you can do.  
316       **What helpith it of me to enquere or spyen?**  
                What helps it to inquire about me or spy?  
317       **I trowe thou woldest loke me in thy chiste!**  
                I believe thou would lock me in thy strongbox!  
318       **Thou sholdest seye, "Wyf, go wher thee liste;**  
                Thou should say, "Wife, go where you please;  
319       **Taak youre disport; I wol nat leve no talys.**  
                Enjoy yourself; I will not believe any gossip.  
320       **I knowe yow for a trewe wyf, dame Alys."**  
                I know you for a true wife, dame Alys."  
321       **We love no man that taketh kep or charge**  
                We love no man who takes notice or concern about  
322       **Wher that we goon; we wol ben at oure large.**  
                Where we go; we will be free (to do as we wish).

323       **Of alle men yblessed moot he be,**  
                Of all men blessed may he be,  
324       **The wise astrologien, Daun Ptholome,**  
                The wise astrologer, Dan Ptolemy,  
325       **That seith this proverbe in his Almageste:**  
                Who says this proverb in his Almagest:  
326       **"Of alle men his wysdom is the hyeste**  
                "Of all men his wisdom is the highest  
327       **That rekketh nevere who hath the world in honde."**  
                Who never cares who has the world in his control."  
328       **By this proverbe thou shalt understonde,**  
                By this proverb thou shalt understand,  
329       **Have thou ynogh, what thar thee recche or care**  
                If thou have enough, why should thou take note or care  
330       **How myrily that othere folkes fare?**  
                How merrily other folks fare?  
331       **For, certeyn, olde dotard, by youre leve,**  
                For, certainly, old senile fool, by your leave,  
332       **Ye shul have queynte right ynogh at eve.**  
                You shall have pudendum right enough at eve.   
333       **He is to greet a nygard that wolde werne**  
                He is too great a miser that would refuse  
334       **A man to lighte a candle at his lanterne;**  
                A man to light a candle at his lantern;  
335       **He shal have never the lasse light, pardee.**  
                He shall have never the less light, by God.  
336       **Have thou ynogh, thee thar nat pleyne thee.**  
                If thou have enough, thou need not complain.

337       **Thou seyst also, that if we make us gay**  
                Thou sayest also, that if we make ourselves gay  
338       **With clothyng, and with precious array,**  
                With clothing, and with precious adornments,  
339       **That it is peril of oure chastitee;**  
                That it is dangerous to our chastity;  
340       **And yet -- with sorwe! -- thou most enforce thee,**  
                And yet -- bad luck to thee! -- thou must reinforce thy argument,  
341       **And seye thise wordes in the Apostles name:**  
                And say these words in the Apostle's name:  
342       **"In habit maad with chastitee and shame**  
                "In clothing made with chastity and shame  
343       **Ye wommen shul apparaille yow," quod he,**  
                You women shall apparel yourselves," he said,  
344       **"And noght in tressed heer and gay perree,**  
                "And not in carefully arranged hair and gay precious stones,  
345       **As perles, ne with gold, ne clothes riche."**  
                Such as pearls, nor with gold, nor rich cloth."  
346       **After thy text, ne after thy rubriche,**  
                In accordance with thy text, nor in accord with thy interpretation,  
347       **I wol nat wirche as muchel as a gnat.**  
                I will not do as much as a gnat.

348       **Thou seydest this, that I was lyk a cat;**  
                Thou said this, that I was like a cat;  
349       **For whoso wolde senge a cattes skyn,**  
                For if anyone would singe a cat's skin,  
350       **Thanne wolde the cat wel dwellen in his in;**  
                Then would the cat well stay in his dwelling;  
351       **And if the cattes skyn be slyk and gay,**  
                And if the cat's skin be sleek and gay,  
352       **She wol nat dwelle in house half a day,**  
                She will not stay in house half a day,  
353       **But forth she wole, er any day be dawed,**  
                But forth she will (go), before any day be dawned,  
354       **To shewe hir skyn and goon a-caterwawed.**  
                To show her skin and go yowling like a cat in heat.   
355       **This is to seye, if I be gay, sire shrewe,**  
                This is to say, if I be well dressed, sir scoundrel,  
356       **I wol renne out my borel for to shewe.**  
                I will run out to show my poor clothes.

357       **Sire olde fool, what helpeth thee to spyen?**  
                Sir old fool, what help is it for thee to spy?  
358       **Thogh thou preye Argus with his hundred yen**  
                Though thou pray Argus with his hundred eyes  
359       **To be my warde-cors, as he kan best,**  
                To be my bodyguard, as he best knows how,  
360       **In feith, he shal nat kepe me but me lest;**  
                In faith, he shall not keep me but as I please;  
361       **Yet koude I make his berd, so moot I thee!**  
                Yet could I deceive him, as I may prosper!

362       **Thou seydest eek that ther been thynges thre,**  
                Thou said also that there are three things,  
363       **The whiche thynges troublen al this erthe,**  
                The which things trouble all this earth,  
364       **And that no wight may endure the ferthe.**  
                And that no one can endure the fourth.  
365       **O leeve sire shrewe, Jhesu shorte thy lyf!**  
                O dear sir scoundrel, Jesus shorten thy life!  
366       **Yet prechestow and seyst an hateful wyf**  
                Yet thou preachest and sayest a hateful wife  
367       **Yrekened is for oon of thise meschances.**  
                Is reckoned as one of these misfortunes.  
368       **Been ther none othere maner resemblances**  
                Are there no other sorts of comparisons  
369       **That ye may likne youre parables to,**  
                That you can use in your sayings,   
370       **But if a sely wyf be oon of tho?**  
                Without a poor wife's being one of them?

371       **Thou liknest eek wommenes love to helle,**  
                Thou also compare women's love to hell,  
372       **To bareyne lond, ther water may nat dwelle.**  
                To barren land, where water may not remain.  
373       **Thou liknest it also to wilde fyr;**  
                Thou compare it also to Greek (inextinguishable) fire;  
374       **The moore it brenneth, the moore it hath desir**  
                The more it burns, the more it has desire  
375       **To consume every thyng that brent wole be.**  
                To consume every thing that will be burned.  
376       **Thou seyest, right as wormes shende a tree,**  
                Thou sayest, just as worms destroy a tree,  
377       **Right so a wyf destroyeth hire housbonde;**  
                Right so a wife destroys her husband;  
378       **This knowe they that been to wyves bonde.'**  
                This know they who are bound to wives.'

379       **Lordynges, right thus, as ye have understonde,**  
                Gentlemen, right thus, as you have heard,  
380       **Baar I stifly myne olde housbondes on honde**  
                I firmly swore to my old husbands  
381       **That thus they seyden in hir dronkenesse;**  
                That thus they said in their drunkenness;  
382       **And al was fals, but that I took witnesse**  
                And all was false, but I took witness  
383       **On Janekyn, and on my nece also.**  
                On Janekin, and on my niece also.   
384       **O Lord! The peyne I dide hem and the wo,**  
                O Lord! The pain I did them and the woe,  
385       **Ful giltelees, by Goddes sweete pyne!**  
                Entirely guiltless (they were), by God's sweet pain!  
386       **For as an hors I koude byte and whyne.**  
                For like a horse I could bite and whinny.  
387       **I koude pleyne, and yit was in the gilt,**  
                I could complain, and yet was in the wrong,  
388       **Or elles often tyme hadde I been spilt.**  
                Or else many times had I been ruined.  
389       **Whoso that first to mille comth, first grynt;**  
                Whoever first comes to the mill, first grinds;  
390       **I pleyned first, so was oure werre ystynt.**  
                I complained first, so was our war ended.  
391       **They were ful glade to excuse hem blyve**  
                They were very glad to excuse themselves quickly  
392       **Of thyng of which they nevere agilte hir lyve.**  
                Of things of which they were never guilty in their lives.  
393       **Of wenches wolde I beren hem on honde,**  
                Of wenches would I falsely accuse them,  
394       **Whan that for syk unnethes myghte they stonde.**  
                When for sickness they could hardly stand.

395       **Yet tikled I his herte, for that he**  
                Yet I tickled his heart, for he  
396       **Wende that I hadde of hym so greet chiertee!**  
                Believed that I had of him so great affection!  
397       **I swoor that al my walkynge out by nyghte**  
                I swore that all my walking out by night  
398       **Was for t' espye wenches that he dighte;**  
                Was to spy out wenches with whom he had intercourse;  
399       **Under that colour hadde I many a myrthe.**  
                Under that pretense I had many a mirth.  
400       **For al swich wit is yeven us in oure byrthe;**  
                For all such wit is given us in our birth;  
401       **Deceite, wepyng, spynnyng God hath yive**  
                Deceit, weeping, spinning God has given  
402       **To wommen kyndely, whil that they may lyve.**  
                To women naturally, while they may live.  
403       **And thus of o thyng I avaunte me:**  
                And thus of one thing I boast:  
404       **Atte ende I hadde the bettre in ech degree,**  
                At the end I had the better in every way,  
405       **By sleighte, or force, or by som maner thyng,**  
                By trickery, or force, or by some such thing,   
406       **As by continueel murmur or grucchyng.**  
                As by continual grumbling or grouching.  
407       **Namely abedde hadden they meschaunce:**  
                Especially in bed they had misfortune:  
408       **Ther wolde I chide and do hem no plesaunce;**  
                There would I scold and do them no pleasure;  
409       **I wolde no lenger in the bed abyde,**  
                I would no longer in the bed abide,  
410       **If that I felte his arm over my syde,**  
                If I felt his arm over my side,  
411       **Til he had maad his raunson unto me;**  
                Until he had paid his penalty to me;  
412       **Thanne wolde I suffre hym do his nycetee.**  
                Then would I allow him to do his foolishness.  
413       **And therfore every man this tale I telle,**  
                And therefore this tale I tell to every man,  
414       **Wynne whoso may, for al is for to selle;**  
                Anyone can profit, for everything is for sale;   
415       **With empty hand men may none haukes lure.**  
                One can lure no hawks with an empty hand.  
416       **For wynnyng wolde I al his lust endure,**  
                For profit I would endure all his lust,  
417       **And make me a feyned appetit;**  
                And make me a feigned appetite;  
418       **And yet in bacon hadde I nevere delit.**  
                And yet in bacon (old meat) I never had delight.  
419       **That made me that evere I wolde hem chide,**  
                That made me so that I would always scold them,  
420       **For thogh the pope hadde seten hem biside,**  
                For though the pope had sat beside them,  
421       **I wolde nat spare hem at hir owene bord,**  
                I would not spare them at their own table,  
422       **For, by my trouthe, I quitte hem word for word.**  
                For, by my troth, I paid them back word for word.  
423       **As helpe me verray God omnipotent,**  
                As help me true God omnipotent,  
424       **Though I right now sholde make my testament,**  
                Though I right now should make my will,  
425       **I ne owe hem nat a word that it nys quit.**  
                I owe them not one word that has not been avenged.  
426       **I broghte it so aboute by my wit**  
                I brought it so about by my wit  
427       **That they moste yeve it up, as for the beste,**  
                That they had to give it up, as the best they could do,  
428       **Or elles hadde we nevere been in reste;**  
                Or else had we never been at peace;  
429       **For thogh he looked as a wood leon,**  
                For though he looked like a furious lion,  
430       **Yet sholde he faille of his conclusion.**  
                Yet should he fail to attain his goal.

431       **Thanne wolde I seye, `Goode lief, taak keep**  
                Then I would say, `Sweetheart, see   
432       **How mekely looketh Wilkyn, oure sheep!**  
                How meekly looks Willy, our sheep!  
433       **Com neer, my spouse, lat me ba thy cheke!**  
                Come near, my spouse, let me kiss thy cheek!  
434       **Ye sholde been al pacient and meke,**  
                You should be all patient and meek,  
435       **And han a sweete spiced conscience,**  
                And have a sweet tender disposition,  
436       **Sith ye so preche of Jobes pacience.**  
                Since you so preach of Job's patience.  
437       **Suffreth alwey, syn ye so wel kan preche;**  
                Suffer always, since you so well can preach;  
438       **And but ye do, certein we shal yow teche**  
                And unless you do, certainly we shall teach you   
439       **That it is fair to have a wyf in pees.**  
                That it is fair to have a wife in peace.  
440       **Oon of us two moste bowen, doutelees,**  
                One of us two must bow, doubtless,  
441       **And sith a man is moore resonable**  
                And since a man is more reasonable  
442       **Than womman is, ye moste been suffrable.**  
                Than a woman is, you must be able to bear suffering.  
443       **What eyleth yow to grucche thus and grone?**  
                What ails you to grouch thus and groan?  
444       **Is it for ye wolde have my queynte allone?**  
                Is it because you want to have my pudendum all to yourself?  
445       **Wy, taak it al! Lo, have it every deel!**  
                Why, take it all! Lo, have it every bit!  
446       **Peter! I shrewe yow, but ye love it weel;**  
                By Saint Peter! I would curse you, if you did not love it well;  
447       **For if I wolde selle my bele chose,**  
                For if I would sell my `pretty thing,'   
448       **I koude walke as fressh as is a rose;**  
                I could walk as fresh (newly clothed) as is a rose;  
449       **But I wol kepe it for youre owene tooth.**  
                But I will keep it for your own pleasure.  
450       **Ye be to blame, by God! I sey yow sooth.'**  
                You are to blame, by God! I tell you the truth.'

451       **Swiche manere wordes hadde we on honde.**  
                Such sorts of words we had in hand.   
452       **Now wol I speken of my fourthe housbonde.**  
                Now will I speak of my fourth husband.

453       **My fourthe housbonde was a revelour --**  
                My fourth husband was a reveller --  
454       **This is to seyn, he hadde a paramour --**  
                This is to say, he had a mistress --  
455       **And I was yong and ful of ragerye,**  
                And I was young and full of playfulness,  
456       **Stibourn and strong, and joly as a pye.**  
                Stubborn and strong, and jolly as a magpie.  
457       **How koude I daunce to an harpe smale,**  
                How well I could dance to a small harp,  
458       **And synge, ywis, as any nyghtyngale,**  
                And sing, indeed, like any nightingale,  
459       **Whan I had dronke a draughte of sweete wyn!**  
                When I had drunk a draft of sweet wine!  
460       **Metellius, the foule cherl, the swyn,**  
                Metellius, the foul churl, the swine,  
461       **That with a staf birafte his wyf hir lyf,**  
                Who with a staff deprived his wife of her life,  
462       **For she drank wyn, thogh I hadde been his wyf,**  
                Because she drank wine, if I had been his wife,  
463       **He sholde nat han daunted me fro drynke!**  
                He should not have frightened me away from drink!  
464       **And after wyn on Venus moste I thynke,**  
                And after wine on Venus must I think,  
465       **For al so siker as cold engendreth hayl,**  
                For as surely as cold engenders hail,  
466       **A likerous mouth moste han a likerous tayl.**  
                A gluttonous mouth must have a lecherous tail.  
467       **In wommen vinolent is no defence --**  
                In drunken women there is no defense --  
468       **This knowen lecchours by experience.**  
                This lechers know by experience.

469       **But -- Lord Crist! -- whan that it remembreth me**  
                But -- Lord Christ! -- when I remember  
470       **Upon my yowthe, and on my jolitee,**  
                My youth, and my gaiety,  
471       **It tikleth me aboute myn herte roote.**  
                It tickles me to the bottom of my heart.  
472       **Unto this day it dooth myn herte boote**  
                Unto this day it does my heart good  
473       **That I have had my world as in my tyme.**  
                That I have had my world in my time.  
474       **But age, allas, that al wole envenyme,**  
                But age, alas, that all will poison,  
475       **Hath me biraft my beautee and my pith.**  
                Has deprived me of my beauty and my vigor.  
476       **Lat go. Farewel! The devel go therwith!**  
                Let it go. Farewell! The devil go with it!  
477       **The flour is goon; ther is namoore to telle;**  
                The flour is gone; there is no more to tell;  
478       **The bren, as I best kan, now moste I selle;**  
                The bran, as I best can, now I must sell;  
479       **But yet to be right myrie wol I fonde.**  
                But yet I will try to be right merry.  
480       **Now wol I tellen of my fourthe housbonde.**  
                Now will I tell of my fourth husband.

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

503       **Now of my fifthe housbonde wol I telle.**  
                Now of my fifth husband I will tell.  
504       **God lete his soule nevere come in helle!**  
                God let his soul never come in hell!  
505       **And yet was he to me the mooste shrewe;**  
                And yet he was to me the greatest scoundrel;  
506       **That feele I on my ribbes al by rewe,**  
                That feel I on my ribs one after another,  
507       **And evere shal unto myn endyng day.**  
                And ever shall unto my final day.  
508       **But in oure bed he was so fressh and gay,**  
                But in our bed he was so lively and gay,  
509       **And therwithal so wel koude he me glose,**  
                And moreover he so well could deceive me,  
510       **Whan that he wolde han my bele chose;**  
                When he would have my `pretty thing';  
511       **That thogh he hadde me bete on every bon,**  
                That though he had beat me on every bone,  
512       **He koude wynne agayn my love anon.**  
                He could win back my love straightway.  
513       **I trowe I loved hym best, for that he**  
                I believe I loved him best, because he  
514       **Was of his love daungerous to me.**  
                Was of his love standoffish to me.   
515       **We wommen han, if that I shal nat lye,**  
                We women have, if I shall not lie,  
516       **In this matere a queynte fantasye:**  
                In this matter a curious fantasy:  
517       **Wayte what thyng we may nat lightly have,**  
                Note that whatever thing we may not easily have,  
518       **Therafter wol we crie al day and crave.**  
                We will cry all day and crave for it.  
519       **Forbede us thyng, and that desiren we;**  
                Forbid us a thing, and we desire it;  
520       **Preesse on us faste, and thanne wol we fle.**  
                Press on us fast, and then will we flee.  
521       **With daunger oute we al oure chaffare;**  
                With niggardliness we spread out all our merchandise;  
522       **Greet prees at market maketh deere ware,**  
                A great crowd at the market makes wares expensive,  
523       **And to greet cheep is holde at litel prys:**  
                And too great a supply makes them of little value:   
524       **This knoweth every womman that is wys.**  
                Every woman that is wise knows this.

525       **My fifthe housbonde -- God his soule blesse! --**  
                My fifth husband -- God bless his soul! --  
526       **Which that I took for love, and no richesse,**  
                Whom I took for love, and no riches,  
527       **He som tyme was a clerk of Oxenford,**  
                He was formerly a clerk of Oxford,  
528       **And hadde left scole, and wente at hom to bord**  
                And had left school, and came home to board  
529       **With my gossib, dwellynge in oure toun;**  
                With my close friend, dwelling in our town;  
530       **God have hir soule! Hir name was Alisoun.**  
                God have her soul! Her name was Alisoun.  
531       **She knew myn herte, and eek my privetee,**  
                She knew my heart, and also my secrets,  
532       **Bet than oure parisshe preest, so moot I thee!**  
                Better than our parish priest, as I may prosper!  
533       **To hire biwreyed I my conseil al.**  
                To her I revealed all my secrets.  
534       **For hadde myn housbonde pissed on a wal,**  
                For had my husband pissed on a wall,  
535       **Or doon a thyng that sholde han cost his lyf,**  
                Or done a thing that should have cost his life,  
536       **To hire, and to another worthy wyf,**  
                To her, and to another worthy wife,  
537       **And to my nece, which that I loved weel,**  
                And to my niece, whom I loved well,  
538       **I wolde han toold his conseil every deel.**  
                I would have told every one of his secrets.  
539       **And so I dide ful often, God it woot,**  
                And so I did very often, God knows it,  
540       **That made his face often reed and hoot**  
                That made his face often red and hot  
541       **For verray shame, and blamed hymself for he**  
                For true shame, and blamed himself because he  
542       **Had toold to me so greet a pryvetee.**  
                Had told to me so great a secret.

543       **And so bifel that ones in a Lente --**  
                And so it happened that once in a Springtime --  
544       **So often tymes I to my gossyb wente,**  
                Since frequently I went to visit my close friend,   
545       **For evere yet I loved to be gay,**  
                For I always loved to be gay,  
546       **And for to walke in March, Averill, and May,**  
                And to walk in March, April, and May,  
547       **Fro hous to hous, to heere sondry talys --**  
                From house to house, to hear various bits of gossip --  
548       **That Jankyn clerk, and my gossyb dame Alys,**  
                That Jankin the clerk, and my close friend dame Alys,  
549       **And I myself, into the feeldes wente.**  
                And I myself, into the fields went.  
550       **Myn housbonde was at Londoun al that Lente;**  
                My husband was at London all that Spring;  
551       **I hadde the bettre leyser for to pleye,**  
                I had the better opportunity to amuse myself,  
552       **And for to se, and eek for to be seye**  
                And to see, and also to be seen  
553       **Of lusty folk. What wiste I wher my grace**  
                By amorous folk. What did I know about where my good fortune   
554       **Was shapen for to be, or in what place?**  
                Was destined to be, or in what place?  
555       **Therfore I made my visitaciouns**  
                Therefore I made my visitations  
556       **To vigilies and to processiouns,**  
                To religious feasts and to processions,   
557       **To prechyng eek, and to thise pilgrimages,**  
                To preaching also, and to these pilgrimages,  
558       **To pleyes of myracles, and to mariages,**  
                To plays about miracles, and to marriages,  
559       **And wered upon my gaye scarlet gytes.**  
                And wore my gay scarlet robes.  
560       **Thise wormes, ne thise motthes, ne thise mytes,**  
                These worms, nor these moths, nor these mites,  
561       **Upon my peril, frete hem never a deel;**  
                Upon my peril (I swear), chewed on them never a bit;  
562       **And wostow why? For they were used weel.**  
                And know thou why? Because they were well used.

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

575       **I bar hym on honde he hadde enchanted me --**  
                I falsely swore that he had enchanted me --  
576       **My dame taughte me that soutiltee --**  
                My mother taught me that trick --  
577       **And eek I seyde I mette of hym al nyght,**  
                And also I said I dreamed of him all night,  
578       **He wolde han slayn me as I lay upright,**  
                He would have slain me as I lay on my back,  
579       **And al my bed was ful of verray blood;**  
                And all my bed was full of real blood;   
580       **`But yet I hope that ye shal do me good,**  
                `But yet I hope that you shall do me good,  
581       **For blood bitokeneth gold, as me was taught.'**  
                For blood symbolizes gold, as I was taught.'  
582       **And al was fals; I dremed of it right naught,**  
                And all was false; I dreamed of it not at all,   
583       **But as I folwed ay my dames loore,**  
                But I followed always my mother's teaching,  
584       **As wel of this as of othere thynges moore.**  
                As well in this as in other things more.

585       **But now, sire, lat me se what I shal seyn.**  
                But now, sir, let me see what I shall say.  
586       **A ha! By God, I have my tale ageyn.**  
                A ha! By God, I have my tale again.

587       **Whan that my fourthe housbonde was on beere,**  
                When my fourth husband was on the funeral bier,  
588       **I weep algate, and made sory cheere,**  
                I wept continuously, and acted sorry,  
589       **As wyves mooten, for it is usage,**  
                As wives must do, for it is the custom,  
590       **And with my coverchief covered my visage,**  
                And with my kerchief covered my face,  
591       **But for that I was purveyed of a make,**  
                But because I was provided with a mate,  
592       **I wepte but smal, and that I undertake.**  
                I wept but little, and that I affirm.

593       **To chirche was myn housbonde born a-morwe**  
                To church was my husband carried in the morning  
594       **With neighebores, that for hym maden sorwe;**  
                By neighbors, who for him made sorrow;  
595       **And Jankyn, oure clerk, was oon of tho.**  
                And Jankin, our clerk, was one of those.  
596       **As help me God, whan that I saugh hym go**  
                As help me God, when I saw him go  
597       **After the beere, me thoughte he hadde a paire**  
                After the bier, I thought he had a pair  
598       **Of legges and of feet so clene and faire**  
                Of legs and of feet so neat and fair  
599       **That al myn herte I yaf unto his hoold.**  
                That all my heart I gave unto his keeping.  
600       **He was, I trowe, twenty wynter oold,**  
                He was, I believe, twenty years old,  
601       **And I was fourty, if I shal seye sooth;**  
                And I was forty, if I shall tell the truth;  
602       **But yet I hadde alwey a coltes tooth.**  
                But yet I had always a colt's tooth.  
603       **Gat-tothed I was, and that bicam me weel;**  
                With teeth set wide apart I was, and that became me well;  
604       **I hadde the prente of seinte Venus seel.**  
                I had the print of Saint Venus's seal.  
605       **As help me God, I was a lusty oon,**  
                As help me God, I was a lusty one,  
606       **And faire, and riche, and yong, and wel bigon,**  
                And fair, and rich, and young, and well fixed,  
607       **And trewely, as myne housbondes tolde me,**  
                And truly, as my husbands told me,  
608       **I hadde the beste quoniam myghte be.**  
                I had the best pudendum that might be.   
609       **For certes, I am al Venerien**  
                For certainly, I am all influenced by Venus  
610       **In feelynge, and myn herte is Marcien.**  
                In feeling, and my heart is influenced by Mars.  
611       **Venus me yaf my lust, my likerousnesse,**  
                Venus me gave my lust, my amorousness,  
612       **And Mars yaf me my sturdy hardynesse;**  
                And Mars gave me my sturdy boldness;  
613       **Myn ascendent was Taur, and Mars therinne.**  
                My ascendant was Taurus, and Mars was therein.  
614       **Allas, allas! That evere love was synne!**  
                Alas, alas! That ever love was sin!  
615       **I folwed ay myn inclinacioun**  
                I followed always my inclination  
616       **By vertu of my constellacioun;**  
                By virtue of the state of the heavens at my birth;  
617       **That made me I koude noght withdrawe**  
                That made me that I could not withdraw  
618       **My chambre of Venus from a good felawe.**  
                My chamber of Venus from a good fellow.  
619       **Yet have I Martes mark upon my face,**  
                Yet have I Mars' mark upon my face,  
620       **And also in another privee place.**  
                And also in another private place.  
621       **For God so wys be my savacioun,**  
                For as God may be my salvation,  
622       **I ne loved nevere by no discrecioun,**  
                I never loved in moderation,  
623       **But evere folwede myn appetit,**  
                But always followed my appetite,  
624       **Al were he short, or long, or blak, or whit;**  
                Whether he were short, or tall, or black-haired, or blond;  
625       **I took no kep, so that he liked me,**  
                I took no notice, provided that he pleased me,  
626       **How poore he was, ne eek of what degree.**  
                How poor he was, nor also of what rank.

627       **What sholde I seye but, at the monthes ende,**  
                What should I say but, at the month's end,  
628       **This joly clerk, Jankyn, that was so hende,**  
                This jolly clerk, Jankin, that was so courteous,  
629       **Hath wedded me with greet solempnytee,**  
                Has wedded me with great solemnity,  
630       **And to hym yaf I al the lond and fee**  
                And to him I gave all the land and property  
631       **That evere was me yeven therbifoore.**  
                That ever was given to me before then.  
632       **But afterward repented me ful soore;**  
                But afterward I repented very bitterly;  
633       **He nolde suffre nothyng of my list.**  
                He would not allow me anything of my desires.  
634       **By God, he smoot me ones on the lyst,**  
                By God, he hit me once on the ear,  
635       **For that I rente out of his book a leef,**  
                Because I tore a leaf out of his book,  
636       **That of the strook myn ere wax al deef.**  
                So that of the stroke my ear became all deaf.  
637       **Stibourn I was as is a leonesse,**  
                I was as stubborn as is a lioness,  
638       **And of my tonge a verray jangleresse,**  
                And of my tongue a true chatterbox,  
639       **And walke I wolde, as I had doon biforn,**  
                And I would walk, as I had done before,  
640       **From hous to hous, although he had it sworn;**  
                From house to house, although he had sworn the contrary;  
641       **For which he often tymes wolde preche,**  
                For which he often times would preach,  
642       **And me of olde Romayn geestes teche;**  
                And teach me of old Roman stories;  
643       **How he Symplicius Gallus lefte his wyf,**  
                How he, Simplicius Gallus, left his wife,  
644       **And hire forsook for terme of al his lyf,**  
                And forsook her for rest of all his life,  
645       **Noght but for open-heveded he hir say**  
                Because of nothing but because he saw her bare-headed  
646       **Lookynge out at his dore upon a day.**  
                Looking out at his door one day.

647       **Another Romayn tolde he me by name,**  
                Another Roman he told me by name,  
648       **That, for his wyf was at a someres game**  
                Who, because his wife was at a midsummer revel  
649       **Withouten his wityng, he forsook hire eke.**  
                Without his knowledge, he forsook her also.  
650       **And thanne wolde he upon his Bible seke**  
                And then he would seek in his Bible  
651       **That ilke proverbe of Ecclesiaste**  
                That same proverb of Ecclesiasticus  
652       **Where he comandeth and forbedeth faste**  
                Where he commands and strictly forbids that  
653       **Man shal nat suffre his wyf go roule aboute.**  
                Man should suffer his wife go wander about.  
654       **Thanne wolde he seye right thus, withouten doute:**  
                Then would he say right thus, without doubt:

655       **`Whoso that buyldeth his hous al of salwes,**  
                `Whoever builds his house all of willow twigs,  
656       **And priketh his blynde hors over the falwes,**  
                And spurs his blind horse over the open fields,  
657       **And suffreth his wyf to go seken halwes,**  
                And suffers his wife to go on pilgrimages,  
658       **Is worthy to been hanged on the galwes!'**  
                Is worthy to be hanged on the gallows!'  
659       **But al for noght, I sette noght an hawe**  
                But all for nothing, I gave not a hawthorn berry   
660       **Of his proverbes n' of his olde sawe,**  
                For his proverbs nor for his old sayings,  
661       **Ne I wolde nat of hym corrected be.**  
                Nor would I be corrected by him.  
662       **I hate hym that my vices telleth me,**  
                I hate him who tells me my vices,  
663       **And so doo mo, God woot, of us than I.**  
                And so do more of us, God knows, than I.  
664       **This made hym with me wood al outrely;**  
                This made him all utterly furious with me;  
665       **I nolde noght forbere hym in no cas.**  
                I would not put up with him in any way.

666       **Now wol I seye yow sooth, by Seint Thomas,**  
                Now will I tell you the truth, by Saint Thomas,  
667       **Why that I rente out of his book a leef,**  
                Why I tore a leaf out of his book,  
668       **For which he smoot me so that I was deef.**  
                For which he hit me so hard that I was deaf.

669       **He hadde a book that gladly, nyght and day,**  
                He had a book that regularly, night and day,  
670       **For his desport he wolde rede alway;**  
                For his amusement he would always read;  
671       **He cleped it Valerie and Theofraste,**  
                He called it Valerie and Theofrastus,  
672       **At which book he lough alwey ful faste.**  
                At which book he always heartily laughed.  
673       **And eek ther was somtyme a clerk at Rome,**  
                And also there was once a clerk at Rome,  
674       **A cardinal, that highte Seint Jerome,**  
                A cardinal, who is called Saint Jerome,  
675       **That made a book agayn Jovinian;**  
                That made a book against Jovinian;  
676       **In which book eek ther was Tertulan,**  
                In which book also there was Tertullian,  
677       **Crisippus, Trotula, and Helowys,**  
                Crisippus, Trotula, and Heloise,  
678       **That was abbesse nat fer fro Parys,**  
                Who was abbess not far from Paris,  
679       **And eek the Parables of Salomon,**  
                And also the Parables of Salomon,  
680       **Ovides Art, and bookes many on,**  
                Ovid's Art, and many other books,  
681       **And alle thise were bounden in o volume.**  
                And all these were bound in one volume.  
682       **And every nyght and day was his custume,**  
                And every night and day was his custom,  
683       **Whan he hadde leyser and vacacioun**  
                When he had leisure and spare time  
684       **From oother worldly occupacioun,**  
                From other worldly occupations,  
685       **To reden on this book of wikked wyves.**  
                To read in this book of wicked wives.  
686       **He knew of hem mo legendes and lyves**  
                He knew of them more legends and lives  
687       **Than been of goode wyves in the Bible.**  
                Than are of good women in the Bible.  
688       **For trusteth wel, it is an impossible**  
                For trust well, it is an impossibility  
689       **That any clerk wol speke good of wyves,**  
                That any clerk will speak good of women,  
690       **But if it be of hooly seintes lyves,**  
                Unless it be of holy saints' lives,  
691       **Ne of noon oother womman never the mo.**  
                Nor of any other woman in any way.  
692       **Who peyntede the leon, tel me who?**  
                Who painted the lion, tell me who?  
693       **By God, if wommen hadde writen stories,**  
                By God, if women had written stories,  
694       **As clerkes han withinne hire oratories,**  
                As clerks have within their studies,   
695       **They wolde han writen of men moore wikkednesse**  
                They would have written of men more wickedness  
696       **Than al the mark of Adam may redresse.**  
                Than all the male sex could set right.  
697       **The children of Mercurie and of Venus**  
                The children of Mercury (clerks) and of Venus (lovers)  
698       **Been in hir wirkyng ful contrarius;**  
                Are directly contrary in their actions;  
699       **Mercurie loveth wysdam and science,**  
                Mercury loves wisdom and knowledge,  
700       **And Venus loveth ryot and dispence.**  
                And Venus loves riot and extravagant expenditures.  
701       **And, for hire diverse disposicioun,**  
                And, because of their diverse dispositions,  
702       **Ech falleth in otheres exaltacioun.**  
                Each falls in the other's most powerful astronomical sign.  
703       **And thus, God woot, Mercurie is desolat**  
                And thus, God knows, Mercury is powerless  
704       **In Pisces, wher Venus is exaltat,**  
                In Pisces (the Fish), where Venus is exalted,  
705       **And Venus falleth ther Mercurie is reysed.**  
                And Venus falls where Mercury is raised.  
706       **Therfore no womman of no clerk is preysed.**  
                Therefore no woman is praised by any clerk.  
707       **The clerk, whan he is oold, and may noght do**  
                The clerk, when he is old, and can not do  
708       **Of Venus werkes worth his olde sho,**  
                Any of Venus's works worth his old shoe,  
709       **Thanne sit he doun, and writ in his dotage**  
                Then he sits down, and writes in his dotage  
710       **That wommen kan nat kepe hir mariage!**  
                That women can not keep their marriage!

711       **But now to purpos, why I tolde thee**  
                But now to the point, why I told thee  
712       **That I was beten for a book, pardee!**  
                That I was beaten for a book, by God!  
713       **Upon a nyght Jankyn, that was oure sire,**  
                Upon a night Jankin, that was master of our house,  
714       **Redde on his book, as he sat by the fire,**  
                Read on his book, as he sat by the fire,  
715       **Of Eva first, that for hir wikkednesse**  
                Of Eve first, how for her wickedness  
716       **Was al mankynde broght to wrecchednesse,**  
                All mankind was brought to wretchedness,  
717       **For which that Jhesu Crist hymself was slayn,**  
                For which Jesus Christ himself was slain,  
718       **That boghte us with his herte blood agayn.**  
                Who bought us back with his heart's blood.  
719       **Lo, heere expres of womman may ye fynde**  
                Lo, here clearly of woman you may find  
720       **That womman was the los of al mankynde.**  
                That woman was the cause of the loss of all mankind.

721       **Tho redde he me how Sampson loste his heres:**  
                Then he read me how Sampson lost his hair:  
722       **Slepynge, his lemman kitte it with hir sheres;**  
                Sleeping, his lover cut it with her shears;   
723       **Thurgh which treson loste he bothe his yen.**  
                Through which treason he lost both his eyes.  
724       **Tho redde he me, if that I shal nat lyen,**  
                Then he read to me, if I shall not lie,  
725       **Of Hercules and of his Dianyre,**  
                Of Hercules and of his Dianyre,  
726       **That caused hym to sette hymself afyre.**  
                Who caused him to set himself on fire.

727       **No thyng forgat he the care and the wo**  
                He forgot not a bit of the care and the woe  
728       **That Socrates hadde with his wyves two,**  
                That Socrates had with his two wives,  
729       **How Xantippa caste pisse upon his heed.**  
                How Xantippa caste piss upon his head.  
730       **This sely man sat stille as he were deed;**  
                This poor man sat still as if he were dead;   
731       **He wiped his heed, namoore dorste he seyn,**  
                He wiped his head, no more dared he say,  
732       **But `Er that thonder stynte, comth a reyn!'**  
                But `Before thunder stops, there comes a rain!'

733       **Of Phasipha, that was the queene of Crete,**  
                Of Phasipha, that was the queen of Crete,  
734       **For shrewednesse, hym thoughte the tale swete;**  
                For sheer malignancy, he thought the tale sweet;  
735       **Fy! Spek namoore -- it is a grisly thyng --**  
                Fie! Speak no more -- it is a grisly thing --  
736       **Of hire horrible lust and hir likyng.**  
                Of her horrible lust and her pleasure.

737       **Of Clitermystra, for hire lecherye,**  
                Of Clitermystra, for her lechery,  
738       **That falsly made hire housbonde for to dye,**  
                That falsely made her husband to die,  
739       **He redde it with ful good devocioun.**  
                He read it with very good devotion.

740       **He tolde me eek for what occasioun**  
                He told me also for what occasion  
741       **Amphiorax at Thebes loste his lyf.**  
                Amphiorax at Thebes lost his life.  
742       **Myn housbonde hadde a legende of his wyf,**  
                My husband had a legend of his wife,  
743       **Eriphilem, that for an ouche of gold**  
                Eriphilem, that for a brooch of gold  
744       **Hath prively unto the Grekes told**  
                Has secretly unto the Greeks told  
745       **Wher that hir housbonde hidde hym in a place,**  
                Where her husband hid him in a place,  
746       **For which he hadde at Thebes sory grace.**  
                For which he had at Thebes a sad fate.

747       **Of Lyvia tolde he me, and of Lucye:**  
                Of Livia told he me, and of Lucie:  
748       **They bothe made hir housbondes for to dye,**  
                They both made their husbands to die,  
749       **That oon for love, that oother was for hate.**  
                That one for love, that other was for hate.  
750       **Lyvia hir housbonde, on an even late,**  
                Livia her husband, on a late evening,  
751       **Empoysoned hath, for that she was his fo;**  
                Has poisoned, because she was his foe;  
752       **Lucia, likerous, loved hire housbonde so**  
                Lucia, lecherous, loved her husband so much  
753       **That, for he sholde alwey upon hire thynke,**  
                That, so that he should always think upon her,  
754       **She yaf hym swich a manere love-drynke**  
                She gave him such a sort of love-drink  
755       **That he was deed er it were by the morwe;**  
                That he was dead before it was morning;  
756       **And thus algates housbondes han sorwe.**  
                And thus always husbands have sorrow.

757       **Thanne tolde he me how oon Latumyus**  
                Then he told me how one Latumius  
758       **Compleyned unto his felawe Arrius**  
                Complained unto his fellow Arrius  
759       **That in his gardyn growed swich a tree**  
                That in his garden grew such a tree  
760       **On which he seyde how that his wyves thre**  
                On which he said how his three wives   
761       **Hanged hemself for herte despitus.**  
                Hanged themselves for the malice of their hearts   
762       **`O leeve brother,' quod this Arrius,**  
                `O dear brother,' this Arrius said,  
763       **`Yif me a plante of thilke blissed tree,**  
                `Give me a shoot of that same blessed tree,   
764       **And in my gardyn planted shal it bee.'**  
                And in my garden shall it be planted.'

765       **Of latter date, of wyves hath he red**  
                Of latter date, of wives has he read  
766       **That somme han slayn hir housbondes in hir bed,**  
                That some have slain their husbands in their bed,  
767       **And lete hir lecchour dighte hire al the nyght,**  
                And let her lecher copulate with her all the night,  
768       **Whan that the corps lay in the floor upright.**  
                When the corpse lay in the floor flat on its back.  
769       **And somme han dryve nayles in hir brayn,**  
                And some have driven nails in their brains,  
770       **Whil that they slepte, and thus they had hem slayn.**  
                While they slept, and thus they had them slain.  
771       **Somme han hem yeve poysoun in hire drynke.**  
                Some have given them poison in their drink.  
772       **He spak moore harm than herte may bithynke,**  
                He spoke more harm than heart may imagine,  
773       **And therwithal he knew of mo proverbes**  
                And concerning this he knew of more proverbs  
774       **Than in this world ther growen gras or herbes.**  
                Than in this world there grow grass or herbs.  
775       **`Bet is,' quod he, `thyn habitacioun**  
                `Better is,' he said, `thy habitation  
776       **Be with a leon or a foul dragoun,**  
                Be with a lion or a foul dragon,  
777       **Than with a womman usynge for to chyde.**  
                Than with a woman accustomed to scold.  
778       **Bet is,' quod he, `hye in the roof abyde,**  
                Better is,' he said, `to stay high in the roof,  
779       **Than with an angry wyf doun in the hous;**  
                Than with an angry wife down in the house;  
780       **They been so wikked and contrarious,**  
                They are so wicked and contrary,  
781       **They haten that hir housbondes loven ay.'**  
                They always hate what their husbands love.'  
782       **He seyde, `A womman cast hir shame away,**  
                He said, `A woman casts their shame away,  
783       **Whan she cast of hir smok'; and forthermo,**  
                When she casts off her undergarment'; and furthermore,  
784       **`A fair womman, but she be chaast also,**  
                `A fair woman, unless she is also chaste,  
785       **Is lyk a gold ryng in a sowes nose.'**  
                Is like a gold ring in a sow's nose.'  
786       **Who wolde wene, or who wolde suppose,**  
                Who would believe, or who would suppose,  
787       **The wo that in myn herte was, and pyne?**  
                The woe that in my heart was, and pain?

788       **And whan I saugh he wolde nevere fyne**  
                And when I saw he would never cease  
789       **To reden on this cursed book al nyght,**  
                Reading on this cursed book all night,  
790       **Al sodeynly thre leves have I plyght**  
                All suddenly have I plucked three leaves   
791       **Out of his book, right as he radde, and eke**  
                Out of his book, right as he read, and also  
792       **I with my fest so took hym on the cheke**  
                I with my fist so hit him on the cheek  
793       **That in oure fyr he fil bakward adoun.**  
                That in our fire he fell down backwards.  
794       **And he up stirte as dooth a wood leoun,**  
                And he leaped up as does a furious lion,  
795       **And with his fest he smoot me on the heed**  
                And with his fist he hit me on the head  
796       **That in the floor I lay as I were deed.**  
                That on the floor I lay as if I were dead.  
797       **And whan he saugh how stille that I lay,**  
                And when he saw how still I lay,  
798       **He was agast and wolde han fled his way,**  
                He was frightened and would have fled on his way,  
799       **Til atte laste out of my swogh I breyde.**  
                Until at the last out of my swoon I awoke.  
800       **`O! hastow slayn me, false theef?' I seyde,**  
                `O! hast thou slain me, false thief?' I said,  
801       **`And for my land thus hastow mordred me?**  
                `And for my land thus hast thou murdered me?  
802       **Er I be deed, yet wol I kisse thee.'**  
                Before I am dead, yet will I kiss thee.'

803       **And neer he cam, and kneled faire adoun,**  
                And near he came, and kneeled gently down,  
804       **And seyde, `Deere suster Alisoun,**  
                And said, `Dear sister Alisoun,  
805       **As help me God, I shal thee nevere smyte!**  
                So help me God, I shall never (again) smite thee!  
806       **That I have doon, it is thyself to wyte.**  
                What I have done, it is thyself to blame (you drove me to it).   
807       **Foryeve it me, and that I thee biseke!'**  
                Forgive it me, and that I beseech thee!'  
808       **And yet eftsoones I hitte hym on the cheke,**  
                And yet immediately I hit him on the cheek,  
809       **And seyde, `Theef, thus muchel am I wreke;**  
                And said, `Thief, thus much am I avenged;  
810       **Now wol I dye, I may no lenger speke.'**  
                Now will I die, I may no longer speak.'  
811       **But atte laste, with muchel care and wo,**  
                But at the last, with much care and woe,  
812       **We fille acorded by us selven two.**  
                We made an agreement between our two selves.   
813       **He yaf me al the bridel in myn hond,**  
                He gave me all the control in my hand,  
814       **To han the governance of hous and lond,**  
                To have the governance of house and land,  
815       **And of his tonge, and of his hond also;**  
                And of his tongue, and of his hand also;  
816       **And made hym brenne his book anon right tho.**  
                And made him burn his book immediately right then.  
817       **And whan that I hadde geten unto me,**  
                And when I had gotten unto me,  
818       **By maistrie, al the soveraynetee,**  
                By mastery, all the sovereignty,  
819       **And that he seyde, `Myn owene trewe wyf,**  
                And that he said, `My own true wife,  
820       **Do as thee lust the terme of al thy lyf;**  
                Do as you please the rest of all thy life;  
821       **Keep thyn honour, and keep eek myn estaat' --**  
                Guard thy honor, and guard also my reputation' --  
822       **After that day we hadden never debaat.**  
                After that day we never had an argument.  
823       **God helpe me so, I was to hym as kynde**  
                As God may help me, I was to him as kind  
824       **As any wyf from Denmark unto Ynde,**  
                As any wife from Denmark unto India,  
825       **And also trewe, and so was he to me.**  
                And also true, and so was he to me.  
826       **I prey to God, that sit in magestee,**  
                I pray to God, who sits in majesty,  
827       **So blesse his soule for his mercy deere.**  
                So bless his soul for his mercy dear.  
828       **Now wol I seye my tale, if ye wol heere."**  
                Now will I say my tale, if you will hear."

*Beholde the wordes bitwene the   
Somonour and the Frere*

829       **The Frere lough, whan he hadde herd al this;**  
                The Friar laughed, when he had heard all this;  
830       **"Now dame," quod he, "so have I joye or blis,**  
                "Now dame," he said, "as I may have joy or bliss,  
831       **This is a long preamble of a tale!"**  
                This is a long preamble of a tale!"  
832       **And whan the Somonour herde the Frere gale,**  
                And when the Summoner heard the Friar cry out,  
833       **"Lo," quod the Somonour, "Goddes armes two!**  
                "Lo," said the Summoner, "By God's two arms!  
834       **A frere wol entremette hym everemo.**  
                A friar will always intrude himself (in others' affairs).  
835       **Lo, goode men, a flye and eek a frere**  
                Lo, good men, a fly and also a friar  
836       **Wol falle in every dyssh and eek mateere.**  
                Will fall in every dish and also every discussion.  
837       **What spekestow of preambulacioun?**  
                What speakest thou of perambulation?  
838       **What! amble, or trotte, or pees, or go sit doun!**  
                  What! amble, or trot, or keep still, or go sit down!  
839         **Thou lettest oure disport in this manere."**  
                  Thou spoil our fun in this manner."

840         **"Ye, woltow so, sire Somonour?" quod the Frere;**  
                  "Yes, wilt thou have it thus, sir Summoner?" said the Friar;  
841         **"Now, by my feith I shal, er that I go,**  
                  "Now, by my faith I shall, before I go,  
842         **Telle of a somonour swich a tale or two**  
                  Tell of a summoner such a tale or two  
843         **That alle the folk shal laughen in this place."**  
                  That all the folk shall laugh in this place."

844         **"Now elles, Frere, I bishrewe thy face,"**  
                  "Now otherwise, Friar, I curse thy face,"  
845         **Quod this Somonour, "and I bishrewe me,**  
                  Said this Summoner, "and I curse myself,  
846         **But if I telle tales two or thre**  
                  Unless I tell tales two or three  
847         **Of freres er I come to Sidyngborne**  
                  Of friars before I come to Siitingbourne  
848         **That I shal make thyn herte for to morne,**  
                  That I shall make thy heart to mourn,  
849         **For wel I woot thy pacience is gon."**  
                  For well I know thy patience is gone."

850         **Oure Hooste cride "Pees! And that anon!"**  
                  Our Host cried "Peace! And that right now!"  
851         **And seyde, "Lat the womman telle hire tale.**  
                  And said, "Let the woman tell her tale.  
852         **Ye fare as folk that dronken ben of ale.**  
                  You act like folk that are drunk on ale.  
853         **Do, dame, telle forth youre tale, and that is best."**  
                  Do, dame, tell forth your tale, and that is best."

854         **"Al redy, sire," quod she, "right as yow lest,**  
                  "All ready, sir," she said, "right as you please,  
855         **If I have licence of this worthy Frere."**  
                  If I have permission of this worthy Friar."

856         **"Yis, dame," quod he, "tel forth, and I wol heere."**  
                  "Yes, dame," he said, "tell forth, and I will hear."

*Heere endeth the Wyf of Bathe hir Prologe*

**The Wife of Bath's Tale**

*Heere bigynneth the Tale of the Wyf of Bathe*

857         **In th' olde dayes of the Kyng Arthour,**  
                  In the old days of King Arthur,   
858         **Of which that Britons speken greet honour,**  
                  Of whom Britons speak great honor,  
859         **Al was this land fulfild of fayerye.**  
                  This land was all filled full of supernatural creatures.   
860         **The elf-queene, with hir joly compaignye,**  
                  The elf-queen, with her jolly company,  
861         **Daunced ful ofte in many a grene mede.**  
                  Danced very often in many a green mead.  
862         **This was the olde opinion, as I rede;**  
                  This was the old belief, as I read;  
863         **I speke of manye hundred yeres ago.**  
                  I speak of many hundred years ago.  
864         **But now kan no man se none elves mo,**  
                  But now no man can see any more elves,  
865         **For now the grete charitee and prayeres**  
                  For now the great charity and prayers  
866         **Of lymytours and othere hooly freres,**  
                  Of licensed beggars and other holy friars,  
867         **That serchen every lond and every streem,**  
                  That overrun every land and every stream,  
868         **As thikke as motes in the sonne-beem,**  
                  As thick as specks of dust in the sun-beam,  
869         **Blessynge halles, chambres, kichenes, boures,**  
                  Blessing halls, chambers, kitchens, bedrooms,  
870         **Citees, burghes, castels, hye toures,**  
                  Cities, towns, castles, high towers,  
871         **Thropes, bernes, shipnes, dayeryes --**  
                  Villages, barns, stables, dairies --  
872         **This maketh that ther ben no fayeryes.**  
                  This makes it that there are no fairies.  
873         **For ther as wont to walken was an elf**  
                  For where an elf was accustomed to walk   
874         **Ther walketh now the lymytour hymself**  
                  There walks now the licensed begging friar himself  
875         **In undermeles and in morwenynges,**  
                  In late mornings and in early mornings,  
876         **And seyth his matyns and his hooly thynges**  
                  And says his morning prayers and his holy things  
877         **As he gooth in his lymytacioun.**  
                  As he goes in his assigned district.  
878         **Wommen may go saufly up and doun.**  
                  Women may go safely up and down.  
879         **In every bussh or under every tree**  
                  In every bush or under every tree  
880         **Ther is noon oother incubus but he,**  
                  There is no other evil spirit but he,  
881         **And he ne wol doon hem but dishonour.**  
                  And he will not do them any harm except dishonor.

882         **And so bifel that this kyng Arthour**  
                  And so it happened that this king Arthur  
883         **Hadde in his hous a lusty bacheler,**  
                  Had in his house a lusty bachelor,  
884         **That on a day cam ridynge fro ryver,**  
                  That on one day came riding from hawking,  
885         **And happed that, allone as he was born,**  
                  And it happened that, alone as he was born,  
886         **He saugh a mayde walkynge hym biforn,**  
                  He saw a maiden walking before him,  
887         **Of which mayde anon, maugree hir heed,**  
                  Of which maiden straightway, despite all she could do,  
888         **By verray force, he rafte hire maydenhed;**  
                  By utter force, he took away her maidenhead;  
889         **For which oppressioun was swich clamour**  
                  For which wrong was such clamor  
890         **And swich pursute unto the kyng Arthour**  
                  And such demand for justice unto king Arthur  
891         **That dampned was this knyght for to be deed,**  
                  That this knight was condemned to be dead,  
892         **By cours of lawe, and sholde han lost his heed --**  
                  By course of law, and should have lost his head --  
893         **Paraventure swich was the statut tho --**  
                  Perhaps such was the statute then --  
894         **But that the queene and other ladyes mo**  
                  Except that the queen and other ladies as well  
895         **So longe preyeden the kyng of grace**  
                  So long prayed the king for grace  
896         **Til he his lyf hym graunted in the place,**  
                  Until he granted him his life right there,  
897         **And yaf hym to the queene, al at hir wille,**  
                  And gave him to the queen, all at her will,  
898         **To chese wheither she wolde hym save or spille.**  
                  To choose whether she would him save or put to death.

899         **The queene thanketh the kyng with al hir myght,**  
                  The queen thanks the king with all her might,  
900         **And after this thus spak she to the knyght,**  
                  And after this she spoke thus to the knight,  
901         **Whan that she saugh hir tyme, upon a day:**  
                  When she saw her time, upon a day:  
902         **"Thou standest yet," quod she, "in swich array**  
                  "Thou standest yet," she said, "in such condition,  
903         **That of thy lyf yet hastow no suretee.**  
                  That of thy life yet thou hast no assurance  
904         **I grante thee lyf, if thou kanst tellen me**  
                  I grant thee life, if thou canst tell me  
905         **What thyng is it that wommen moost desiren.**  
                  What thing it is that women most desire.  
906         **Be war, and keep thy nekke-boon from iren!**  
                  Beware, and keep thy neck-bone from iron (axe)!  
907         **And if thou kanst nat tellen it anon,**  
                  And if thou canst not tell it right now,  
908         **Yet wol I yeve thee leve for to gon**  
                  Yet I will give thee leave to go  
909         **A twelf-month and a day, to seche and leere**  
                  A twelvemonth and a day, to seek to learn  
910         **An answere suffisant in this mateere;**  
                  A satisfactory answer in this matter;  
911         **And suretee wol I han, er that thou pace,**  
                  And I will have, before thou go, a pledge   
912         **Thy body for to yelden in this place."**  
                  To surrender thy body in this place."

913         **Wo was this knyght, and sorwefully he siketh;**  
                  Woe was this knight, and sorrowfully he sighs;  
914         **But what! He may nat do al as hym liketh.**  
                  But what! He can not do all as he pleases.  
915         **And at the laste he chees hym for to wende**  
                  And at the last he chose to leave  
916         **And come agayn, right at the yeres ende,**  
                  And come again, exactly at the year's end,  
917         **With swich answere as God wolde hym purveye;**  
                  With such answer as God would provide him;  
918         **And taketh his leve, and wendeth forth his weye.**  
                  And takes his leave, and goes forth on his way.

919         **He seketh every hous and every place**  
                  He seeks every house and every place  
920         **Where as he hopeth for to fynde grace**  
                  Where he hopes to have the luck  
921         **To lerne what thyng wommen loven moost,**  
                  To learn what thing women love most,  
922         **But he ne koude arryven in no coost**  
                  But he could not arrive in any region  
923         **Wher as he myghte fynde in this mateere**  
                  Where he might find in this matter  
924         **Two creatures accordynge in-feere.**  
                  Two creatures agreeing together.  
925         **Somme seyde wommen loven best richesse,**  
                  Some said women love riches best,  
926         **Somme seyde honour, somme seyde jolynesse,**  
                  Some said honor, some said gaiety,  
927         **Somme riche array, somme seyden lust abedde,**  
                  Some rich clothing, some said lust in bed,  
928         **And oftetyme to be wydwe and wedde.**  
                  And frequently to be widow and wedded.  
929         **Somme seyde that oure hertes been moost esed**  
                  Some said that our hearts are most eased  
930         **Whan that we been yflatered and yplesed.**  
                  When we are flattered and pleased.  
931         **He gooth ful ny the sothe, I wol nat lye.**  
                  He goes very near the truth, I will not lie.  
932         **A man shal wynne us best with flaterye,**  
                  A man shall win us best with flattery,  
933         **And with attendance and with bisynesse**  
                  And with attentions and with solicitude  
934         **Been we ylymed, bothe moore and lesse.**  
                  We are caught, every one of us.

935         **And somme seyen that we loven best**  
                  And some say that we love best  
936         **For to be free and do right as us lest,**  
                  To be free and do just as we please,  
937         **And that no man repreve us of oure vice,**  
                  And that no man reprove us for our vices,  
938         **But seye that we be wise and no thyng nyce.**  
                  But say that we are wise and not at all silly.  
939         **For trewely ther is noon of us alle,**  
                  For truly there is not one of us all,  
940         **If any wight wol clawe us on the galle,**  
                  If any one will scratch us on the sore spot,   
941         **That we nel kike, for he seith us sooth.**  
                  That we will not kick back, because he tells us the truth.  
942         **Assay, and he shal fynde it that so dooth;**  
                  Try it, and whoever so does shall find it true;  
943         **For, be we never so vicious withinne,**  
                  For, be we never so vicious within,  
944         **We wol been holden wise and clene of synne.**  
                  We want to be considered wise and clean of sin.

945         **And somme seyn that greet delit han we**  
                  And some say that we have great delight   
946         **For to been holden stable, and eek secree,**  
                  To be considered steadfast, and also (able to keep a) secret,  
947         **And in o purpos stedefastly to dwelle,**  
                  And in one purpose steadfastly to remain,  
948         **And nat biwreye thyng that men us telle.**  
                  And not reveal things that men tell us.  
949         **But that tale is nat worth a rake-stele.**  
                  But that tale is not worth a rake handle.  
950         **Pardee, we wommen konne no thyng hele;**  
                  By God, we women can hide nothing;  
951         **Witnesse on Myda -- wol ye heere the tale?**  
                  Witness on Midas -- will you hear the tale?

952         **Ovyde, amonges othere thynges smale,**  
                  Ovid, among other small matters,   
953         **Seyde Myda hadde, under his longe heres,**  
                  Said Midas had, under his long hair,  
954         **Growynge upon his heed two asses eres,**  
                  Two ass's ears, growing upon his head,  
955         **The whiche vice he hydde as he best myghte**  
                  The which vice he hid as he best could  
956         **Ful subtilly from every mannes sighte,**  
                  Very skillfully from every man's sight,  
957         **That, save his wyf, ther wiste of it namo.**  
                  That, except for his wife, there knew of it no others.  
958         **He loved hire moost, and trusted hire also;**  
                  He loved her most, and trusted her also;  
959         **He preyede hire that to no creature**  
                  He prayed her that to no creature  
960         **She sholde tellen of his disfigure.**  
                  She should tell of his disfigurement.

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

983         **This knyght, of which my tale is specially,**  
                  This knight, of whom my tale is in particular,  
984         **Whan that he saugh he myghte nat come therby --**  
                  When he saw he might not come to that --  
985         **This is to seye, what wommen love moost --**  
                  This is to say, what women love most --  
986         **Withinne his brest ful sorweful was the goost.**  
                  Within his breast very sorrowful was the spirit.  
987         **But hoom he gooth; he myghte nat sojourne;**  
                  But home he goes; he could not linger;  
988         **The day was come that homward moste he tourne.**  
                  The day was come that homeward he must turn.  
989         **And in his wey it happed hym to ryde,**  
                  And in his way he happened to ride,  
990         **In al this care, under a forest syde,**  
                  In all this care, near a forest side,  
991         **Wher as he saugh upon a daunce go**  
                  Where he saw upon a dance go  
992         **Of ladyes foure and twenty, and yet mo;**  
                  Ladies four and twenty, and yet more;  
993         **Toward the whiche daunce he drow ful yerne,**  
                  Toward the which dance he drew very eagerly,  
994         **In hope that som wysdom sholde he lerne.**  
                  In hope that he should learn some wisdom.  
995         **But certeinly, er he cam fully there,**  
                  But certainly, before he came fully there,  
996         **Vanysshed was this daunce, he nyste where.**  
                  Vanished was this dance, he knew not where.  
997         **No creature saugh he that bar lyf,**  
                  He saw no creature that bore life,  
998         **Save on the grene he saugh sittynge a wyf --**  
                  Save on the green he saw sitting a woman --  
999         **A fouler wight ther may no man devyse.**  
                  There can no man imagine an uglier creature.  
1000       **Agayn the knyght this olde wyf gan ryse,**  
                  At the knight's coming this old wife did rise,  
1001       **And seyde, "Sire knyght, heer forth ne lith no wey.**  
                  And said, "Sir knight, there lies no road out of here.  
1002       **Tel me what that ye seken, by youre fey!**  
                  Tell me what you seek, by your faith!  
1003       **Paraventure it may the bettre be;**  
                  Perhaps it may be the better;  
1004       **Thise olde folk kan muchel thyng," quod she.**  
                  These old folk know many things," she said.

1005       **"My leeve mooder," quod this knyght, "certeyn**  
                  "My dear mother," said this knight, "certainly  
1006       **I nam but deed but if that I kan seyn**  
                  I am as good as dead unless I can say  
1007       **What thyng it is that wommen moost desire.**  
                  What thing it is that women most desire.  
1008       **Koude ye me wisse, I wolde wel quite youre hire."**  
                  If you could teach me, I would well repay you."

1009       **"Plight me thy trouthe heere in myn hand," quod she,**  
                  "Pledge me thy word here in my hand," she said,  
1010       **"The nexte thyng that I requere thee,**  
                  "The next thing that I require of thee,  
1011       **Thou shalt it do, if it lye in thy myght,**  
                  Thou shalt do it, if it lies in thy power,  
1012       **And I wol telle it yow er it be nyght."**  
                  And I will tell it to you before it is night."

1013       **"Have heer my trouthe," quod the knyght, "I grante."**  
                  "Have here my pledged word," said the knight, "I agree."  
1014       **"Thanne," quod she, "I dar me wel avante**  
                  "Then," she said, "I dare me well boast  
1015       **Thy lyf is sauf, for I wol stonde therby;**  
                  Thy life is safe, for I will stand thereby;  
1016       **Upon my lyf, the queene wol seye as I.**  
                  Upon my life, the queen will say as I.  
1017       **Lat se which is the proudeste of hem alle**  
                  Let's see which is the proudest of them all  
1018       **That wereth on a coverchief or a calle**  
                  That wears a kerchief or a hairnet  
1019       **That dar seye nay of that I shal thee teche.**  
                  That dares say `nay' of what I shall teach thee.  
1020       **Lat us go forth withouten lenger speche."**  
                  Let us go forth without longer speech."  
1021       **Tho rowned she a pistel in his ere,**  
                  Then she whispered a message in his ear,  
1022       **And bad hym to be glad and have no fere.**  
                  And commanded him to be glad and have no fear.  
1023       **Whan they be comen to the court, this knyght**  
                  When they are come to the court, this knight  
1024       **Seyde he had holde his day, as he hadde hight,**  
                  Said he had held his day, as he had promised,  
1025       **And redy was his answere, as he sayde.**  
                  And his answer was ready, as he said.  
1026       **Ful many a noble wyf, and many a mayde,**  
                  Very many a noble wife, and many a maid,  
1027       **And many a wydwe, for that they been wise,**  
                  And many a widow, because they are wise,  
1028       **The queene hirself sittynge as a justise,**  
                  The queen herself sitting as a justice,  
1029       **Assembled been, his answere for to heere;**  
                  Are assembled, to hear his answer;  
1030       **And afterward this knyght was bode appeere.**  
                  And afterward this knight was commanded to appear.

1031       **To every wight comanded was silence,**  
                  Silence was commanded to every person,  
1032       **And that the knyght sholde telle in audience**  
                  And that the knight should tell in open court  
1033       **What thyng that worldly wommen loven best.**  
                  What thing (it is) that worldly women love best.  
1034       **This knyght ne stood nat stille as doth a best,**  
                  This knight stood not silent as does a beast,  
1035       **But to his questioun anon answerde**  
                  But to his question straightway answered  
1036       **With manly voys, that al the court it herde:**  
                  With manly voice, so that all the court heard it:

1037       **"My lige lady, generally," quod he,**  
                  "My liege lady, without exception," he said,  
1038       **"Wommen desiren to have sovereynetee**  
                  "Women desire to have sovereignty  
1039       **As wel over hir housbond as hir love,**  
                  As well over her husband as her love,  
1040       **And for to been in maistrie hym above.**  
                  And to be in mastery above him.  
1041       **This is youre mooste desir, thogh ye me kille.**  
                  This is your greatest desire, though you kill me.  
1042       **Dooth as yow list; I am heer at youre wille."**  
                  Do as you please; I am here subject to your will."  
1043       **In al the court ne was ther wyf, ne mayde,**  
                  In all the court there was not wife, nor maid,  
1044       **Ne wydwe that contraried that he sayde,**  
                  Nor widow that denied what he said,  
1045       **But seyden he was worthy han his lyf.**  
                  But said that he was worthy to have his life.  
1046       **And with that word up stirte the olde wyf,**  
                  And with that word up sprang the old woman,  
1047       **Which that the knyght saugh sittynge on the grene:**  
                  Whom the knight saw sitting on the green:  
1048       **"Mercy," quod she, "my sovereyn lady queene!**  
                  "Mercy," she said, "my sovereign lady queen!  
1049       **Er that youre court departe, do me right.**  
                  Before your court departs, do me justice.  
1050       **I taughte this answere unto the knyght;**  
                  I taught this answer to the knight;  
1051       **For which he plighte me his trouthe there,**  
                  For which he pledged me his word there,  
1052       **The firste thyng that I wolde hym requere**  
                  The first thing that I would ask of him  
1053       **He wolde it do, if it lay in his myghte.**  
                  He would do, if it lay in his power.  
1054       **Bifore the court thanne preye I thee, sir knyght,"**  
                  Before the court then I pray thee, sir knight,"  
1055       **Quod she, "that thou me take unto thy wyf,**  
                  Said she, "that thou take me as thy wife,  
1056       **For wel thou woost that I have kept thy lyf.**  
                  For well thou know that I have saved thy life.  
1057       **If I seye fals, sey nay, upon thy fey!"**  
                  If I say false, say `nay', upon thy faith!"

1058       **This knyght answerde, "Allas and weylawey!**  
                  This knight answered, "Alas and woe is me!  
1059       **I woot right wel that swich was my biheste.**  
                  I know right well that such was my promise.  
1060       **For Goddes love, as chees a newe requeste!**  
                  For God's love, choose a new request!  
1061       **Taak al my good and lat my body go."**  
                  Take all my goods and let my body go."

1062       **"Nay, thanne," quod she, "I shrewe us bothe two!**  
                  "Nay, then," she said, "I curse both of us two!  
1063       **For thogh that I be foul, and oold, and poore**  
                  For though I am ugly, and old, and poor  
1064       **I nolde for al the metal, ne for oore**  
                  I would not for all the metal, nor for ore  
1065       **That under erthe is grave or lith above,**  
                  That under earth is buried or lies above,  
1066       **But if thy wyf I were, and eek thy love."**  
                  Have anything except that I were thy wife, and also thy love."

1067       **"My love?" quod he, "nay, my dampnacioun!**  
                  "My love?" he said, "nay, my damnation!  
1068       **Allas, that any of my nacioun**  
                  Alas, that any of my family  
1069       **Sholde evere so foule disparaged be!"**  
                  Should ever be so foully degraded!"  
1070       **But al for noght; the ende is this, that he**  
                  But all for naught; the end is this, that he  
1071       **Constreyned was; he nedes moste hire wedde,**  
                  Constrained was; he must by necessity wed her,  
1072       **And taketh his olde wyf, and gooth to bedde.**  
                  And takes his old wife, and goes to bed.

1073       **Now wolden som men seye, paraventure,**  
                  Now would some men say, perhaps,  
1074       **That for my necligence I do no cure**  
                  That because of my negligence I make no effort  
1075       **To tellen yow the joye and al th' array**  
                  To tell you the joy and all the rich display  
1076       **That at the feeste was that ilke day.**  
                  That was at the (wedding) feast that same day.  
1077       **To which thyng shortly answeren I shal:**  
                  To which thing shortly I shall answer:  
1078       **I seye ther nas no joye ne feeste at al;**  
                  I say there was no joy nor feast at all;  
1079       **Ther nas but hevynesse and muche sorwe.**  
                  There was nothing but heaviness and much sorrow.  
1080       **For prively he wedded hire on morwe,**  
                  For he wedded her in private in the morning,  
1081       **And al day after hidde hym as an owle,**  
                  And all day after hid himself like an owl,  
1082       **So wo was hym, his wyf looked so foule.**  
                  So woeful was he, his wife looked so ugly.

1083       **Greet was the wo the knyght hadde in his thoght,**  
                  Great was the woe the knight had in his thought,  
1084       **Whan he was with his wyf abedde ybroght;**  
                  When he was brought to bed with his wife;  
1085       **He walweth and he turneth to and fro.**  
                  He wallows and he turns to and fro.  
1086       **His olde wyf lay smylynge everemo,**  
                  His old wife lay smiling evermore,  
1087       **And seyde, "O deere housbonde, benedicitee!**  
                  And said, "O dear husband, bless me!  
1088       **Fareth every knyght thus with his wyf as ye?**  
                  Does every knight behave thus with his wife as you do?  
1089       **Is this the lawe of kyng Arthures hous?**  
                  Is this the law of king Arthur's house?  
1090       **Is every knyght of his so dangerous?**  
                  Is every knight of his so aloof?  
1091       **I am youre owene love and youre wyf;**  
                  I am your own love and your wife;  
1092       **I am she which that saved hath youre lyf,**  
                  I am she who has saved your life,  
1093       **And, certes, yet ne dide I yow nevere unright;**  
                  And, certainly, I did you never wrong yet;  
1094       **Why fare ye thus with me this firste nyght?**  
                  Why behave you thus with me this first night?  
1095       **Ye faren lyk a man had lost his wit.**  
                  You act like a man who had lost his wit.  
1096       **What is my gilt? For Goddes love, tel it,**  
                  What is my offense? For God's love, tell it,  
1097       **And it shal been amended, if I may."**  
                  And it shall be amended, if I can."

1098       **"Amended?" quod this knyght, "Allas, nay, nay!**  
                  "Amended?" said this knight, "Alas, nay, nay!  
1099       **It wol nat been amended nevere mo.**  
                  It will not be amended ever more.  
1100       **Thou art so loothly, and so oold also,**  
                  Thou art so loathsome, and so old also,  
1101       **And therto comen of so lough a kynde,**  
                  And moreover descended from such low born lineage,  
1102       **That litel wonder is thogh I walwe and wynde.**  
                  That little wonder is though I toss and twist about.  
1103       **So wolde God myn herte wolde breste!"**  
                  So would God my heart would burst!"

1104       **"Is this," quod she, "the cause of youre unreste?"**  
                  "Is this," she said, "the cause of your distress?"

1105       **"Ye, certeinly," quod he, "no wonder is."**  
                  "Yes, certainly," he said, "it is no wonder."

1106       **"Now, sire," quod she, "I koude amende al this,**  
                  "Now, sir," she said, "I could amend all this,  
1107       **If that me liste, er it were dayes thre,**  
                  If I pleased, before three days were past,  
1108       **So wel ye myghte bere yow unto me.**  
                  Providing that you might behave well towards me.

1109       **"But, for ye speken of swich gentillesse**  
                  "But, since you speak of such nobility  
1110       **As is descended out of old richesse,**  
                  As is descended out of old riches,  
1111       **That therfore sholden ye be gentil men,**  
                  That therefore you should be noble men,  
1112       **Swich arrogance is nat worth an hen.**  
                  Such arrogance is not worth a hen.  
1113       **Looke who that is moost vertuous alway,**  
                  Look who is most virtuous always,  
1114       **Pryvee and apert, and moost entendeth ay**  
                  In private and public, and most intends ever  
1115       **To do the gentil dedes that he kan;**  
                  To do the noble deeds that he can;  
1116       **Taak hym for the grettest gentil man.**  
                  Take him for the greatest noble man.  
1117       **Crist wole we clayme of hym oure gentillesse,**  
                  Christ wants us to claim our nobility from him,  
1118       **Nat of oure eldres for hire old richesse.**  
                  Not from our ancestors for their old riches.  
1119       **For thogh they yeve us al hir heritage,**  
                  For though they give us all their heritage,  
1120       **For which we clayme to been of heigh parage,**  
                  For which we claim to be of noble lineage,  
1121       **Yet may they nat biquethe for no thyng**  
                  Yet they can not bequeath by any means  
1122       **To noon of us hir vertuous lyvyng,**  
                  To any of us their virtuous living,  
1123       **That made hem gentil men ycalled be,**  
                  That made them be called noble men,  
1124       **And bad us folwen hem in swich degree.**  
                  And commanded us to follow them in such matters.

1125       **"Wel kan the wise poete of Florence,**  
                  "Well can the wise poet of Florence,  
1126       **That highte Dant, speken in this sentence.**  
                  Who is called Dante, speak on this matter.  
1127       **Lo, in swich maner rym is Dantes tale:**  
                  Lo, in such sort of rime is Dante's speech:  
1128       **`Ful selde up riseth by his branches smale**  
                  `Very seldom grows up from its small branches  
1129       **Prowesse of man, for God, of his goodnesse,**  
                  Nobility of man, for God, of his goodness,  
1130       **Wole that of hym we clayme oure gentillesse';**  
                  Wants us to claim our nobility from him';  
1131       **For of oure eldres may we no thyng clayme**  
                  For from our ancestors we can claim no thing   
1132       **But temporel thyng, that man may hurte and mayme.**  
                  Except temporal things, that may hurt and injure a man.

1133       **"Eek every wight woot this as wel as I,**  
                  "Also every person knows this as well as I,  
1134       **If gentillesse were planted natureelly**  
                  If nobility were planted naturally  
1135       **Unto a certeyn lynage doun the lyne,**  
                  Unto a certain lineage down the line,  
1136       **Pryvee and apert thanne wolde they nevere fyne**  
                  Then in private and in public they would never cease  
1137       **To doon of gentillesse the faire office;**  
                  To do the just duties of nobility;  
1138       **They myghte do no vileynye or vice.**  
                  They could do no dishonor or vice.

1139       **"Taak fyr and ber it in the derkeste hous**  
                  "Take fire and bear it in the darkest house  
1140       **Bitwix this and the mount of Kaukasous,**  
                  Between this and the mount of Caucasus,  
1141       **And lat men shette the dores and go thenne;**  
                  And let men shut the doors and go away;  
1142       **Yet wole the fyr as faire lye and brenne**  
                  Yet will the fire as brightly blaze and burn   
1143       **As twenty thousand men myghte it biholde;**  
                  As if twenty thousand men might it behold;  
1144       **His office natureel ay wol it holde,**  
                  Its natural function it will always hold,  
1145       **Up peril of my lyf, til that it dye.**  
                  On peril of my life (I say), until it dies.

1146       **"Heere may ye se wel how that genterye**  
                  "Here may you see well that nobility  
1147       **Is nat annexed to possessioun,**  
                  Is not joined with possession,  
1148       **Sith folk ne doon hir operacioun**  
                  Since folk not do behave as they should  
1149       **Alwey, as dooth the fyr, lo, in his kynde.**  
                  Always, as does the fire, lo, in its nature.  
1150       **For, God it woot, men may wel often fynde**  
                  For, God knows it, men may well often find  
1151       **A lordes sone do shame and vileynye;**  
                  A lord's son doing shame and dishonor;  
1152       **And he that wole han pris of his gentrye,**  
                  And he who will have praise for his noble birth,  
1153       **For he was boren of a gentil hous**  
                  Because he was born of a noble house  
1154       **And hadde his eldres noble and vertuous,**  
                  And had his noble and virtuous ancestors,  
1155       **And nel hymselven do no gentil dedis**  
                  And will not himself do any noble deeds  
1156       **Ne folwen his gentil auncestre that deed is,**  
                  Nor follow his noble ancestry that is dead,  
1157       **He nys nat gentil, be he duc or erl,**  
                  He is not noble, be he duke or earl,  
1158       **For vileyns synful dedes make a cherl.**  
                  For churlish sinful deeds make a churl.  
1159       **For gentillesse nys but renomee**  
                  For nobility is nothing but renown  
1160       **Of thyne auncestres, for hire heigh bountee,**  
                  Of thy ancestors, for their great goodness,  
1161       **Which is a strange thyng to thy persone.**  
                  Which is a thing not naturally part of thy person.  
1162       **Thy gentillesse cometh fro God allone.**  
                  Thy nobility comes from God alone.  
1163       **Thanne comth oure verray gentillesse of grace;**  
                  Then our true nobility comes from grace ;  
1164       **It was no thyng biquethe us with oure place.**  
                  It was not at all bequeathed to us with our social rank.

1165       **"Thenketh hou noble, as seith Valerius,**  
                  "Think how noble, as says Valerius,  
1166       **Was thilke Tullius Hostillius,**  
                  Was that same Tullius Hostillius,  
1167       **That out of poverte roos to heigh noblesse.**  
                  That out of poverty rose to high nobility.  
1168       **Reedeth Senek, and redeth eek Boece;**  
                  Read Seneca, and read also Boethius;  
1169       **Ther shul ye seen expres that it no drede is**  
                  There shall you see clearly that it is no doubt  
1170       **That he is gentil that dooth gentil dedis.**  
                  That he is noble who does noble deeds.  
1171       **And therfore, leeve housbonde, I thus conclude:**  
                  And therefore, dear husband, I thus conclude:  
1172       **Al were it that myne auncestres were rude,**  
                  Although it is so that my ancestors were rude,  
1173       **Yet may the hye God, and so hope I,**  
                  Yet may the high God, and so hope I,  
1174       **Grante me grace to lyven vertuously.**  
                  Grant me grace to live virtuously.  
1175       **Thanne am I gentil, whan that I bigynne**  
                  Then am I noble, when I begin  
1176       **To lyven vertuously and weyve synne.**  
                  To live virtuously and abandon sin.

1177       **"And ther as ye of poverte me repreeve,**  
                  "And whereas you reprove me for poverty,  
1178       **The hye God, on whom that we bileeve,**  
                  The high God, on whom we believe,  
1179       **In wilful poverte chees to lyve his lyf.**  
                  In voluntary poverty chose to live his life.  
1180       **And certes every man, mayden, or wyf**  
                  And certainly every man, maiden, or woman  
1181       **May understonde that Jhesus, hevene kyng,**  
                  Can understand that Jesus, heaven's king,  
1182       **Ne wolde nat chese a vicious lyvyng.**  
                  Would not choose a vicious form of living.  
1183       **Glad poverte is an honest thyng, certeyn;**  
                  Glad poverty is an honest thing, certain;  
1184       **This wole Senec and othere clerkes seyn.**  
                  This will Seneca and other clerks say.  
1185       **Whoso that halt hym payd of his poverte,**  
                  Whoever considers himself satisfied with his poverty,  
1186       **I holde hym riche, al hadde he nat a sherte.**  
                  I consider him rich, although he had not a shirt.  
1187       **He that coveiteth is a povre wight,**  
                  He who covets is a poor person,  
1188       **For he wolde han that is nat in his myght;**  
                  For he would have that which is not in his power;  
1189       **But he that noght hath, ne coveiteth have,**  
                  But he who has nothing, nor covets to have anything,  
1190       **Is riche, although ye holde hym but a knave.**  
                  Is rich, although you consider him but a knave.  
1191       **Verray poverte, it syngeth proprely;**  
                  True poverty, it rightly sings;   
1192       **Juvenal seith of poverte myrily:**  
                  Juvenal says of poverty merrily:  
1193       **`The povre man, whan he goth by the weye,**  
                  `The poor man, when he goes along the roadway,  
1194       **Bifore the theves he may synge and pleye.'**  
                  Before the thieves he may sing and play.'  
1195       **Poverte is hateful good and, as I gesse,**  
                  Poverty is a hateful good and, as I guess,  
1196       **A ful greet bryngere out of bisynesse;**  
                  A very great remover of cares;  
1197       **A greet amendere eek of sapience**  
                  A great amender also of wisdom  
1198       **To hym that taketh it in pacience.**  
                  To him that takes it in patience.  
1199       **Poverte is this, although it seme alenge:**  
                  Poverty is this, although it may seem miserable:  
1200       **Possessioun that no wight wol chalenge.**  
                  A possession that no one will challenge.  
1201       **Poverte ful ofte, whan a man is lowe,**  
                  Poverty very often, when a man is low,  
1202       **Maketh his God and eek hymself to knowe.**  
                  Makes him know his God and also himself.  
1203       **Poverte a spectacle is, as thynketh me,**  
                  Poverty is an eye glass, as it seems to me,  
1204       **Thurgh which he may his verray freendes see.**  
                  Through which one may see his true friends.  
1205       **And therfore, sire, syn that I noght yow greve,**  
                  And therefore, sir, since I do not injure you,  
1206       **Of my poverte namoore ye me repreve.**  
                  You (should) no longer reprove me for my poverty.

1207       **"Now, sire, of elde ye repreve me;**  
                  "Now, sir, of old age you reprove me;  
1208       **And certes, sire, thogh noon auctoritee**  
                  And certainly, sir, though no authority  
1209       **Were in no book, ye gentils of honour**  
                  Were in any book, you gentlefolk of honor  
1210       **Seyn that men sholde an oold wight doon favour**  
                  Say that men should be courteous to an old person  
1211       **And clepe hym fader, for youre gentillesse;**  
                  And call him father, because of your nobility;  
1212       **And auctours shal I fynden, as I gesse.**  
                  And authors shall I find, as I guess.

1213       **"Now ther ye seye that I am foul and old,**  
                  "Now where you say that I am ugly and old,  
1214       **Than drede you noght to been a cokewold;**  
                  Than do not fear to be a cuckold;  
1215       **For filthe and eelde, also moot I thee,**  
                  For filth and old age, as I may prosper,  
1216       **Been grete wardeyns upon chastitee.**  
                  Are great guardians of chastity.  
1217       **But nathelees, syn I knowe youre delit,**  
                  But nonetheless, since I know your delight,  
1218       **I shal fulfille youre worldly appetit.**  
                  I shall fulfill your worldly appetite.

1219       **"Chese now," quod she, "oon of thise thynges tweye:**  
                  "Choose now," she said, "one of these two things:  
1220       **To han me foul and old til that I deye,**  
                  To have me ugly and old until I die,  
1221       **And be to yow a trewe, humble wyf,**  
                  And be to you a true, humble wife,  
1222       **And nevere yow displese in al my lyf,**  
                  And never displease you in all my life,  
1223       **Or elles ye wol han me yong and fair,**  
                  Or else you will have me young and fair,  
1224       **And take youre aventure of the repair**  
                  And take your chances of the crowd  
1225       **That shal be to youre hous by cause of me,**  
                  That shall be at your house because of me,  
1226       **Or in som oother place, may wel be.**  
                  Or in some other place, as it may well be.  
1227       **Now chese yourselven, wheither that yow liketh."**  
                  Now choose yourself, whichever you please."

1228       **This knyght avyseth hym and sore siketh,**  
                  This knight deliberates and painfully sighs,  
1229       **But atte laste he seyde in this manere:**  
                  But at the last he said in this manner:  
1230       **"My lady and my love, and wyf so deere,**  
                  "My lady and my love, and wife so dear,  
1231       **I put me in youre wise governance;**  
                  I put me in your wise governance;  
1232       **Cheseth youreself which may be moost plesance**  
                  Choose yourself which may be most pleasure  
1233       **And moost honour to yow and me also.**  
                  And most honor to you and me also.  
1234       **I do no fors the wheither of the two,**  
                  I do not care which of the two,  
1235       **For as yow liketh, it suffiseth me."**  
                  For as it pleases you, is enough for me."

1236       **"Thanne have I gete of yow maistrie," quod she,**  
                  "Then have I gotten mastery of you," she said,  
1237       **"Syn I may chese and governe as me lest?"**  
                  "Since I may choose and govern as I please?"

1238       **"Ye, certes, wyf," quod he, "I holde it best."**  
                  "Yes, certainly, wife," he said, "I consider it best."

1239       **"Kys me," quod she, "we be no lenger wrothe,**  
                  "Kiss me," she said, "we are no longer angry,  
1240       **For, by my trouthe, I wol be to yow bothe --**  
                  For, by my troth, I will be to you both --  
1241       **This is to seyn, ye, bothe fair and good.**  
                  This is to say, yes, both fair and good.  
1242       **I prey to God that I moote sterven wood,**  
                  I pray to God that I may die insane  
1243       **But I to yow be also good and trewe**  
                  Unless I to you be as good and true  
1244       **As evere was wyf, syn that the world was newe.**  
                  As ever was wife, since the world was new.  
1245       **And but I be to-morn as fair to seene**  
                  And unless I am tomorrow morning as fair to be seen  
1246       **As any lady, emperice, or queene,**  
                  As any lady, empress, or queen,  
1247       **That is bitwixe the est and eke the west,**  
                  That is between the east and also the west,  
1248       **Dooth with my lyf and deth right as yow lest.**  
                  Do with my life and death right as you please.  
1249       **Cast up the curtyn, looke how that it is."**  
                  Cast up the curtain, look how it is."

1250       **And whan the knyght saugh verraily al this,**  
                  And when the knight saw truly all this,  
1251       **That she so fair was, and so yong therto,**  
                  That she so was beautiful, and so young moreover,  
1252       **For joye he hente hire in his armes two.**  
                  For joy he clasped her in his two arms.  
1253       **His herte bathed in a bath of blisse.**  
                  His heart bathed in a bath of bliss.  
1254       **A thousand tyme a-rewe he gan hire kisse,**  
                  A thousand time in a row he did her kiss,  
1255       **And she obeyed hym in every thyng**  
                  And she obeyed him in every thing  
1256       **That myghte doon hym plesance or likyng.**  
                  That might do him pleasure or enjoyment.

1257       **And thus they lyve unto hir lyves ende**  
                  And thus they live unto their lives' end  
1258       **In parfit joye; and Jhesu Crist us sende**  
                  In perfect joy; and Jesus Christ us send  
1259       **Housbondes meeke, yonge, and fressh abedde,**  
                  Husbands meek, young, and vigorous in bed,  
1260       **And grace t' overbyde hem that we wedde;**  
                  And grace to outlive them whom we wed;  
1261       **And eek I praye Jhesu shorte hir lyves**  
                  And also I pray Jesus shorten their lives  
1262       **That noght wol be governed by hir wyves;**  
                  That will not be governed by their wives;  
1263       **And olde and angry nygardes of dispence,**  
                  And old and angry misers in spending,  
1264       **God sende hem soone verray pestilence!**  
                  God send them soon the very pestilence!

*Heere endeth the Wyves Tale of Bathe*