

Some this, some that, as liketh him to shift.*	*appoint, distribute
Virginity is great perfection,	
And continence eke with devotion:	
But Christ, that of perfection is the well,*	*fountain
Bade not every wight he should go sell	
All that he had, and give it to the poor,	
And in such wise follow him and his lore:*	*doctrine
He spake to them that would live perfectly, --	
And, lordings, by your leave, that am not I;	
I will bestow the flower of mine age	
In th' acts and in the fruits of marriage.	
Tell me also, to what conclusion*	*end, purpose
Were members made of generation,	
And of so perfect wise a wight* y-wrought?	*being
Trust me right well, they were not made for nought.	
Glose whoso will, and say both up and down,	
That they were made for the purgatioun	
Of urine, and of other thinges smale,	
And eke to know a female from a male:	
And for none other cause? say ye no?	
Experience wot well it is not so.	
So that the clerkes* be not with me wroth,	*scholars
I say this, that they were made for both,	
That is to say, *for office, and for ease*	*for duty and
Of engendrure, there we God not displease.	for pleasure*
Why should men elles in their bookes set,	
That man shall yield unto his wife her debt?	
Now wherewith should he make his payement,	
If he us'd not his silly instrument?	
Then were they made upon a creature	
To purge urine, and eke for engendrure.	
But I say not that every wight is hold,*	*obliged
That hath such harness* as I to you told,	*equipment
To go and use them in engendrure;	
Then should men take of chastity no cure.*	*care
Christ was a maid, and shapen* as a man,	*fashioned
And many a saint, since that this world began,	
Yet ever liv'd in perfect chastity.	
I will not vie* with no virginity.	*contend
Let them with bread of pured* wheat be fed,	*purified

Read in his Almagest, and take it there."
"Dame, I would pray you, if your will it were,"
Saide this Pardoner, "as ye began,
Tell forth your tale, and spare for no man,
And teach us younge men of your practique."
"Gladly," quoth she, "since that it may you like.
But that I pray to all this company,
If that I speak after my fantasy,
To take nought agrief* what I may say; *to heart
For mine intent is only for to play.

Now, Sirs, then will I tell you forth my tale.
As ever may I drinke wine or ale
I shall say sooth; the husbands that I had
Three of them were good, and two were bad
The three were goode men, and rich, and old
Unnethes mighte they the statute hold *they could with difficulty
In which that they were bounden unto me. obey the law*
Yet wot well what I mean of this, pardie.* *by God
As God me help, I laugh when that I think
How piteously at night I made them swink,* *labour
But, *by my fay, I told of it no store.* *by my faith, I held it
They had me giv'n their land and their treasure, of no account*
Me needed not do longer diligence
To win their love, or do them reverence.
They loved me so well, by God above,
That I *tolde no dainty* of their love. *cared nothing for*
A wise woman will busy her ever-in-one* *constantly
To get their love, where that she hath none.
But, since I had them wholly in my hand,
And that they had me given all their land,
Why should I take keep* them for to please, *care
But* it were for my profit, or mine ease? *unless
I set them so a-worke, by my fay,
That many a night they sange, well-away!
The bacon was not fetched for them, I trow,
That some men have in Essex at Dunmow.<9>
I govern'd them so well after my law,
That each of them full blissful was and fawe* *fain
To bringe me gay thinges from the fair.

They were full glad when that I spake them fair,
For, God it wot, I *chid them spiteously.* *rebuked them angrily*
Now hearken how I bare me properly.

Ye wise wives, that can understand,
Thus should ye speak, and *bear them wrong on hand,* *make them
For half so boldely can there no man believe falsely*
Swearen and lien as a woman can.

(I say not this by wives that be wise,
But if it be when they them misadvise.)* *unless* *act unadvisedly
A wise wife, if that she can* her good, *knows
Shall *beare them on hand* the cow is wood, *make them believe*
And take witness of her owen maid
Of their assent: but hearken how I said.

"Sir olde kaynard,<10> is this thine array?
Why is my neigheboure's wife so gay?
She is honour'd *over all where* she go'th, *wheresoever
I sit at home, I have no *thrifty cloth.* *good clothes*

What dost thou at my neigheboure's house?
Is she so fair? art thou so amorous?
What row'n'st* thou with our maid? benedicite, *whisperest
Sir olde lechour, let thy japes* be. *tricks

And if I have a gossip, or a friend
(Withoute guilt), thou chidest as a fiend,
If that I walk or play unto his house.
Thou comest home as drunken as a mouse,
And preachest on thy bench, with evil prefe:* *proof

Thou say'st to me, it is a great mischief
To wed a poore woman, for costage:* *expense
And if that she be rich, of high parage;* *birth <11>
Then say'st thou, that it is a tormentry
To suffer her pride and melancholy.

And if that she be fair, thou very knave,
Thou say'st that every holour* will her have; *whoremonger
She may no while in chastity abide,
That is assailed upon every side.

Thou say'st some folk desire us for richness,
Some for our shape, and some for our fairness,
And some, for she can either sing or dance,
And some for gentiless and dalliance,

Some for her handes and her armes smale:
 Thus goes all to the devil, by thy tale;
 Thou say'st, men may not keep a castle wall
 That may be so assailed *over all.* *everywhere*
 And if that she be foul, thou say'st that she
 Coveteth every man that she may see;
 For as a spaniel she will on him leap,
 Till she may finde some man her to cheap;* *buy
 And none so grey goose goes there in the lake,
 (So say'st thou) that will be without a make.* *mate
 And say'st, it is a hard thing for to weld *wield, govern
 A thing that no man will, *his thanks, held.* *hold with his goodwill*
 Thus say'st thou, lorel,* when thou go'st to bed, *good-for-nothing
 And that no wise man needeth for to wed,
 Nor no man that intendeth unto heaven.
 With wilde thunder dint* and fiery leven** *stroke **lightning
 Mote* thy wicked necke be to-broke. *may
 Thou say'st, that dropping houses, and eke smoke,
 And chiding wives, make men to flee
 Out of their owne house; ah! ben'dicite,
 What aileth such an old man for to chide?
 Thou say'st, we wives will our vices hide,
 Till we be fast,* and then we will them shew. *wedded
 Well may that be a proverb of a shrew.* *ill-tempered wretch
 Thou say'st, that oxen, asses, horses, hounds,
 They be *assayed at diverse stounds,* *tested at various
 Basons and lavers, ere that men them buy, seasons
 Spoons, stooles, and all such husbandry,
 And so be pots, and clothes, and array,* *raiment
 But folk of wives make none assay,
 Till they be wedded, -- olde dotard shrew! --
 And then, say'st thou, we will our vices shew.
 Thou say'st also, that it displeaseth me,
 But if * that thou wilt praise my beauty, *unless
 And but* thou pore alway upon my face, *unless
 And call me faire dame in every place;
 And but* thou make a feast on thilke** day *unless **that
 That I was born, and make me fresh and gay;
 And but thou do to my norice* honour, *nurse <12>
 And to my chamberere* within my bow'r, *chamber-maid

And yet in bacon* had I never delight: *i.e. of Dunmow <9>
 That made me that I ever would them chide.
 For, though the Pope had sitten them beside,
 I would not spare them at their owen board,
 For, by my troth, I quit* them word for word *repaid
 As help me very God omnipotent,
 Though I right now should make my testament
 I owe them not a word, that is not quit* *repaid
 I brought it so aboute by my wit,
 That they must give it up, as for the best
 Or elles had we never been in rest.
 For, though he looked as a wood* lion, *furious
 Yet should he fail of his conclusion.
 Then would I say, "Now, goode lefe* tak keep** *dear **heed
 How meekly looketh Wilken oure sheep!
 Come near, my spouse, and let me ba* thy cheek *kiss <18>
 Ye shoulde be all patient and meek,
 And have a *sweet y-spiced* conscience, *tender, nice*
 Since ye so preach of Jobe's patience.
 Suffer alway, since ye so well can preach,
 And but* ye do, certain we shall you teach* *unless
 That it is fair to have a wife in peace.
 One of us two must bowe* doubteless: *give way
 And since a man is more reasonable
 Than woman is, ye must be suff'able.
 What aileth you to grudge* thus and groan? *complain
 Is it for ye would have my [love] <14> alone?
 Why, take it all: lo, have it every deal,* *whit
 Peter! <19> shrew* you but ye love it well *curse
 For if I woulde sell my *belle chose*, *beautiful thing*
 I coulde walk as fresh as is a rose,
 But I will keep it for your owen tooth.
 Ye be to blame, by God, I say you sooth."
 Such manner wordes hadde we on hand.

Now will I speaken of my fourth husband.
 My fourthe husband was a revellour;
 This is to say, he had a paramour,
 And I was young and full of ragerie,* *wantonness
 Stubborn and strong, and jolly as a pie.* *magpie

Then could I dance to a harpe smale,
 And sing, y-wis,* as any nightingale, *certainly
 When I had drunk a draught of sweete wine.
 Metellius, the foule churl, the swine,
 That with a staff bereft his wife of life
 For she drank wine, though I had been his wife,
 Never should he have daunted me from drink:
 And, after wine, of Venus most I think.
 For all so sure as cold engenders hail,
 A liquorish mouth must have a liquorish tail.
 In woman vinolent* is no defence,** *full of wine *resistance
 This knowe lechours by experience.
 But, lord Christ, when that it rememb'reth me
 Upon my youth, and on my jollity,
 It tickleth me about mine hearte-root;
 Unto this day it doth mine hearte boot,* *good
 That I have had my world as in my time.
 But age, alas! that all will envenime,* *poison, embitter
 Hath me bereft my beauty and my pith:* *vigour
 Let go; farewell; the devil go therewith.
 The flour is gon, there is no more to tell,
 The bran, as I best may, now must I sell.
 But yet to be right merry will I fand.* *try
 Now forth to tell you of my fourth husband,
 I say, I in my heart had great despite,
 That he of any other had delight;
 But he was quit,* by God and by Saint Joce:<21> *requited, paid back
 I made for him of the same wood a cross;
 Not of my body in no foul mannere,
 But certainly I made folk such cheer,
 That in his owen grease I made him fry
 For anger, and for very jealousy.
 By God, in earth I was his purgatory,
 For which I hope his soul may be in glory.
 For, God it wot, he sat full oft and sung,
 When that his shoe full bitterly him wrung.* *pinched
 There was no wight, save God and he, that wist
 In many wise how sore I did him twist.<20>
 He died when I came from Jerusalem,
 And lies in grave under the *roode beam:* *cross*

Although his tomb is not so curious
As was the sepulchre of Darius,
Which that Apelles wrought so subtly.
It is but waste to bury them preciously.
Let him fare well, God give his soule rest,
He is now in his grave and in his chest.

Now of my fifthe husband will I tell:
God let his soul never come into hell.
And yet was he to me the moste shrew;*
That feel I on my ribbes all *by rew,*
And ever shall, until mine ending day.
But in our bed he was so fresh and gay,
And therewithal so well he could me glose,*
When that he woulde have my belle chose,
Though he had beaten me on every bone,
Yet could he win again my love anon.

*cruel, ill-tempered
*in a row

*flatter

I trow, I lov'd him better, for that he
Was of his love so dangerous* to me.
We women have, if that I shall not lie,
In this matter a quainte fantasy.

*sparing, difficult

Whatever thing we may not lightly have,
Thereafter will we cry all day and crave.
Forbid us thing, and that desire we;
Press on us fast, and thenne will we flee.
With danger* utter we all our chaffare;**
Great press at market maketh deare ware,
And too great cheap is held at little price;
This knoweth every woman that is wise.

*difficulty **merchandise

My fifthe husband, God his soule bless,
Which that I took for love and no richness,
He some time was *a clerk of Oxenford,*
And had left school, and went at home to board
With my gossip,* dwelling in oure town:
God have her soul, her name was Alisoun.

a scholar of Oxford

*godmother

She knew my heart, and all my privity,
Bet than our parish priest, so may I the.*
To her betrayed I my counsel all;

*thrive

For had my husband pissed on a wall,
Or done a thing that should have cost his life,

Is worthy to be hanged on the gallows."
 But all for nought; I *sette not a haw* *cared nothing for*
 Of his proverbs, nor of his olde saw;
 Nor would I not of him corrected be.
 I hate them that my vices telle me,
 And so do more of us (God wot) than I.
 This made him wood* with me all utterly; *furious
 I woulde not forbear* him in no case. *endure
 Now will I say you sooth, by Saint Thomas,
 Why that I rent out of his book a leaf,
 For which he smote me, so that I was deaf.
 He had a book, that gladly night and day
 For his disport he would it read alway;
 He call'd it Valerie,<28> and Theophrast,
 And with that book he laugh'd alway full fast.
 And eke there was a clerk sometime at Rome,
 A cardinal, that highte Saint Jerome,
 That made a book against Jovinian,
 Which book was there; and eke Tertullian,
 Chrysippus, Trotula, and Heloise,
 That was an abbess not far from Paris;
 And eke the Parables* of Solomon, *Proverbs
 Ovide's Art, <29> and bourdes* many one; *jests
 And alle these were bound in one volume.
 And every night and day was his custume
 (When he had leisure and vacation
 From other worldly occupation)
 To readen in this book of wicked wives.
 He knew of them more legends and more lives
 Than be of goodde wives in the Bible.
 For, trust me well, it is an impossible
 That any clerk will speake good of wives,
 (*But if* it be of holy saintes' lives) *unless
 Nor of none other woman never the mo'.
 Who painted the lion, tell it me, who?
 By God, if women haddde written stories,
 As clerkes have within their oratories,
 They would have writ of men more wickedness
 Than all the mark of Adam <30> may redress
 The children of Mercury and of Venus,<31>

Be in their working full contrarious.
Mercury loveth wisdom and science,
And Venus loveth riot and dispence.*
And for their diverse disposition,
Each falls in other's exaltation.
As thus, God wot, Mercury is desolate
In Pisces, where Venus is exaltate,
And Venus falls where Mercury is raised. <32>
Therefore no woman by no clerk is praised.
The clerk, when he is old, and may not do
Of Venus' works not worth his olde shoe,
Then sits he down, and writes in his dotage,
That women cannot keep their marriage.
But now to purpose, why I tolde thee
That I was beaten for a book, pardie.

*extravagance

Upon a night Jenkin, that was our sire,*
Read on his book, as he sat by the fire,
Of Eva first, that for her wickedness
Was all mankind brought into wretchedness,
For which that Jesus Christ himself was slain,
That bought us with his hearte-blood again.
Lo here express of women may ye find
That woman was the loss of all mankind.
Then read he me how Samson lost his hairs
Sleeping, his leman cut them with her shears,
Through whiche treason lost he both his eyen.
Then read he me, if that I shall not lien,
Of Hercules, and of his Dejanire,
That caused him to set himself on fire.
Nothing forgot he of the care and woe
That Socrates had with his wives two;
How Xantippe cast piss upon his head.
This silly man sat still, as he were dead,
He wip'd his head, and no more durst he sayn,
But, "Ere the thunder stint* there cometh rain."
Of Phasiphae, that was queen of Crete,
For shrewedness* he thought the tale sweet.
Fy, speak no more, it is a grisly thing,
Of her horrible lust and her liking.

*goodman

*ceases

*wickedness

Of Clytemnestra, for her lechery
 That falsely made her husband for to die,
 He read it with full good devotion.
 He told me eke, for what occasion
 Amphiorax at Thebes lost his life:
 My husband had a legend of his wife
 Eryphile, that for an ouche* of gold *clasp, collar
 Had privily unto the Greekes told,
 Where that her husband hid him in a place,
 For which he had at Thebes sorry grace.
 Of Luna told he me, and of Lucie;
 They bothe made their husbands for to die,
 That one for love, that other was for hate.
 Luna her husband on an ev'ning late
 Empoison'd had, for that she was his foe:
 Lucia liquorish lov'd her husband so,
 That, for he should always upon her think,
 She gave him such a manner* love-drink, *sort of
 That he was dead before it were the morrow:
 And thus algates* husbands hadde sorrow. *always
 Then told he me how one Latumeus
 Complained to his fellow Arius
 That in his garden growed such a tree,
 On which he said how that his wives three
 Hanged themselves for heart dispiteous.
 "O leve* brother," quoth this Arius, *dear
 "Give me a plant of thilke* blessed tree, *that
 And in my garden planted shall it be."
 Of later date of wives hath he read,
 That some have slain their husbands in their bed,
 And let their *lechour dight them* all the night, *lover ride them*
 While that the corpse lay on the floor upright:
 And some have driven nails into their brain,
 While that they slept, and thus they have them slain:
 Some have them given poison in their drink:
 He spake more harm than hearte may bethink.
 And therewithal he knew of more proverbs,
 Than in this world there groweth grass or herbs.
 "Better (quoth he) thine habitation
 Be with a lion, or a foul dragon,

Than with a woman using for to chide.
 Better (quoth he) high in the roof abide,
 Than with an angry woman in the house,
 They be so wicked and contrarious:
 They hate that their husbands loven aye."
 He said, "A woman cast her shame away
 When she cast off her smock;" and farthermo',
 "A fair woman, but* she be chaste also, *except
 Is like a gold ring in a sowe's nose.
 Who coulde ween,* or who coulde suppose *think
 The woe that in mine heart was, and the pine?* *pain
 And when I saw that he would never fine* *finish
 To readen on this cursed book all night,
 All suddenly three leaves have I plight* *plucked
 Out of his book, right as he read, and eke
 I with my fist so took him on the cheek,
 That in our fire he backward fell adown.
 And he up start, as doth a wood* lion, *ferocious
 And with his fist he smote me on the head,
 That on the floor I lay as I were dead.
 And when he saw how still that there I lay,
 He was aghast, and would have fled away,
 Till at the last out of my swoon I braid,* *woke
 "Oh, hast thou slain me, thou false thief?" I said
 "And for my land thus hast thou murder'd me?
 Ere I be dead, yet will I kisse thee."
 And near he came, and kneeled fair adown,
 And saide", "Deare sister Alisoun,
 As help me God, I shall thee never smite:
 That I have done it is thyself to wite,* *blame
 Forgive it me, and that I thee beseek."* *beseech
 And yet eftsoons* I hit him on the cheek, *immediately; again
 And saidde, "Thief, thus much am I awreak.* *avenged
 Now will I die, I may no longer speak."

But at the last, with mucche care and woe
 We fell accorded* by ourselves two: *agreed
 He gave me all the bridle in mine hand
 To have the governance of house and land,
 And of his tongue, and of his hand also.

I made him burn his book anon right tho.* *then
 And when that I had gotten unto me
 By mast'ry all the sovereignty,
 And that he said, "Mine owen true wife,
 Do *as thee list,* the term of all thy life, *as pleases thee*
 Keep thine honour, and eke keep mine estate;
 After that day we never had debate.
 God help me so, I was to him as kind
 As any wife from Denmark unto Ind,
 And also true, and so was he to me:
 I pray to God that sits in majesty
 So bless his soule, for his mercy dear.
 Now will I say my tale, if ye will hear. --

The Friar laugh'd when he had heard all this:
 "Now, Dame," quoth he, "so have I joy and bliss,
 This is a long preamble of a tale."
 And when the Sompnour heard the Friar gale,* *speak
 "Lo," quoth this Sompnour, "Godde's armes two,
 A friar will intermete* him evermo': *interpose <33>
 Lo, goode men, a fly and eke a frere
 Will fall in ev'ry dish and eke mattere.
 What speak'st thou of perambulation?*" *preamble
 What? amble or trot; or peace, or go sit down:
 Thou lettest* our disport in this mattere." *hinderesst
 "Yea, wilt thou so, Sir Sompnour?" quoth the Frere;
 "Now by my faith I shall, ere that I go,
 Tell of a Sompnour such a tale or two,
 That all the folk shall laughen in this place."
 "Now do, else, Friar, I beshrew* thy face," *curse
 Quoth this Sompnour; "and I beshrewe me,
 But if* I telle tales two or three *unless
 Of friars, ere I come to Sittingbourne,
 That I shall make thine hearte for to mourn:
 For well I wot thy patience is gone."
 Our Hoste cried, "Peace, and that anon;"
 And saide, "Let the woman tell her tale.
 Ye fare* as folk that drunken be of ale. *behave
 Do, Dame, tell forth your tale, and that is best."
 "All ready, sir," quoth she, "right as you lest,* *please

If I have licence of this worthy Frere."

"Yes, Dame," quoth he, "tell forth, and I will hear."

Notes to the Prologue to the Wife of Bath's Tale

1. Among the evidences that Chaucer's great work was left incomplete, is the absence of any link of connexion between the Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale, and what goes before. This deficiency has in some editions caused the Squire's and the Merchant's Tales to be interposed between those of the Man of Law and the Wife of Bath; but in the Merchant's Tale there is internal proof that it was told after the jolly Dame's. Several manuscripts contain verses designed to serve as a connexion; but they are evidently not Chaucer's, and it is unnecessary to give them here. Of this Prologue, which may fairly be regarded as a distinct autobiographical tale, Tyrwhitt says: "The extraordinary length of it, as well as the vein of pleasantry that runs through it, is very suitable to the character of the speaker. The greatest part must have been of Chaucer's own invention, though one may plainly see that he had been reading the popular invectives against marriage and women in general; such as the 'Roman de la Rose,' 'Valerius ad Rufinum, De non Ducenda Uxore,' ('Valerius to Rufinus, on not being ruled by one's wife') and particularly 'Hieronymus contra Jovinianum.' ('Jerome against Jovinianus') St Jerome, among other things designed to discourage marriage, has inserted in his treatise a long passage from 'Liber Aureolus Theophrasti de Nuptiis.' ('Theophrastus's Golden Book of Marriage')."

2. A great part of the marriage service used to be performed in the church-porch.

3. Jesus and the Samaritan woman: John iv. 13.

4. Dan: Lord; Latin, "dominus." Another reading is "the wise man, King Solomon."

5. Defended: forbade; French, "defendre," to prohibit.

6. Dart: the goal; a spear or dart was set up to mark the point of victory.

7. "But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver, but also of wood and of earth; and some to honour, and some to dishonour." -- 2 Tim. ii 20.

8. Jesus feeding the multitude with barley bread: Mark vi. 41, 42.

9. At Dunmow prevailed the custom of giving, amid much merry making, a flitch of bacon to the married pair who had lived together for a year without quarrel or regret. The same custom prevailed of old in Bretagne.

10. "Cagnard," or "Caignard," a French term of reproach, originally derived from "canis," a dog.

11. Parage: birth, kindred; from Latin, "pario," I beget.

12. Norice: nurse; French, "nourrice."

13. This and the previous quotation from Ptolemy are due to the Dame's own fancy.

14. (Transcriber's note: Some Victorian censorship here. The word given in [brackets] should be "queint" i.e. "cunt".)

15. Women should not adorn themselves: see I Tim. ii. 9.

16. Cherte: affection; from French, "cher," dear.

17. Nicety: folly; French, "niaiserie."

18. Ba: kiss; from French, "baiser."

19. Peter!: by Saint Peter! a common adjuration, like Marie! from the Virgin's name.

20. St. Joce: or Judocus, a saint of Ponthieu, in France.

21. "An allusion," says Mr Wright, "to the story of the Roman sage who, when blamed for divorcing his wife, said that a shoe might appear outwardly to fit well, but no one but the wearer knew where it pinched."

22. Vigilies: festival-eves; see note 33 to the Prologue to the Tales.

23. Bobance: boasting; Ben Jonson's braggart, in "Every Man in his Humour," is named Bobadil.

24. "I hold a mouse's wit not worth a leek,
That hath but one hole for to starte to"
A very old proverb in French, German, and Latin.

25. The lines in brackets are only in some of the manuscripts.

26. Gat-toothed: gap-toothed; goat-toothed; or cat- or separate toothed. See note 41 to the prologue to the Tales.

27. Sempronius Sophus, of whom Valerius Maximus tells in his sixth book.

28. The tract of Walter Mapes against marriage, published under the title of "Epistola Valerii ad Rufinum."

29. "Ars Amoris."

30. All the mark of Adam: all who bear the mark of Adam i.e. all men.

31. The Children of Mercury and Venus: those born under the influence of the respective planets.

32. A planet, according to the old astrologers, was in "exaltation" when in the sign of the Zodiac in which it exerted its strongest influence; the opposite sign, in which it was weakest, was called its "dejection." Venus being strongest in

Pisces, was weakest in Virgo; but in Virgo Mercury was in "exaltation."

33. Intermete: interpose; French, "entremettre."

THE TALE. <1>

In olde dayes of the king Arthour,
Of which that Britons speake great honour,
All was this land full fill'd of faerie;* *fairies
The Elf-queen, with her jolly company,
Danced full oft in many a green mead
This was the old opinion, as I read;
I speak of many hundred years ago;
But now can no man see none elves mo',
For now the great charity and prayeres
Of limitours,* and other holy freres, *begging friars <2>
That search every land and ev'ry stream
As thick as motes in the sunne-beam,
Blessing halls, chambers, kitchenes, and bowers,
Cities and burghes, castles high and towers,
Thorpes* and barnes, shepens** and dairies, *villages <3> **stables
This makes that there be now no faeries:
For *there as* wont to walke was an elf, *where*
There walketh now the limitour himself,
In undermeles* and in morrowings**, *evenings <4> **mornings
And saith his matins and his holy things,
As he goes in his limitatioun.* *begging district
Women may now go safely up and down,
In every bush, and under every tree;
There is none other incubus <5> but he;
And he will do to them no dishonour.

And so befell it, that this king Arthour
Had in his house a lusty bachelor,
That on a day came riding from river: <6>
And happen'd, that, alone as she was born,
He saw a maiden walking him befor,

Some said honour, and some said jolliness,	
Some rich array, and some said lust* a-bed,	*pleasure
And oft time to be widow and be wed.	
Some said, that we are in our heart most eased	
When that we are y-flatter'd and y-praised.	
He *went full nigh the sooth,* I will not lie;	*came very near
A man shall win us best with flattery;	the truth*
And with attendance, and with business	
Be we y-limed,* bothe more and less.	*caught with bird-lime
And some men said that we do love the best	
For to be free, and do *right as us lest,*	*whatever we please*
And that no man reprove us of our vice,	
But say that we are wise, and nothing nice,*	*foolish <7>
For truly there is none among us all,	
If any wight will *claw us on the gall,*	*see note <8>*
That will not kick, for that he saith us sooth:	
Assay,* and he shall find it, that so do'th.	*try
For be we never so vicious within,	
We will be held both wise and clean of sin.	
And some men said, that great delight have we	
For to be held stable and eke secre,*	*discreet
And in one purpose steadfastly to dwell,	
And not bewray* a thing that men us tell.	*give away
But that tale is not worth a rake-stele.*	*rake-handle
Pardie, we women canne nothing hele,*	*hide <9>
Witness on Midas; will ye hear the tale?	
Ovid, amonges other thinges smale*	*small
Saith, Midas had, under his longe hairs,	
Growing upon his head two ass's ears;	
The whiche vice he hid, as best he might,	
Full subtley from every man's sight,	
That, save his wife, there knew of it no mo';	
He lov'd her most, and trusted her also;	
He prayed her, that to no creature	
She woulde tellen of his disfigure.	
She swore him, nay, for all the world to win,	
She would not do that villainy or sin,	
To make her husband have so foul a name:	
She would not tell it for her owen shame.	
But natheless her thoughte that she died,	

That she so longe should a counsel hide;
Her thought it swell'd so sore about her heart
That needes must some word from her astart
And, since she durst not tell it unto man
Down to a marish fast thereby she ran,
Till she came there, her heart was all afire:
And, as a bittern bumbles* in the mire, *makes a humming noise
She laid her mouth unto the water down
"Bewray me not, thou water, with thy soun"
Quoth she, "to thee I tell it, and no mo',
Mine husband hath long ass's eares two!
Now is mine heart all whole; now is it out;
I might no longer keep it, out of doubt."
Here may ye see, though we a time abide,
Yet out it must, we can no counsel hide.
The remnant of the tale, if ye will hear,
Read in Ovid, and there ye may it lear.* *learn

This knight, of whom my tale is specially,
When that he saw he might not come thereby,
That is to say, what women love the most,
Within his breast full sorrowful was his ghost.* *spirit
But home he went, for he might not sojourn,
The day was come, that homeward he must turn.
And in his way it happen'd him to ride,
In all his care,* under a forest side, *trouble, anxiety
Where as he saw upon a dance go
Of ladies four-and-twenty, and yet mo',
Toward this ilke* dance he drew full yern,** *same **eagerly <10>
The hope that he some wisdom there should learn;
But certainly, ere he came fully there,
Y-vanish'd was this dance, he knew not where;
No creature saw he that bare life,
Save on the green he sitting saw a wife,
A fouler wight there may no man devise.* *imagine, tell
Against* this knight this old wife gan to rise, *to meet
And said, "Sir Knight, hereforth* lieth no way. *from here
Tell me what ye are seeking, by your fay.
Paraventure it may the better be:
These olde folk know mucche thing." quoth she.

My leve* mother," quoth this knight, "certain,
 I am but dead, but if* that I can sayn
 What thing it is that women most desire:
 Could ye me wiss,* I would well *quite your hire."* *instruct <11>
 "Plight me thy troth here in mine hand," quoth she, *reward you*
 "The nexte thing that I require of thee
 Thou shalt it do, if it be in thy might,
 And I will tell it thee ere it be night."
 "Have here my trothe," quoth the knight; "I grant."
 "Thenne," quoth she, "I dare me well avaunt,* *boast, affirm
 Thy life is safe, for I will stand thereby,
 Upon my life the queen will say as I:
 Let see, which is the proudest of them all,
 That wears either a kerchief or a caul,
 That dare say nay to that I shall you teach.
 Let us go forth withoute longer speech
 Then *rowned she a pistel* in his ear, *she whispered a secret*
 And bade him to be glad, and have no fear.

When they were come unto the court, this knight
 Said, he had held his day, as he had hight,* *promised
 And ready was his answer, as he said.
 Full many a noble wife, and many a maid,
 And many a widow, for that they be wise, --
 The queen herself sitting as a justice, --
 Assembled be, his answer for to hear,
 And afterward this knight was bid appear.
 To every wight commanded was silence,
 And that the knight should tell in audience,
 What thing that worldly women love the best.
 This knight he stood not still, as doth a beast,
 But to this question anon answer'd
 With manly voice, that all the court it heard,
 "My liege lady, generally," quoth he,
 "Women desire to have the sovereignty
 As well over their husband as their love
 And for to be in mast'ry him above.
 This is your most desire, though ye me kill,
 Do as you list, I am here at your will."
 In all the court there was no wife nor maid

Nor widow, that contraried what he said,
But said, he worthy was to have his life.
And with that word up start that olde wife
Which that the knight saw sitting on the green.

"Mercy," quoth she, "my sovereign lady queen,
Ere that your court departe, do me right.
I taughte this answer unto this knight,
For which he plighted me his trothe there,
The firste thing I would of him requere,
He would it do, if it lay in his might.

Before this court then pray I thee, Sir Knight,"
Quoth she, "that thou me take unto thy wife,
For well thou know'st that I have kept* thy life.
If I say false, say nay, upon thy fay."*

*preserved
*faith

This knight answer'd, "Alas, and well-away!
I know right well that such was my behest.*

*promise

For Godde's love choose a new request
Take all my good, and let my body go."

"Nay, then," quoth she, "I shrew* us bothe two,
For though that I be old, and foul, and poor,
I n'ould* for all the metal nor the ore,
That under earth is grave,* or lies above
But if thy wife I were and eke thy love."

*curse

*would not
*buried

"My love?" quoth he, "nay, my damnation,
Alas! that any of my nation
Should ever so foul disparaged be.
But all for nought; the end is this, that he
Constrained was, that needs he muste wed,
And take this olde wife, and go to bed.

Now woulde some men say paraventure
That for my negligence I do no cure*
To tell you all the joy and all th' array
That at the feast was made that ilke* day.
To which thing shortly answeren I shall:
I say there was no joy nor feast at all,
There was but heaviness and mucche sorrow:
For privily he wed her on the morrow;
And all day after hid him as an owl,

*take no pains

*same

So woe was him, his wife look'd so foul
 Great was the woe the knight had in his thought
 When he was with his wife to bed y-brought;
 He wallow'd, and he turned to and fro.
 This olde wife lay smiling evermo',
 And said, "Dear husband, benedicite,
 Fares every knight thus with his wife as ye?
 Is this the law of king Arthoures house?
 Is every knight of his thus dangerous?*" *fastidious, niggardly
 I am your owen love, and eke your wife
 I am she, which that saved hath your life
 And certes yet did I you ne'er unright.
 Why fare ye thus with me this firste night?
 Ye fare like a man had lost his wit.
 What is my guilt? for God's love tell me it,
 And it shall be amended, if I may."
 "Amended!" quoth this knight; "alas, nay, nay,
 It will not be amended, never mo';
 Thou art so loathly, and so old also,
 And thereto* comest of so low a kind, *in addition
 That little wonder though I wallow and wind;* *writhe, turn about
 So woulde God, mine hearte woulde brest!"* *burst
 "Is this," quoth she, "the cause of your unrest?"
 "Yea, certainly," quoth he; "no wonder is."
 "Now, Sir," quoth she, "I could amend all this,
 If that me list, ere it were dayes three,
 So well ye mighte bear you unto me. *if you could conduct
 But, for ye speaken of such gentleness yourself well
 As is descended out of old richness, towards me*
 That therefore shalle ye be gentlemen;
 Such arrogancy is *not worth a hen.* *worth nothing
 Look who that is most virtuous alway,
 Prive and apert, and most intendeth aye *in private and public*
 To do the gentle deedes that he can;
 And take him for the greatest gentleman.
 Christ will,* we claim of him our gentleness, *wills, requires
 Not of our elders* for their old richness. *ancestors
 For though they gave us all their heritage,
 For which we claim to be of high parage,* *birth, descent
 Yet may they not bequeathe, for no thing,

To none of us, their virtuous living
 That made them gentlemen called to be,
 And bade us follow them in such degree.
 Well can the wise poet of Florence,
 That highte Dante, speak of this sentence:* *sentiment
 Lo, in such manner* rhyme is Dante's tale. *kind of
 'Full seld'* upriseth by his branches smale *seldom
 Prowess of man, for God of his goodness
 Wills that we claim of him our gentleness;' <12>
 For of our elders may we nothing claim
 But temp'ral things that man may hurt and maim.
 Eke every wight knows this as well as I,
 If gentleness were planted naturally
 Unto a certain lineage down the line,
 Prive and apert, then would they never fine* *cease
 To do of gentleness the fair office
 Then might they do no villainy nor vice.
 Take fire, and bear it to the darkest house
 Betwixt this and the mount of Caucasus,
 And let men shut the doores, and go thenne,* *thence
 Yet will the fire as fair and lighte brenne* *burn
 As twenty thousand men might it behold;
 Its office natural aye will it hold, *it will perform its
 On peril of my life, till that it die. natural duty*
 Here may ye see well how that gentry* *gentility, nobility
 Is not annexed to possession,
 Since folk do not their operation
 Alway, as doth the fire, lo, *in its kind* *from its very nature*
 For, God it wot, men may full often find
 A lorde's son do shame and villainy.
 And he that will have price* of his gent'ry, *esteem, honour
 For* he was boren of a gentle house, *because
 And had his elders noble and virtuous,
 And will himselfe do no gentle deedes,
 Nor follow his gentle ancestry, that dead is,
 He is not gentle, be he duke or earl;
 For villain sinful deedes make a churl.
 For gentleness is but the renomee* *renown
 Of thine ancestors, for their high bounte,* *goodness, worth
 Which is a strange thing to thy person:

Povert' full often, when a man is low,
 Makes him his God and eke himself to know
 Povert' a spectacle* is, as thinketh me *a pair of spectacles
 Through which he may his very* friendes see. *true
 And, therefore, Sir, since that I you not grieve,
 Of my povert' no more me reprove.* *reproach
 "Now, Sir, of elde* ye reprove me: *age
 And certes, Sir, though none authority* *text, dictum
 Were in no book, ye gentles of honour
 Say, that men should an olde wight honour,
 And call him father, for your gentleness;
 And authors shall I finden, as I guess.
 Now there ye say that I am foul and old,
 Then dread ye not to be a cokewold.* *cuckold
 For filth, and elde, all so may I the,* *thrive
 Be greate wardens upon chastity.
 But nathless, since I know your delight,
 I shall fulfil your wordly appetite.
 Choose now," quoth she, "one of these thinges tway,
 To have me foul and old till that I dey,* *die
 And be to you a true humble wife,
 And never you displease in all my life:
 Or elles will ye have me young and fair,
 And take your aventure of the repair* *resort
 That shall be to your house because of me, --
 Or in some other place, it may well be?
 Now choose yourselfe whether that you liketh.

This knight adviseth* him and sore he siketh,** *considered **sighed
 But at the last he said in this mannere;
 "My lady and my love, and wife so dear,
 I put me in your wise governance,
 Choose for yourself which may be most pleasance
 And most honour to you and me also;
 I *do no force* the whether of the two: *care not
 For as you liketh, it sufficeth me."
 "Then have I got the mastery," quoth she,
 "Since I may choose and govern as me lest.*" *pleases
 "Yea, certes wife," quoth he, "I hold it best."
 "Kiss me," quoth she, "we are no longer wroth,* *at variance

For by my troth I will be to you both;
 This is to say, yea, bothe fair and good.
 I pray to God that I may *sterve wood,* *die mad*
 But* I to you be all so good and true, *unless
 As ever was wife since the world was new;
 And but* I be to-morrow as fair to seen, *unless
 As any lady, emperess or queen,
 That is betwixt the East and eke the West
 Do with my life and death right as you lest.* *please
 Cast up the curtain, and look how it is."

And when the knight saw verily all this,
 That she so fair was, and so young thereto,
 For joy he hent* her in his armes two: *took
 His hearte bathed in a bath of bliss,
 A thousand times *on row* he gan her kiss: *in succession*
 And she obeyed him in every thing
 That mighte do him pleasance or liking.
 And thus they live unto their lives' end
 In perfect joy; and Jesus Christ us send
 Husbandes meek and young, and fresh in bed,
 And grace to overlive them that we wed.
 And eke I pray Jesus to short their lives,
 That will not be governed by their wives.
 And old and angry niggards of dispence,* *expense
 God send them soon a very pestilence!

Notes to the Wife of Bath's Tale

1. It is not clear whence Chaucer derived this tale. Tyrwhitt thinks it was taken from the story of Florent, in the first book of Gower's "Confessio Amantis;" or perhaps from an older narrative from which Gower himself borrowed. Chaucer has condensed and otherwise improved the fable, especially by laying the scene, not in Sicily, but at the court of our own King Arthur.

2. Limitours: begging friars. See note 18 to the prologue to the

Tales.

3. Thorpes: villages. Compare German, "Dorf,"; Dutch, "Dorp."

4. Undermeles: evening-tides, afternoons; "undern" signifies the evening; and "mele," corresponds to the German "Mal" or "Mahl," time.

5. Incubus: an evil spirit supposed to do violence to women; a nightmare.

6. Where he had been hawking after waterfowl. Froissart says that any one engaged in this sport "alloit en riviere."

7. Nice: foolish; French, "niais."

8. Claw us on the gall: Scratch us on the sore place. Compare, "Let the galled jade wince." Hamlet iii. 2.

9. Hele: hide; from Anglo-Saxon, "helan," to hide, conceal.

10. Yern: eagerly; German, "gern."

11. Wiss: instruct; German, "weisen," to show or counsel.

12. Dante, "Purgatorio", vii. 121.

13. "Cantabit vacuus coram latrone viator" -- "Satires," x. 22.

14. In a fabulous conference between the Emperor Adrian and the philosopher Secundus, reported by Vincent of Beauvais, occurs the passage which Chaucer here paraphrases: -- "Quid est Paupertas? Odibile bonum; sanitas mater; remotio Curarum; sapientiae repertrix; negotium sine damno; possessio absque calumnia; sine sollicitudinae felicitas." (What is Poverty? A hateful good; a mother of health; a putting away of cares; a discoverer of wisdom; business without injury; ownership without calumny; happiness without anxiety)

15. Elenge: strange; from French "eloigner," to remove.