

	In vertu and in holy almes-dede°	<i>alms deeds, charity</i>
	They liven alle, and never asonder wende.°	<i>part asunder</i>
	Til deeth departeth° hem this lyf they lede.°	<i>separates / lead</i>
	And fareth now weel°—my tale is at an ende.	<i>now farewell</i>
1160	Now Jhesu Crist, that of his might° may sende	<i>who through his power</i>
	Joye after wo, governe us in his grace,	
	And kepe° us alle that ben in this place. Amen.	<i>preserve, protect</i>

The Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale

The Prologue

	“Experience, though noon auctoritee ¹	
	Were in this world, is right ynough° for me	<i>certainly enough</i>
	To speke of wo that is in mariage:	
	For, lordinges, sith° I twelf yeer was of age,	<i>since</i>
5	Thonked be God that is eterne on lyve,°	<i>alive eternally</i>
	Housbondes at chirche dore I have had fyve ²	
	(If I so ofte myghte have y-wedded be)	
	And alle were worthy men in hir degree.°	<i>within their station</i>
	But me was told, certeyn,° nat longe agon is,°	<i>truly / not long ago</i>
10	That sith that Crist ne wente nevere but onis°	<i>once</i>
	To wedding in the Cane° of Galilee,	<i>Cana</i>
	That by the same ensample° taughte he me	<i>example</i>
	That I ne sholde wedded be but ones.°	<i>once</i>
	Herkne eek, lo, which a sharp word for the nones ³	
15	Besyde a welle, Jesus, God and man,	
	Spak in repreve° of the Samaritan:	<i>reproof</i>
	‘Thou hast y-had fyve housbondes,’ quod he,	
	‘And that ilke° man that now hath thee	<i>that same</i>
	Is noght thyn housbond’—thus seyde he certeyn.	
20	What that he mente therby, I can nat seyn,°	<i>say</i>
	But that° I axe,° why that the fifthe man	<i>Except / ask</i>
	Was noon housbond to the Samaritan?	
	How manye mighte she have in mariage?	
	Yet herde I nevere tellen in myn age°	<i>in all my days</i>
25	Upon° this nombre diffinicioun.°	<i>Of / definition, explanation</i>
	Men may devyne° and glosen° up and doun,	<i>guess / interpret, comment upon</i>
	But wel I woot expres,° withoute lye,°	<i>know particularly / lie</i>
	God bad us for to wexe° and multiplie:	<i>wax, increase</i>
	That gentil° text can I wel understonde.	<i>noble</i>
30	Eek° wel I woot° he seyde myn housbonde	<i>Also / know</i>
	Sholde lete° fader and moder and take to me;	<i>leave</i>
	But of no nombre mencion made he	

1. The authoritative truths of learned tradition, preserved in writings from the past.

2. Medieval marriages were performed at the church door. Only the nuptial mass was within the church.

3. (And) lo, hear also what a sharp word on the matter (“for the nones” is a tag-ending: “for the occasion,” “to the purpose,” but often nearly meaningless). The incident referred to can be found in John 4:5–42, printed on pp. 415–17.

	Of bigamy or of octogamy. ⁴	
	Why sholde men thanne speke of it vileinye? ^o	<i>rude things, reproach</i>
35	Lo, here the wyse king, daun Salomon; ⁵	
	I trowe ^o he hadde wyves mo than oon.	<i>believe</i>
	As wolde ^o God it leful ^o were unto me	<i>Would to / lawful</i>
	To be refreshed ^o half so ofte as he!	<i>i.e., sexually</i>
	Which yifte ^o of God hadde he for alle his wyvis!	<i>What a gift</i>
40	No man hath swich ^o that in this world alyve is.	<i>such</i>
	God woot ^o this noble king, as to my wit, ^o	<i>knows / understanding</i>
	The firste night had many a mery fit ^o	<i>bout, turn</i>
	With ech of hem, so wel was him on lyve! ⁶	
	Blessed be God that I have wedded fyve,	
44a	Of whiche I have pyked out ^o the beste, ⁷	<i>extracted</i>
	Bothe of here nether purs and of here cheste. ⁸	
	Diverse scoles ^o maken parfyt clerkes, ^o	<i>schools / perfect scholars</i>
	And diverse practyk ^o in many sondry ^o werkes	<i>practice / sundry, varied</i>
	Maketh the werkman parfyt sekirly: ^o	<i>assuredly</i>
44f	Of fyve husbondes scoleiyn ^o am I.	<i>schooling</i>
45	Welcome the sixte, whan that evere he shall ^o	<i>shall (come along)</i>
	For sothe I wol nat kepe me chast in al. ^o	<i>entirely chaste</i>
	Whan myn housbond is fro the world y-gon,	
	Som Cristen man shal wedde me anon; ^o	<i>at once</i>
	For thanne th'Apostle ^o seith that I am free	<i>St. Paul</i>
50	To wedde, a Goddes half, ^o where it lyketh ^o me.	<i>on God's behalf / pleases</i>
	He seith that to be wedded is no sinne:	
	Bet ^o is to be wedded than to brinne. ^o	<i>Better / burn</i>
	What rekketh me ^o thogh folk seye vileinye ^o	<i>do I care / speak ill</i>
	Of shrewed Lameth ^o and his bigamy? ^o	<i>accursed Lamech</i>
55	I woot ^o wel Abraham was an holy man,	<i>know</i>
	And Jacob eek, as ferforth ^o as I can; ^o	<i>far / know</i>
	And ech of hem ^o hadde wyves mo ^o than two,	<i>each of them / more</i>
	And many another holy man also.	
	Wher can ye seye, ^o in any manere age, ^o	<i>say / any age whatever</i>
60	That hye ^o God defended ^o mariage	<i>high / forbade</i>
	By expres word? I pray you, telleth me.	
	Or where comanded he virginitee? ^o	
	I woot as wel as ye, it is no drede, ^o	<i>no doubt about it</i>
	Th'Apostel, ^o whan he speketh of maydenhede,	<i>St. Paul</i>
65	He seyde that precept ^o therof hadde he noon.	<i>i.e., commandment</i>
	Men may conseil ^o a womman to been oon,	<i>advise</i>
	But conseil ^o ing is no comandement:	
	He putte it in oure owene ^o jugement.	<i>own</i>
	For hadde God comanded maydenhede,	
70	Thanne hadde he dampned ^o wedding with the ^o dede.	<i>dammned / in that</i>
	And certes, if ther were no seed y-sowe, ^o	<i>sown</i>

4. Here, marriages in succession.

5. Consider the wise king, lord Solomon. (According to 1 Kings 11:3, he had seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines.)

6. With each of them, so fortunate was his life.

7. Lines 44a–44f are probably a late addition; the best manuscripts exclude them.

8. Both from their lower purse (i.e., testicles) and from their (money-)chest.

- Virginitee, thanne wherof sholde it growe?
 Poul dorste nat comanden, atte leste,⁹
 A thing of which his maister yaf noon heste.^o
- 75 The dart^o is set up for virginitee;
 Cacche who so may: who renneth best lat see.¹
 But this word is nat take of every wight,
 But ther as God list give it of his might.²
- 80 I woot^o wel that th'Apostel was a mayde,^o
 But natheless,^o thogh that he wroot^o and sayde
 He wolde^o that every wight^o were swich^o as he,
 Al nis^o but conseil to virginitee,
 And for to been a wyf, he yaf^o me leve^o
 Of^o indulgence. So nis it no reprove^o
- 85 To wedde me, if that my make dye,
 Withoute excepcioun of bigamy,³
 Al^o were it good no womman for to touche—
 He mente as in his bed or in his couche—
 For peril is bothe fyr and tow t'assemble;⁴
- 90 Ye knowe what this ensample^o may resemble.
 This al and som: he heeld virginitee
 More parfit than wedding in freletee.
 Freletee clepe I, but if that he and she⁵
 Wolde leden^o al hir lyf in chastitee.
- 95 I graunte it wel, I have noon envye
 Thogh maydenhede preferre^o bigamy.
 Hem lyketh^o to be clene, body and goost.^o
 Of myn estaat^o I nil nat^o make no boost:
 For wel ye knowe, a lord in his houshold
- 100 He hath nat every vessel al of gold;
 Somme been of tree,^o and doon hir lord servyse.
 God clepeth^o folk to him in sondry wyse,^o
 And everich hath of God a propre yifte,^o
 Som this, som that, as Him lyketh shifte.^o
- 105 Virginitee is greet perfeccioun,
 And continece eek with devocioun.⁶
 But Crist, that of perfeccioun is welle,^o
 Bad^o nat every wight^o he sholde go selle
 All that he hadde and give it to the pore,^o
- 110 And in swich wyse^o folwe him and his fore.^o
 He spak to hem that wolde live parfitly,
 And lordinges, by youre leve,^o that am nat I.
 I wol bistowe the flour^o of al myn age
 In the actes and in fruit of mariage.
- 115 Telle me also, to what conclusioun^o

*gave no order
 dart (given as prize)*

*know / virgin
 nevertheless / wrote
 wished / person / such
 All (this) is nothing
 gave / leave, permission
 By / reproach*

Although

example

Should wish to lead

*be preferred over
 They wish / soul, spirit
 condition / will not*

*wood
 calls / various ways
 his own special gift
 it pleases Him to ordain*

*the well, the source
 Commanded / person
 poor
 such a way / footsteps*

*leave
 the flower, the best part*

end, purpose

9. (St.) Paul did not dare in the least command.

1. Catch (win) it whoever may: let's see who runs the best.

2. But this counsel (i.e., the preference for virginity) is not required of every person but (only) there where God is pleased to impose it by His might.

3. To wed (again) if my mate die, without being criticized for bigamy.

4. For it is perilous to bring together both fire and flax.

5. "Frailty" I call it, unless he and she.

6. And continece also (when) accompanied by devotion.

	Were membres maad of generacioun And of so parfit wys a wright y-wrought? ⁷ Trusteth right wel, they were nat maad for noght. Glose° whoso wole,° and seye bothe up and doun	<i>Interpret / will</i>
120	That they were maked for purgacioun Of urine, and oure bothe° thinges smale Were eek to knowe° a femele from a male, And for noon other cause: sey ye no? The experience° woot° wel it is noght so.	<i>both our to distinguish</i>
125	So that the clerkes be nat with me wrothe,° I sey this, that they maked been for bothe— This is to seye, for office,° and for ese° Of engendrure,° ther° we nat God displese. Why sholde men elles° in hir bokes sette	<i>experience (in general) / knows wroth, angry</i>
130	That man shal yelde° to his wyf hire dette?° Now wherwith° sholde he make his payement If he ne used his sely° instrument? Thanne° were they maad upon a creature To purge uryne, and eek for engendrure.	<i>natural duty / pleasure In procreation / there where otherwise pay / what is owing her by what means simple, blessed Therefore</i>
135	But I seye noght that every wight is holde,° That hath swich harneys° as I to yow tolde, To goon and usen hem in engendrure: Thanne sholde men take of chastitee no cure. ⁸ Crist was a mayde° and shapen as° a man,	<i>beholden, bound such equipment</i>
140	And many a seint, sith that° the world bigan, Yet lived they evere in parfit chastitee. I nil° envye no virginitee: Lat hem be breed° of pured whete-seed,° And lat us wyves hoten° barley-breed.°	<i>virgin / formed like since will not bread / finest wheat be called / barley bread</i>
145	And yet with barley-breed, Mark° telle can, Oure Lord Jesu refreshed° many a man. In swich estaat° as God hath cleped° us I wol persevere, I nam nat precious. ⁹ In wyfhode I wol use myn instrument	<i>St. Mark i.e., fed condition / called</i>
150	As frely° as my Makere hath it sent. If I be daungerous,° God yeve° me sorwe! Myn housbond shal it have bothe eve and morwe,° Whan that him list° com forth and paye his dette. An housbonde I wol have, I wol nat lette,°	<i>generously standoffish / give morning it pleases him to will not leave off</i>
155	Which shal be bothe my dettour and my thral,° And have his tribulacioun withal° Upon his flessch, whyl that I am his wyf. I have the power duringe al my lyf Upon° his propre° body, and noght he:	<i>thrall, slave besides</i>
160	Right thus th' Apostel° tolde it unto me, And bad oure housbondes for to love us weel. Al this sentence me lyketh every deel. ¹¹	<i>Over / own St. Paul</i>

7. And by so perfect and wise a workman (i.e., God)?

8. Then people wouldn't be concerned about chastity.

9. I will continue; I'm not overly fastidious.

1. All this lesson pleases me, every bit (of it).

- Up sterte the Pardoner, and that anon.²
 “Now dame,” quod he, “by God and by Seint John,
 165 Ye been a noble prechour^o in this cas!^o *preacher / matter*
 I was aboute to wedde a wyf. Allas,
 What^o sholde I bye^o it on my flesh so dere? *Why / pay for*
 Yet hadde I levere^o wedde no wyf to-yere!”^o *rather / this year*
 “Abyde!”^o quod^o she, “my tale is nat bigonne. *Wait / said*
 170 Nay, thou shalt drinken of another tonne^o *tun, cask*
 Er that I go, shal savoure wors than ale.³
 And whan that I have told thee forth my tale
 Of tribulacioun in mariage,
 Of which I am expert in al myn age⁴—
 175 This^o to seyn, myself^o have been the whippe— *This is / (I) myself*
 Than maystow chese^o whether thou wolt sippe^o *mayst thou choose / sip*
 Of thilke^o tonne that I shal abroche.^o *that same / open*
 Be war^o of it, er thou to ny^o approche, *wary / too near*
 For I shall telle ensamples^o mo^o than ten. *examples / more*
 180 ‘Whoso that nil be war^o by othere men, *Whoever will not be warned*
 By him shul othere men corrected be.’
 The same wordes wryteth Ptholomee:^o *Ptolemy*
 Rede in his Almageste,^o and take it there.” *an astronomical treatise*
 “Dame, I wolde praye yow, if youre wil it were,”
 185 Seyde this Pardoner, “as ye bigan,
 Telle forth youre tale, spareth^o for no man, *hold back*
 And teche us yonge men of youre praktike.”^o *practice*
 “Gladly,” quod she, “sith it may yow lyke.^o *please*
 But yet I praye to al this companye,
 190 If that I speke after my fantasye,^o *according to my fancy*
 As taketh not agrief of that I seye;⁵
 For myn entente^o nis^o but for to pleye. *intention / is not*
 Now sires, now wol I telle forth my tale.
 As evere mote^o I drinken wyn or ale, *might*
 195 I shal seye sooth,^o tho^o housbondes that I hadde, *tell the truth / (of) those*
 As three of hem were gode and two were badde.
 The three men were gode, and riche, and olde;
 Unnethe mighte they the statut holde⁶
 In^o which that they were bounden unto me. *By*
 200 Ye woot^o wel what I mene of this, pardee!^o *know / by God*
 As help me God, I laughe whan I thinke
 How pitously^o a-night^o I made hem swinke,^o *pitiably / at night / labor*
 And by my fey, I tolde of it no stoor.⁷
 They had me yeven^o hir lond and hir tresoor;^o *given / wealth*
 205 Me neded nat do lenger diligence⁸
 To winne hir love, or doon hem reverence.^o *to honor them*
 They loved me so wel, by God above,

2. The Pardoner broke in (literally, started up) at once.

3. Before I go, (which) shall taste worse than ale.

4. About which I have been expert all my life.

5. Not to take amiss that (which) I say.

6. They could scarcely observe the statute (law).

7. And by my faith, I set no store by it.

8. It wasn't necessary that I be diligent any longer.

	That I ne tolde no deyntee of ^o hir love!	<i>took no pleasure in</i>
	A wys womman wol bisye hire evere in oon ⁹	
210	To gete hire love, ye, ther as ^o she hath noon.	<i>there where</i>
	But sith I hadde hem hoolly ^o in myn hond,	<i>wholly</i>
	And sith they hadde me yeven ^o all hir lond,	<i>given</i>
	What ^o sholde I taken keep ^o hem for to plese,	<i>Why / heed</i>
	But ^o it were for my profit and myn ese? ^o	<i>Unless / comfort</i>
215	I sette hem so a-werke, ^o by my fey, ^o	<i>working / faith</i>
	That many a night they songen ^o 'weilawaye! ^o	<i>sang / woe is me</i>
	The bacoun was nat fet for hem, I trowe, ¹	
	That som men han in Essex at Dunmowe.	
	I governed hem so wel after ^o my lawe	<i>according to</i>
220	That ech ^o of hem ful blisful ^o was and fawe ^o	<i>each / happy / fain, eager</i>
	To bringe me gaye thinges fro the fayre. ^o	<i>fair</i>
	They were ful glad whan I spak to hem fayre, ^o	<i>nicely</i>
	For God it woot, I chidde ^o hem spitously. ^o	<i>chided, scolded / spitefully</i>
	Now herkneth ^o how I bar me ^o proprely:	<i>listen / conducted myself</i>
225	Ye wyse ^o wyves, that can understonde,	<i>prudent</i>
	Thus shul ye speke and bere hem wrong on honde, ^o	<i>put them in the wrong</i>
	For half so boldely can ther no man	
	Swere and lyen as a womman can.	
	I sey nat this by ^o wyves that ben wyse,	<i>concerning</i>
230	But if ^o it be whan they hem misavyse. ^o	<i>Unless / act ill-advisedly</i>
	A wys wyf, if that she can hir good,	
	Shal beren him on hond the cow ^o is wood, ²	<i>chough (in the crow family)</i>
	And take wisse of ^o hir owene mayde	<i>take as witness</i>
	Of ^o hir assent. ^o But herkneth ^o how I sayde:	<i>With / consent / listen</i>
235	'Sire olde kaynard, is this thyn array? ³	
	Why is my neighebores wyf so gay? ^o	<i>gaily dressed</i>
	She is honoured over al ther ^o she goth: ^o	<i>everywhere / goes</i>
	I sitte at hoom, I have no thrifty cloth. ^o	<i>suitable clothing</i>
	What dostow ^o at my neighebores hous? ^o	<i>dost thou</i>
240	Is she so fair? ^o artow ^o so amorous? ^o	<i>beautiful / art thou</i>
	What rowne ^o ye with our mayde? <i>benedicite!</i> ^o	<i>whisper / God bless us</i>
	Sire olde lechour, lat thy japes be! ^o	<i>leave off thy pranks</i>
	And if I have a gossib ^o or a freend,	<i>gossip, confidante</i>
	Withouten gilt, thou chydest as a feend, ⁴	
245	If that I walke or pleye unto his hous!	
	Thou comest hoom as dronken as a mous, ^o	<i>mouse</i>
	And prechest on thy bench, with yvel preef! ⁵	
	Thou seist ^o to me, it is a greet meschief ^o	<i>says / misfortune</i>
	To wedde a povre womman, for costage. ^o	<i>because of expense</i>
250	And if that she be riche, of heigh parage, ^o	<i>parentage, blood</i>

9. A prudent woman will exert herself constantly.

1. The bacon wasn't fetched for them I'm sure. (A side of bacon was awarded annually at Dunmow in Essex to couples who could claim they had not quarreled or been unhappy in their marriage that year.)

2. A prudent (skillful) wife, if she knows her (own) good, shall trick him into believing the chough is mad. (Refers to common stories—the crow in Chaucer's own *Manciple's Tale* is an example—in which a speaking bird tells tales to the husband of a wife's infidelity.)

3. Old dotard, sir, is this how you dress me?

4. Without guilt (on our part), thou scoldest like a devil.

5. And preachest (sermons, sitting) on thy bench—bad luck to you!

	Thanne seistow ^o that it is a tormentrye ^o	<i>sayst thou / torment</i>
	To suffre ^o hire pryde and hire malencolye. ^o	<i>endure / melancholy, moodiness</i>
	And if that she be fair, ^o thou verray knave, ^o	<i>pretty / true rascal</i>
	Thou seyst that every honour ^o wol hire have:	<i>lecher</i>
255	She may no whyle in chastitee abyde ^o	<i>abide, remain</i>
	That ^o is assailed upon ech a syde. ^o	<i>Who / on every side</i>
	Thou seyst som folk desyren us for richesse, ^o	<i>(our) money</i>
	Somme for oure shap, ^o and somme for oure fairnesse, ^o	<i>figure / beauty</i>
	And som for ^o she can outhere ^o singe or daunce,	<i>because / either</i>
260	And som for gentillesse ^o and daliaunce, ^o	<i>good breeding / flirtatiousness</i>
	Som for hir handes and hir armes smale; ^o	<i>slender</i>
	Thus goth al to the devel, by thy tale. ^o	<i>according to thy account</i>
	Thou seyst men may nat kepe ^o a castel wal,	<i>hold</i>
	It may so longe assailed been over al. ^o	<i>everywhere</i>
265	And if that she be foul, ^o thou seist that she	<i>ugly</i>
	Coveiteth ^o every man that she may se;	<i>Desires</i>
	For as a spaynel ^o she wol on him lepe,	<i>spaniel</i>
	Til that she finde som man hire to chepe. ^o	<i>to buy her wares</i>
	Ne noon so grey goos goth ther in the lake ⁶	
270	As, seistow, ^o that wol been withoute make. ^o	<i>sayst thou / a mate</i>
	And seyst, it is an hard thing for to welde ^o	<i>control</i>
	A thing that no man wol, his thanks, ^o helde. ^o	<i>willingly / hold</i>
	Thus seistow, lorel, ^o whan thou goost to bedde,	<i>you wretch</i>
	And that no wys man nedeth for to wedde,	
275	Ne no man that entendeth unto ^o hevене.	<i>aims to get to</i>
	With wilde thonder-dint ^o and firy leve ^o	<i>thunderclap / fiery lightning</i>
	Mote ^o thy welked ^o nekke be to-broke! ^o	<i>May / withered / broken</i>
	Thow seyst that dropping ^o houses and eek smoke	<i>leaking</i>
	And chyding wyves maken men to flee	
280	Out of hir owene hous; a, <i>benedicite!</i> ^o	<i>God bless us</i>
	What eyleth ^o swich an old man for to chyde?	<i>ails</i>
	Thow seyst we wyves wol oure vyces ^o hyde	<i>vices</i>
	Til we be fast, ^o and thanne we wol hem shewe ^o —	<i>secure (married) / show</i>
	Wel may that be a proverbe of a shrew! ^o	<i>(fit) for a villain</i>
285	Thou seist that oxen, asses, hors, ^o and houndes,	<i>horses</i>
	They been assayed ^o at diverse stoundes; ^o	<i>tested / various times</i>
	Bacins, ^o lavours, ^o er ^o that men hem bye, ^o	<i>Basins / washbowls / before / buy</i>
	Spones ^o and stoles, ^o and al swich	<i>Spoons / stools</i>
	housbondrye, ^o	<i>all such housewares</i>
	And so been pottes, clothes, and array; ^o	<i>ornament(s)</i>
290	But folk of wyves maken noon assay ^o	<i>test</i>
	Til they be wedded. Olde dotard shrew! ^o	<i>wretched rascal</i>
	And thanne, seistow, ^o we wol oure vices shewe.	<i>sayst thou</i>
	Thou seist also that it displeth me	
	But if that ^o thou wolt preyse ^o my beautee,	<i>Unless / praise</i>
295	And but ^o thou poure ^o alwey upon my face,	<i>unless / gaze intently</i>
	And clepe ^o me “faire dame” in every place;	<i>call</i>
	And but thou make a feste ^o on thilke ^o day	<i>feast / that same</i>
	That I was born, and make me fresh and gay,	

6. There swims in the lake no goose so gray.

And but thou do to my norice^o honour, *nurse*
 300 And to my chamberere^o withinne my bour,^o *chambermaid / bower, bedroom*
 And to my fadres folk^o and his allyes^o— *relatives / connections*
 Thus seistow, olde barel ful of lyes!^o *lies (pun on lees, or dregs)*
 And yet of oure apprentice Janekyn,
 For his criske heer,^o shyninge as gold so fyn, *curly hair*
 305 And for^o he squiereth^o me bothe up and down, *because / escorts*
 Yet hastow caught a fals suspeciouⁿ.⁷
 I wol hym noght,^o thogh thou were deed tomorwe. *I don't want him*
 But tel me this, why hydestow, with sorwe,⁸
 The keyes of thy cheste^o away fro me? *for storing valuables*
 310 It is my good^o as wel as thyn, pardee.^o *property / by God*
 What, wenestow make an idiot of oure dame?⁹
 Now by that lord that called is Seint Jame,^o *St. James*
 Thou shalt nat bothe, thogh that thou were wood,^o *mad (with rage)*
 Be maister of my body and of my good;^o *goods, possessions*
 315 That oon thou shalt forgo, maugree thyne yën,¹
 What helpith thee of me to enquere^o or spyën? *inquire*
 I trowe,^o thou woldest loke^o me in thy chiste!^o *believe / lock / chest*
 Thou sholdest seye, “Wyf, go wher thee liste;^o *it pleases thee*
 Tak your disport,^o I wol nat leve no talis.^o *pleasure / believe any tales*
 320 I knowe yow for a trewe wyf, dame Alis.”^o *Alice*
 We love no man that taketh kepe or charge^o *takes heed or cares*
 Wher that we goon; we wol ben at oure large.^o *liberty*
 Of alle men y-blessed moot^o he be, *may*
 The wyse astrologien^o Daun Ptholome,^o *astrologer / Lord Ptolemy*
 325 That seith this proverbe in his Almageste:
 “Of alle men his wisdom is the hyeste,^o *greatest*
 That rekketh^o nevere who hath the world in honde.”^o *cares / in (his) control*
 By this proverbe thou shalt understonde,
 Have thou ynogh, what thar thee recche or care²
 330 How merily that othere folkes fare?^o *get along*
 For certeyn, olde dotard, by youre leve,^o *leave*
 Ye shul have queynte^o right ynough at eve. *i.e., sex (punning on ME “cunte”)*
 He is to^o greet a nigard that wol werne^o *too / refuse*
 A man to lighte a candle at his lanterne;
 335 He shal have never the lasse^o light, pardee. *less*
 Have thou ynough, thee thar nat pleyne thee.^o *thou needst not complain*
 Thou seyst also that if we make us gay
 With clothing and with precious array,^o *ornaments*
 That it is peril of^o oure chastitee; *a danger to*
 340 And yet, with sorwe, thou most enforce thee,³
 And seye these wordes in th’Apostles^o name: *St. Paul’s*
 “In habit^o maad with chastitee and shame, *garment(s)*
 Ye wommen shul appaillaie yow,”^o quod he, *dress yourselves*

7. I.e., become wrongly suspicious.

8. But tell me this, why dost thou hide (may you have sorrow).

9. What, do you think to make an idiot of our mistress? (She here uses a kind of royal plural: she means herself.)

1. Thou shalt give up one (of them), despite thy eyes (i.e., despite anything you can do).

2. As long as thou hast enough, what need for thee to take heed or care.

3. And further—sorrow beset thee!—thou must strengthen thyself (in the argument).

- "And noght in tressed heer° and gay perree°, *braided hair / precious stones*
 345 As° perles, ne with gold, ne clothes riche." *Such as*
 After thy text, ne after thy rubriche
 I wol nat wirche as muchel as a gnat.⁴
 Thou seydest this, that I was lyk a cat:
 For whoso wolde senge° a cattes skin°, *singe / i.e., fur*
 350 Thanne wolde the cat wel dwellen in his in°, *lodgings*
 And if the cattes skin be slyk° and gay, *sleek*
 She wol nat dwelle in house half a day,
 But forth she wole, er° any day be dawed°, *before / has dawned*
 To shewe hir skin and goon a-caterwawed°.° *caterwauling*
 355 This is to seye, if I be gay, sire shrewe°, *wretch*
 I wol renne out°, my borel° for to shewe. *run about / clothing*
 Sire olde fool, what helpeth thee to spyen?
 Thogh thou preye° Argus, with his hundred yēn°, *beg / eyes*
 To be my warde-cors°, as he can° best, *bodyguard / knows how*
 360 In feith, he shal nat kepe me but me lest;° *unless I wish*
 Yet coude I make his berd, so moot I thee.⁵
 Thou seydest eek that ther ben thinges three,
 The whiche thinges troublen al this erthe,
 And that no wight ne may endure the ferthe.° *fourth*
 365 O leve° sire shrewe, Jesu shorte° thy lyf! *dear / may Jesus shorten*
 Yet prechestow° and seyst an hateful wyf *Still thou preachest*
 Y-rekened° is for° oon of these meschances.° *Counted / as / misfortunes*
 Been ther none othere maner° resemblances *kind of*
 That ye may lykne° youre parables to, *liken*
 370 But if° a sely° wyf be oon of tho?° *Unless / innocent / those*
 Thou lykenest eek wommanes love to helle,
 To bareyne° lond, ther° water may not dwelle; *barren / where*
 Thou lyknest it also to wilde fyr.⁶
 The more it brenneth°, the more it hath desyr *burns*
 375 To consume every thing that brent wol be.° *can be burned*
 Thou seyst that right° as wormes shende° a tree,
 Right so a wyf destroyeth hire housbonde;
 This knowe they that been to wyves bonde.⁷° *bound*
 Lordinges, right thus, as ye have understonde,
 380 Bar I stifly myne olde housbondes on honde⁷
 That thus they seyden in hir dronkenesse;
 And al was fals, but that° I took wisse
 On° Janekin and on my nece° also. *and yet*
 O Lord, the peyne I dide° hem and the wo, *From / niece*
 385 Ful giltelees, by Goddes swete pyne!° *suffering I caused*
 For as° an hors I coude byte° and whyne.° *suffering*
 I coude pleyne°, thogh I were in the gilt,° *like / bite / whimny*
 Or elles° often tyme hadde I ben spilt.° *complain / wrong*
 Whoso that first to mille comth, first grint.° *otherwise / ruined*
grinds (his grain)

4. I will not behave according to thy text or thy rubric (i.e., interpretation) as much as (would) a gnat.

5. I could still trick him, as I hope to thrive.

6. "Greek fire," a highly inflammable compound used in sea warfare.

7. I firmly deceived my old husbands into thinking.

- 390 I pleyned first: so was oure werre° y-stint.° *strife / concluded*
 They were ful glad to excusen hem° ful blyve° *themselves / quickly*
 Of thing of which they nevere agilte° hir lyve. *were guilty (in)*
 Of wenches wolde I beren hem on honde,° *accuse them (falsely)*
 Whan that for syk° unnethes° mighte they stonde. *illness / scarcely*
- 395 Yet tikled° I his herte, for that he *tickled, pleased*
 Wende° that I hadde of him so greet chiertee.° *Thought / affection*
 I swear that al my walkinge out by nighte
 Was for t'espye° wenches that he dighte.° *to spy out / lay with*
 Under that colour° hadde I many a mirthe,° *pretense / merry time*
- 400 For al swich wit° is even° us in oure birthe. *such cleverness / given*
 Deceite, weping, spinning God hath yive° *given*
 To wommen kindly° whyl they may live. *by nature*
 And thus of o° thing I avaunte° me: *one / boast*
 Atte° ende I hadde the bettre in ech degree,° *At the / in every way*
- 405 By sleighte,° or force, or by som maner° thing, *trick / kind of*
 As by continuel murmur or grucching.° *grumbling*
 Namely abedde° hadden they meschaunce:° *Especially in bed / misfortune*
 Ther wolde I chyde° and do° hem no plesaunce;° *scold / give / pleasure*
 I wolde no lenger in the bed abyde,
- 410 If that I felte his arm over my syde,
 Til he had maad his raunson° unto me; *paid his ransom*
 Thanne wolde I suffre° him do his nycetee.° *endure, allow / foolishness, lust*
 And therefore every man this tale I telle,
 Winne whoso may, for al is for to selle.⁸
- 415 With empty hand men may none haukes° lure. *hawks*
 For winning° wolde I al his lust endure, *profit*
 And make me a feyned° appetyt— *feigned*
 And yet in bacon° hadde I nevere delyt. *old meat (aged men)*
 That made me that evere I wolde hem chyde.
- 420 For thogh the Pope had seten hem beside,° *sat next to them*
 I wolde nat spare hem at hir owene bord.° *table*
 For by my trouthe,° I quitte° hem word for word. *troth / requited, paid back*
 As° help me verray° God omnipotent, *So / true*
 Thogh I right now sholde make my testament,° *will*
- 425 I ne owe hem nat a word that it nis quit.° *is not paid back*
 I broghte it so aboute, by my wit,° *cleverness*
 That they moste yeve it up,° as for the beste, *give up*
 Or elles° hadde we nevere been in reste. *else*
 For thogh he loked as a wood leoun,° *like a mad lion*
- 430 Yet sholde he faille of his conclusioun.° *fail in the end*
 Thanne wolde I seye, 'Godelief,° tak keep° *Sweetheart / heed*
 How mekely loketh Wilkin oure sheep!
 Com neer, my spouse, lat me ba° thy cheke!
 Ye sholde been al pacient and meke, *kiss*
- 435 And han a swete spyced conscience,° *sweetly seasoned disposition*
 Sith° ye so preche of Jobes° pacience. *Since / Job's*
 Suffreth° alwey, sin° ye so wel can preche; *Endure / since*
 And but° ye do, certain we shal yow teche *unless*

8. Profit whoever may, for all is for sale.

	That it is fair ^o to have a wyf in pees. ^o	<i>good / peace</i>
440	Oon of us two moste bowen, ^o doutelees,	<i>bow (to the other's will)</i>
	And sith ^o a man is more resonable	<i>since</i>
	Than womman is, ye moste been suffrable. ^o	<i>patient</i>
	What eyleth ^o yow to grucche ^o thus and grone? ^o	<i>ails / grumble / groan</i>
	Is it for ye wolde have my queynte ^o allone?	<i>(cf. ME "cunte")</i>
445	Why taak it all! lo, have it every-deel! ^o	<i>every bit of it</i>
	Peter! ^o I shrewe ^o yow but ye love it weel!	<i>(By St.) Peter / curse</i>
	For if I wolde ^o selle my <i>bele chose</i> , ^o	<i>wished to / pretty thing</i>
	I coude walke as fresh as is a rose;	
	But I wol kepe it for your owene tooth. ⁹	
450	Ye be to blame. By God, I sey yow sooth. ^o	<i>tell you the truth</i>
	Swiche manere ^o wordes hadde we on honde.	<i>kind of</i>
	Now wol I speken of my fourthe housbonde.	
	My fourthe housebonde was a revelour ^o —	<i>reveler, rioter</i>
	This is to seyn, he hadde a paramour ^o —	<i>mistress</i>
455	And I was yong and ful of ragerye, ^o	<i>wantonness, passion</i>
	Stiborn ^o and strong, and joly as a pye. ^o	<i>Stubborn / magpie</i>
	Wel coude I daunce to an harpe smale,	
	And singe, ywis, ^o as any nightingale,	<i>truly</i>
	Whan I had dronke a draughte of swete wyn.	
460	Metellius, the foule cherl, the swyn, ^o	<i>swine</i>
	That with a staf birafte ^o his wyf hir lyf	<i>bereft</i>
	For she drank wyn, thogh ^o I hadde been his wyf,	<i>if</i>
	He sholde nat han daunted ^o me fro drinke!	<i>frightened</i>
	And after wyn on Venus moste ^o I thinke,	<i>must</i>
465	For al so siker ^o as cold engendreth ^o hayl, ^o	<i>surely / engenders / hail</i>
	A likerous mouth moste han a likerous tayl. ¹	
	In wommen vinolent ^o is no defence ^o —	<i>full of wine / resistance</i>
	This knowen lechours by experience.	
	But, Lord Crist! whan that it remembreth me ^o	<i>I think</i>
470	Upon my yowthe, and on my jolitee, ^o	<i>gaiety</i>
	It tikleth ^o me aboute myn herte rote. ^o	<i>tickles / heart's root</i>
	Unto this day it dooth myn herte bote ^o	<i>good</i>
	That I have had my world as in my tyme.	
	But age, allas! that al wol envenyme, ^o	<i>poison</i>
475	Hath me biraft ^o my beautee and my pith. ^o	<i>bereft of / vigor</i>
	Lat go, ^o farewell! the devel go therwith!	<i>Let it go</i>
	The flour is goon, ther is namore to telle:	
	The bren, ^o as I best can, now moste I selle;	<i>bran, husks</i>
	But yet to be right mery wol I fonde. ^o	<i>try</i>
480	Now wol I tellen of my fourthe housbonde.	
	I seye, I hadde in herte greet despyt ^o	<i>malice</i>
	That he of any other ^o had delyt.	<i>other woman</i>
	But he was quit, ^o by God and by Seint Joce! ^o	<i>repaid / a Breton saint</i>
	I made him of the same wode ^o a croce ^o —	<i>wood / cross</i>
485	Nat of my body in no foul ^o manere,	<i>unclean</i>
	But certainly, I made folk swich chere ^o	<i>such good cheer</i>

9. I.e., your own sexual appetite.

1. A gluttonous mouth must have (i.e., necessarily implies) a lecherous tail.

	That in his owene grece° I made him frye	<i>grease</i>
	For angre and for verray° jalousye.	<i>pure</i>
	By God, in erthe° I was his purgatorie,	<i>on earth</i>
490	For which I hope his soule be in glorie.	
	For God it woot,° he sat ful ofte and song°	<i>knows / sang</i>
	Whan that his shoo° ful bitterly him wrong.°	<i>shoe / hurt</i>
	Ther was no wight,° save° God and he, that wiste°	<i>person / except / knew</i>
	In many wyse° how sore° I him twiste.°	<i>ways / sorely / tormented</i>
495	He deyde whan I cam fro° Jerusalem,	<i>from (a pilgrimage to)</i>
	And lyth y-grave under the rode-beem, ²	
	Al° is his tombe noht so curious°	<i>Although / elaborate</i>
	As was the sepulcre° of him Darius,	<i>a very famous tomb</i>
	Which that Appelles wroughte subtilly;°	<i>made skillfully</i>
500	It nis but wast to burie him preciously. ³	
	Lat him° farewel, God yeve his soule reste!	<i>May he</i>
	He is now in the grave and in his cheste.°	<i>coffin</i>
	Now of my fifthe housbond wol I telle—	
	God lete his soule nevere come in helle!	
505	And yet was he to me the moste shrewe.°	<i>worst rascal</i>
	That fele° I on my ribbes al by rewe,°	<i>feel / in a row</i>
	And evere shal unto myn ending day.°	<i>i.e., dying day</i>
	But in oure bed he was so fresh and gay,	
	And therwithal so wel coude he me glose°	<i>cajole, flatter</i>
510	Whan that he wolde han my <i>bele chose</i> ,°	<i>pretty thing</i>
	That thogh he hadde me bet° on every boon,°	<i>beaten / bone</i>
	He coude winne agayn my love anoon.°	<i>at once</i>
	I trowe° I loved him beste for that he	<i>believe</i>
	Was of his love daungerous° to me.	<i>standoffish, grudging</i>
515	We wommen han, if that I shal nat lye,	
	In this matere a queynte fantasye:°	<i>an odd fancy</i>
	Wayte what° thing we may nat lightly have,	<i>Whatever</i>
	Thereafter wol we crye al day and crave.	
	Forbede us thing,° and that desyren we;	<i>something</i>
520	Prees on° us faste,° and thanne wol we fle.	<i>Crowd, pursue / hard</i>
	With daunger° oute° we al oure chaffare:°	<i>haughtiness / set out / wares</i>
	Greet prees° at market maketh dere° ware,	<i>press, crowd / expensive</i>
	And to° greet cheep° is holde at litel prys.°	<i>too / a bargain / worth</i>
	This knoweth every womman that is wys.	
525	My fifthe housbonde, God his soule blesse!	
	Which that I took for love and no richesse,	
	He som tyme° was a clerk° of Oxenford,°	<i>once / scholar / Oxford</i>
	And had left scole, and wente at hoom to bord°	<i>to board at home</i>
	With my gossib,° dwellinge in oure toun—	<i>gossip, intimate friend</i>
530	God have hir soule! hir name was Alisoun.	
	She knew myn herte and eek° my privetee°	<i>also / secrets</i>
	Bet° than oure parisshe preest, so moot I thee!°	<i>Better / as I may thrive</i>
	To hire biwreyed° I my conseil° al,	<i>disclosed / thoughts</i>

2. And lies buried under the rood-beam (a timber separating the nave from the chancel in a church).

3. It is (i.e., would have been) nothing but a waste to bury him expensively.

- For had myn housebonde pissed on a wal,
 535 Or doon a thing that sholde han cost his lyf,
 To hire and to another worthy wyf,
 And to my nece,^o which that I loved weel, *niece*
 I wolde han told his conseil^o every deel.^o *secrets / (in) every detail*
 And so I dide ful often, God it woot,^o *knows*
 540 That made his face ful often reed and hoot
 For verray^o shame, and blamed himself for^o he *pure / because*
 Had told to me so greet a privetee.^o *secret*
 And so bifel^o that ones^o in a Lente^o— *it happened / once / at Lent*
 So often tymes I to my gossib wente,
 545 For evere yet I lovede to be gay,
 And for to walke in March, Averille,^o and May, *April*
 Fro hous to hous, to here^o sondry talis^o— *hear / various tales*
 That Jankin clerk^o and my gossib dame Alis *Jankin (the) clerk*
 And I myself into the feldes^o wente. *fields*
 550 Myn housbond was at London al that Lente:
 I hadde the bettre leyser^o for to pleye, *leisure, opportunity*
 And for to see, and eek^o for to be seye^o *also / seen*
 Of lusty folk. What wiste I wher my grace
 Was shapen for to be, or in what place?⁴
 555 Therefore I made my visitaciouns,^o *visits*
 To vigilies and to processiouns,⁵
 To preching eek and to thise pilgrimages,
 To pleyes^o of miracles, and mariages, *(stage) plays*
 And wered upon^o my gaye scarlet gytes.^o *wore / gowns*
 560 Thise wormes, ne thise motthes,^o ne thise mytes,^o *moths / mites*
 Upon my peril, frete hem never a deel;⁶
 And wostow^o why? for^o they were used weel. *knowest thou / because*
 Now wol I tellen forth what happed^o me. *befell*
 I seye that in the feeldes walked we,
 565 Til trewely we hadde swich daliance,⁷
 This clerk and I, that of my purveyance^o *by my foresight*
 I spak to him and seyde him how that he,
 If I were widwe,^o sholde wedde me. *a widow*
 For certainly, I sey for no bobance,^o *not as a boast*
 570 Yet was I nevere withouten purveyance^o *(future) provision*
 Of^o mariage, n'of^o othere thinges eek. *Concerning / nor concerning*
 I holde a mouses herte nat worth a leek^o *leek, onion*
 That hath but oon hole for to sterte^o to, *run*
 And if that faille,^o thanne is al y-do.^o *fails / done for*
 575 I bar him on honde^o he hadde enchanted me— *made him believe*
 My dame^o taughte me that soutiltee^o— *mother / subtlety, trick*
 And eek I seyde I mette^o of him al night: *dreamed*
 He wolde han slayn^o me as I lay upright,^o *wanted to slay / face-up*

4. By pleasure-loving folk. How could I know where grace was destined to befall me, or in what place?

5. *Vigilies*: vigils (services on the eve of a feast day); *processiouns*: ceremonial processions within a church service.

6. On peril (of my soul), ate into them not at all.

7. I.e., were getting along so well.

And al my bed was ful of verray^o blood; *real*
 580 But yet I hope that he shal do me good,
 For blood bitokeneth gold, as me was taught.
 And al was fals—I dremed of it right naught,
 But as^o I folwed ay^o my dames lore^o *But / ever / teaching*
 As wel of^o this as of othere thinges more. *concerning*
 585 But now sire, lat me see, what I shal seyn?
 Aha! by God, I have my tale ageyn.
 Whan that my fourthe housbond was on bere,^o *(his) bier*
 I weep algate, and made sory chere⁸
 As wyves moten,^o for it is usage,^o *must / the custom*
 590 And with my coverchief^o covered my visage;^o *kerchief / face*
 But for that^o I was purveyed of^o a make,^o *because / provided with / mate*
 I wepte but smal,^o and that I undertake.^o *little / declare*
 To chirche was myn housbond born^o a-morwe^o *borne / in the morning*
 With^o neighebores, that for him maden sorwe; *By*
 595 And Jankinoure clerk was oon of tho.^o *them*
 As^o help me God! whan that I saugh^o him go^o *So / saw / walk*
 After the bere, me thoughte he hadde a paire
 Of legges and of feet so clene^o and faire, *neat*
 That al myn herte I yaf^o unto his hold.^o *gave / possession*
 600 He was, I trowe,^o twenty winter old, *believe*
 And I was fourty, if I shal seye sooth;^o *tell the truth*
 But yet I hadde alwey a coltes tooth.^o *i.e., youthful appetites*
 Gat-tothed I was, and that bicam me weel;⁹
 I hadde the prente of Seynte Venus seel.¹
 605 As help me God, I was a lusty^o oon, *vigorous*
 And faire, and riche, and yong, and wel bigoon;^o *well-off*
 And trewely, as myne housbondes tolde me,
 I had the beste *quoniam*^o mighte be. *i.e., pudendum*
 For certes, I am al Venerien
 610 In felinge, and myn herte is Marcien:²
 Venus me yaf^o my lust, my likerousnesse,^o *gave / lecherousness*
 And Mars yaf me my sturdy hardinesse;^o *boldness*
 Myn ascendent was Taur, and Mars therinne.³
 Allas! allas! that evere love was sinne!
 615 I folwed ay^o myn inclinacioun *ever*
 By vertu of my constellacioun;⁴
 That made me I coude nought withdrawe^o *withhold*
 My chambre of Venus from a good felawe.^o *companion*
 Yet have I Martes^o mark upon my face, *Mars's*
 620 And also in another privee^o place. *secret*
 For, God so wis be my savacioun,^o *salvation*

8. I wept, of course, and put on a sad look.

9. I was gap-toothed, and that suited me well. (In medieval handbooks of physiognomy, gap teeth are said to indicate a bold and lascivious nature.)

1. I had the print of St. Venus's seal—i.e., Venus had given me a birthmark (again indicative of amorousness).

2. *Venerien*: under the influence of the planet Venus; *Marcien*: under the influence of the planet Mars. Together they determine her appetites for love and marital strife.

3. (When I was born) the sign of Taurus was ascendant, and Mars was in it.

4. Through the influence of my horoscope (the planets reigning over my birth).

	I ne loved nevere by no discrecioun, ^o	<i>with any wisdom</i>
	But evere folwede myn appetyt:	
	Al ^o were he short or long, ^o or blak or whyt,	<i>Whether / tall</i>
625	I took no kepe, so that he lyked me, ⁵	
	How pore he was, ne eek ^o of what degree. ^o	<i>nor / social rank</i>
	What sholde I seye but, at the monthes ende,	
	This joly clerk Jankin, that was so hende, ^o	<i>pleasant</i>
	Hath wedded me with greet solempnitee, ^o	<i>ceremony</i>
630	And to him yaf ^o I al the lond ^o and fee ^o	<i>gave / land / property</i>
	That evere was me yeven ^o therbifore.	<i>given (by earlier husbands)</i>
	But afterward repented me ^o ful sore; ^o	<i>I regretted it / deeply</i>
	He nolde suffre nothing of my list. ⁶	
	By God, he smoot ^o me ones ^o on the list ^o	<i>hit / once / ear</i>
635	For that ^o I rente ^o out of his book a leef, ^o	<i>Because / tore / leaf, page</i>
	That of the strook myn ere wex al deaf. ⁷	
	Stiborn ^o I was as is a leonesse, ^o	<i>Stubborn / lionness</i>
	And of my tonge a verray jangleresse, ^o	<i>real ranter</i>
640	And walke I wolde, as I had doon biforn,	
	From hous to hous, although he had it sworn. ⁸	
	For which he often tymes wolde preche,	
	And me of ^o olde Romain gestes ^o teche,	<i>from / Roman stories</i>
	How he Simplicius Gallus lefte his wyf,	
	And hire forsook for terme ^o of al his lyf,	<i>the duration</i>
645	Noght but for open-heveded he hir say ⁹	
	Lokinge out at his dore upon a day.	
	Another Romain tolde he me by name,	
	That, for ^o his wyf was at a someres game ^o	<i>because / summer's revel</i>
	Withoute his witing, ^o he forsook hire eke. ^o	<i>knowledge / also</i>
650	And thanne wolde he upon ^o his Bible seke	<i>in</i>
	That ilke ^o proverbe of Ecclesiaste ^o	<i>same / Ecclesiasticus</i>
	Wher he comandeth and forbedeth faste ^o	<i>firmly</i>
	Man shal nat suffre ^o his wyf go roule ^o aboute;	<i>allow / to go roaming</i>
	Thanne wolde he seye right thus, withouten doute:	
655	'Whoso that ^o buildeth his hous al of salwes, ^o	<i>Whoever / willow twigs</i>
	And priketh ^o his blinde hors over the falwes, ^o	<i>spurs / fallow (plowed) land</i>
	And suffreth ^o his wyf to go seken halwes, ^o	<i>allows / shrines</i>
	Is worthy to been hanged on the galwes! ¹⁰	<i>gallows</i>
	But al for noght; I sette noght an hawe ^o	<i>haw (hawthorn berry)</i>
660	Of his proverbes n'of his olde sawe, ^o	<i>saw, proverb</i>
	Ne I wolde nat of ^o him corrected be.	<i>by</i>
	I hate him that ^o my vices telleth me,	<i>the one who</i>
	And so do mo, ^o God woot, ^o of us than I.	<i>more / knows</i>
	This made him with me wood ^o al outrely: ^o	<i>mad / completely</i>
665	I nolde noght forbere him in no cas. ¹	
	Now wol I seye yow sooth, ^o by Seint Thomas,	<i>tell you the truth</i>

5. I took no heed, as long as he was pleasing to me.

6. He wouldn't allow (me) anything I wanted.

7. So that from the blow my ear grew wholly deaf.

8. I.e., he had sworn I shouldn't.

9. Only because he saw her bareheaded.

1. I wouldn't give way to him on any occasion.

Why that I rente^o out of his book a leef,^o *tore / leaf*
 For which he smoot^o me so that I was deef. *struck*
 He hadde a book that gladly, night and day,
 670 For his desport^o he wolde rede alway. *amusement*
 He cleped it Valerie and Theofraste,²
 At which book he lough^o alwey ful faste.^o *laughed / strongly*
 And eek ther was somtyme^o a clerk^o at Rome, *once / scholar*
 A cardinal, that highte^o Seint Jerome, *was called*
 675 That made a book agayn Jovinian;
 In which book eek ther was Tertulan,
 Crisippus, Trotula, and Helowys,³
 That was abbesse nat fer fro Parys;^o *Paris*
 And eek the Parables^o of Salomon, *Proverbs*
 680 Ovydes Art,^o and bokes many on,^o *Ovid's Art (of Love) / a one*
 And alle these were bounden in o^o volume. *one*
 And every night and day was his custume,
 Whan he hadde leyser^o and vacacioun^o *leisure / free time*
 From other worldly occupacioun,
 685 To reden on this book of wikked^o wyves. *wicked*
 He knew of hem mo^o legendes and lyves *more*
 Than been^o of gode wyves in the Bible. *there are*
 For trusteth wel, it is an impossible^o *impossibility*
 That any clerk wol speke good of wyves,
 690 But if^o it be of holy seintes lyves, *Unless*
 Ne of noon other womman never the mo.^o *in any way*
 Who peyntede the leoun, tel me, who?⁴
 By God, if wommen hadde writen stories,
 As clerkes han withinne hir oratories,^o *chapels, studies*
 695 They wolde han writen of men more wikkednesse
 Than all the mark^o of Adam may redresse. *sex*
 The children⁵ of Mercurie and of Venus
 Been in hir wirking^o ful contrarious:^o *actions / contrary*
 Mercurie loveth wysdom and science,^o *knowledge*
 700 And Venus loveth ryot^o and dispence;^o *revelry / spending*
 And, for^o hire diverse disposicioun,
 Ech^o falleth in othere's exaltacioun,^o *because of*
 And thus, God woot, Mercurie is desolat^o *Each / moment of highest ascent*
 In Pisces wher Venus is exaltat,^o *without influence*
 705 And Venus falleth ther^o Mercurie is reysed;^o *in her greatest influence*
 Therefore no womman of^o no clerk is preyed. *there where / has risen*
 The clerk, whan he is old and may noight do *by*
 Of Venus werkes worth^o his olde sho^o— *to the value of / shoe*
 Thanne sit he doun and writ in his dotage

2. Jankyn's "book of wikked wyves" includes several antifeminist works: Walter Map's *Letter of Valerius*, Theophrastus's *On Marriage*, and St. Jerome's *Against Jovinian*; they quote other authorities in turn (Tertullian, Chrysippus, et al.). For these texts, see the Sources and Backgrounds section on *The Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale*.

3. *Trotula*: the supposed woman author of a well-known medieval treatise on the diseases of women; *Helowys*: Eloise, who loved the great scholar Abelard but argued in her letters against marrying him; she later became a nun and abbess.

4. In the *Fables* of Marie de France (#37), a peasant shows a lion a painting of a lion being killed by a peasant; the lion asks pointedly who painted that picture, a man or a lion.

5. Those born under the sign.

- 710 That women can nat kepe^o hir mariage! *i.e., be faithful in*
 But now to purpos why I tolde thee
 That I was beten^o for a book, pardee.^o *beaten / by God*
 Upon a night Jankin, that was our syre,^o *lord, husband*
 Redde on his book as he sat by the fyre
- 715 Of Eva^o first, that for hir wikkednesse *Eve*
 Was al mankinde broght to wrecchednesse,
 For which that Jesu Crist himself was slayn,
 That boghte us with his herteblood agayn.
 Lo, here expres^o of womman may ye finde *specifically*
- 720 That womman was the los^o of all mankinde. *destruction*
 Tho^o redde he me how Sampson loste his heres:^o *Then / hair(s)*
 Slepinge, his lemman^o kitte^o hem^o with hir sheres, *lover / cut / it (them)*
 Thurgh whiche tresoun loste he bothe his yën.^o *eyes*
- 725 Tho^o redde he me, if that I shal nat lyen, *Then*
 Of Hercules and of his Dianyre,^o *Deianira*
 That caused him to sette himself a fyre.^o *on fire*
 Nothing forgat he the sorwe and the wo
 That Socrates had with hise wyves two—
 How Xantippa caste pisse upon his heed:
- 730 This sely^o man sat stille, as^o he were deed; *poor / as if*
 He wyped his heed; namore dorste^o he seyn *dared*
 But 'Er^o that thonder stinte,^o comth a reyn.^o *Before / ceases / rain, shower*
 Of Phasipha⁶ that was the quene of Crete—
 For shrewednesse^o him thoughte the tale swete— *Out of cursedness*
- 735 Fy! spek namore, it is a grisly thing,
 Of hire horrible lust and hir lyking.^o *desire*
 Of Clitemistra,⁷ for hire lecherye,
 That falsly made hire housband for to dye,
 He redde it with ful good devocioun.
- 740 He tolde me eek for what occasioun
 Amphiorax⁸ at Thebes loste his lyf.
 Myn housbond hadde a legende of his wyf,
 Eriphilem, that^o for an ouche^o of gold *Eryphile, who / brooch*
 Hath prively^o unto the Grekes told *secretly*
- 745 Wher that hir housbonde hidde him in a place,
 For which he hadde at Thebes sory grace.^o *ill fortune*
 Of Lyvia tolde he me, and of Lucye.⁹
 They bothe made hir housbondes for to dye,
 That oon for love, that other was for hate.
- 750 Lyvia hir housbond, on an even^o late, *evening*
 Empoysoned^o hath, for that she was his fo.^o *Poisoned / foe*
 Lucya, likerous,^o loved hire housbond so, *lecherous*
 That, for^o he sholde alwey upon hire thinke, *so that*
 She yaf^o him swich a manere^o love-drinke, *gave / such a kind of*

6. Pasiphaë, who loved a bull and gave birth to the Minotaur.

7. Clytemnestra, who murdered her husband, Agamemnon, to keep Aegisthus, her lover.

8. Amphiarus, a soothsayer who prophesied his own death if he fought at Thebes; he was persuaded into battle by his wife.

9. Livia poisoned her husband, Drusus, at Sejanus's instigation; Lucilia, wife of the poet Lucretius, poisoned him with a love potion meant to increase his amorousness.

- 755 That he was deed er° it were by the morwe;° *before / morning*
 And thus algates° housbondes han sorwe. *in every way*
 Thanne tolde he me how oon Latumius
 Compleyned unto his felawe° Arrius, *companion*
 That in his gardin growed swich a° tree *a certain*
- 760 On which he seyde how that his wyves three
 Hanged himself° for herte despitous.° *themselves / spiteful*
 ‘O leve° brother,’ quod this Arrius, *dear*
 ‘Yif° me a plante° of thilke° blissed tree,
 And in my gardin planted shal it be!’ *Give / slip / that same*
- 765 Of latter date, of wyves hath he red
 That somme han slayn hir housbondes in hir bed,
 And lete hir lechour° dighte° hire al the night *lecher, lover / lie with*
 Whyl that the corps lay in° the floor upright.° *on / faceup*
 And somme han drive° nayles° in hir brayn° *driven / nails / brain*
- 770 Whyl that they slepte, and thus they han hem slayn.
 Somme han hem yeve° poysoun in hire drinke. *given*
 He spak more harm than herte may bithinke,° *imagine*
 And therwithal° he knew of mo° proverbes *in addition / more*
 Than in this world ther growen gras or herbes.° *plants*
- 775 ‘Bet is,°’ quod he, ‘thyn habitacioun
 Be with a leoun or a foul dragoun,
 Than with a womman usinge for° to chyde. *accustomed*
 Bet is,’ quod he, ‘hye in° the roof abyde° *high on / to stay*
 Than with an angry wyf down in the hous;
- 780 They been so wikked and contrarious° *contradictory*
 They haten that° hir housbondes loveth ay.° *what / ever*
 He seyde, ‘A womman cast° hir shame away *casts*
 Whan she cast of° hir smok;° and *off / smock, underdress*
 forthermo,° *furthermore*
 ‘A fair° womman, but° she be chaast also, *beautiful / unless*
 Is lyk a gold ring in a sowes° nose.’ *sow's*
- 785 Who wolde wene,° or who wolde suppose° *think / imagine*
 The wo that in myn herte was, and pyne?° *suffering*
 And whan I saugh° he wolde nevere fyne° *saw / finish*
 To reden on this cursed book al night,
 Al sodeynly° three leves° have I plight° *suddenly / pages / plucked*
 Out of his book, right° as he radde,° and eke° *just / read / also*
 I with my fist so took° him on the cheke *hit*
 That in oure fyr he fil° bakward adoun. *fell*
 And he upstirte° as dooth a wood leoun,° *jumped up / mad lion*
- 795 And with his fist he smoot° me on the heed *struck*
 That in° the floor I lay as° I were deed. *(So) that on / as if*
 And when he saugh° how stille that I lay, *saw*
 He was agast,° and wolde han fled his way, *frightened*
 Til atte laste out of my swogh° I breyde.° *swoon, faint / started up*
- 800 ‘O! hastow° slayn me, false theef?° I seyde, *hast thou / criminal*
 ‘And for my land thus hastow mordred° me? *murdered*
 Er° I be deed, yet wol I kisse thee.’ *Before*
 And neer he cam, and kneled faire° adoun, *courteously*
 And seyde, ‘Dere suster Alisoun,

- 805 As° help me God, I shall thee nevere smyte;° *So / strike*
 That I have doon, it is thyself to wyte.¹
 Foryeve° it me, and that I thee biseke'°— *Forgive / beseech*
 And yet eftsones° I hitte him on the cheke *again*
 And seyde, 'Theef! thus muchel° am I wreke.°' *much / avenged*
- 810 Now wol I dye: I may no lenger speke.¹
 But atte laste, with muchel care and wo,
 We fille acorded° by us selven two. *came to an agreement*
 He yaf me al° the brydel° in myn hond, *completely / bridle*
 To han the governance° of hous and lond, *direction*
- 815 And of his tonge and of his hond also;
 And made him brenne his book anon right tho.²
 And whan that I hadde geten unto me,° *gotten for myself*
 By maistrie,° al the soveraynetee,° *mastery / supremacy, sovereignty*
 And that he seyde, 'Myn owene trewe wyf,
- 820 Do as thee lust° the terme° of al thy lyf; *please / (to the) end*
 Keep° thyn honour, and keep eek myn estaat'°— *Preserve / public position*
 After that day we hadden never debaat.° *contention*
 God help me so, I was to him as kinde
 As any wyf from Denmark unto Inde,° *India*
- 825 And also° trewe, and so was he to me. *equally as*
 I prey to God that sit° in magestee,° *who sits / majesty*
 So blesse his soule for his° mercy dere!
 Now wol I seye my tale, if ye wol here."

Biholde the wordes bitween the Somonour and the Frere.

- The Frere° lough° whan he hadde herd al this. *Friar / laughed*
- 830 "Now, dame," quod° he, "so have I° joye or blis, *said / as I may have*
 This is a long preamble of° a tale!" *i.e., introduction to*
 And whan the Somnour herde the Frere gale,° *exclaim aloud*
 "Lo,"° quod the Somnour, "Goddess armes two,°" *Behold / by God's two arms*
 A frere wol entremette him° everemo! *intrude himself*
- 835 Lo, gode men, a flye and eek a frere
 Wol falle in every dish and eek matere.° *subject*
 What spekestow° of preambulacioun?° *Why speakest thou / preambling*
 What!° amble, or trotte, or [pace,]° or go sit down! *Lo / walk*
 Thou letttest° oure disport° in this manere." *hinderest / pleasure*
- 840 "Ye, woltow so,° sire Somnour?" quod the Frere; *wouldst thou (have it) so*
 "Now by my feith, I shal, er that I go,
 Telle of a somnour swich° a tale or two *such*
 That alle the folk shal laughen in this place."
 "Now elles,° Frere, I wol bishrewe° thy face," *otherwise / curse*
- 845 Quod this Somnour, "and I bishrewe me
 But if° I telle tales two or thre *Unless*
 Of freres, er I come to Sidingborne,³
 That° I shal make thyn herte for to morne°— *So that / mourn*

1. For what I've done, it's thyself (who is) to blame.

2. And (I) made him burn his book then at once.

3. Sittingbourne, a town roughly two-thirds of the way to Canterbury.

For wel I woot^o thy pacience is goon.”
 850 Oure Hoste cryde “Pees!^o and that anon!”^o *know*
 And seyde, “Lat the womman telle hire tale. *Peace / at once*
 Ye fare^o as folk that dronken been of ale. *act*
 Do, dame, tel forth youre tale, and that is best.”
 “Al redy, sire,” quod she, “right as yow lest,⁴
 855 If I have licence^o of this worthy Frere.” *the permission*
 “Yis, dame,” quod he, “tel forth, and I wol here.”^o *listen*

The Tale

In th’olde dayes of the King Arthour,
 Of which that Britons speken greet honour,
 All was this land fulfild of fayerye.^o *filled with fairy people*
 860 The elf-queen with hir joly companye
 Daunced ful ofte in many a grene mede.^o *meadow*
 This was the olde opinion, as I rede—
 I speke of manye hundred yeres ago—
 But now can no man see none elves mo.^o *more*
 865 For now the grete charitee and prayers
 Of limitours⁵ and othere holy freres,
 That serchen^o every lond and every streem, *visit*
 As thikke^o as motes in the sonne-beem,^o *thick / sunbeam*
 Blessinge halles, chambres, kichenes, boures,^o *bowers, sleeping rooms*
 870 Citees, burghes,^o castels, hye toures,^o *towns / high towers*
 Thropes, bernes, shipnes, dayeryes⁶—
 This maketh^o that ther been no fayeryes. *is the cause*
 For ther as wont to walken was an elf,⁷
 Ther walketh now the limitour himself
 875 In undermeles^o and in morweninges,^o *afternoons / mornings*
 And seyth his Matins^o and his holy thinges *morning service*
 As he goth in his limitacioun.^o *licensed begging area*
 Wommen may go now sauffy^o up and doun: *safely*
 In every bush or under every tree⁸
 880 Ther is noon other incubus⁹ but he,
 And he ne wol doon hem but dishonour.¹
 And so bifel^o that this King Arthour *it happened*
 Hadde in his hous a lusty bachelor,^o *young knight*
 That on a day cam rydinge fro river;²
 885 And happed that, allone as he was born,
 He saugh^o a mayde walkinge him biforn, *saw*
 Of whiche mayde anon, maugree hir heed,³
 By verray force^o he rafte^o hire maydenheed. *force itself / took*

4. “(I am) all ready, sir,” she said, “just as you wish.”

5. Friars given exclusive rights by license to beg within a certain area, or “limits.”

6. Villages, barns, sheds, dairies.

7. For there where an elf was accustomed to walk.

8. Places popularly thought to be haunted by fairies.

9. An evil spirit supposed to lie upon women in their sleep and have intercourse with them.

1. Shame, dishonor; as opposed to the begetting of devils upon them.

2. From hawking; riverbanks were favorite places for the sport.

3. (And) from this maid at once, in spite of anything she could do.

- For which oppressioun° was swich° clamour
 890 And swich pursute° unto the King Arthour, *wrong / such*
 That dampned° was this knight for to be deed *suing (for justice)*
 By cours of lawe, and sholde han° lost his heed— *condemned*
 Paraventure° swich was the statut° tho°— *was to have*
 But that° the quene and othere ladies mo° *By chance / statute, law / then*
 895 So longe preyeden° the king of° grace *Except / besides*
 Til he his lyf him graunted in the place, *begged / for*
 And yaf° him to the quene al at hir wille, *gave*
 To chese whether she wolde him save or spille.° *destroy*
 The quene thanketh the king with al hir might,
 900 And after this thus spak she to the knight
 Whan that she saugh hir tyme, upon a day:
 “Thou standest yet,” quod she, “in swich array° *such a condition*
 That of thy lyf yet hastow° no suretee.° *hast thou / security, guarantee*
 I grante thee lyf, if thou canst tellen me
 905 What thing is it that wommen most desyren.
 Be war, and keep thy nekke-boon from yren.⁴
 And if thou canst nat tellen it anon,° *right away*
 Yet wol I yeve° thee leve° for to gon *give / leave*
 A twelf-month and a day, to seche° and lere° *seek out / learn*
 910 An answer suffisant° in this matere.° *sufficient / subject*
 And suretee° wol I han, er that thou pace,° *a pledge, security / walk off*
 Thy body for to yelden° in this place.” *yield up, return*
 Wo° was this knight and sorwefully he syketh.° *Woeful / sighs*
 But what! he may nat do al as him lyketh,⁵
 915 And at the laste he chees him for to wende,° *decided to go off*
 And come agayn, right° at the yeres ende, *exactly*
 With swich answe as God wolde him purveye,° *provide for him*
 And taketh his leve and wendeth forth his weye.
 He seketh every hous and every place
 920 Wheras° he hopeth for to finde grace,° *Where / good fortune*
 To lerne what thing wommen loven most;
 But he ne coude arryven in no cost° *coast, country*
 Wheras he mighte finde in this matere° *subject*
 Two creatures accordinge in-fere.° *agreeing together*
 925 Somme seyde wommen loven best richesse,
 Somme seyde honour, somme seyde jolynesse;
 Somme riche array,° somme seyden lust abedde,° *adornment / pleasure in bed*
 And ofte tyme to be widwe° and wedde.° *widowed / (re)married*
 Somme seyde that oure hertes been most esed
 930 Whan that we been y-flatered and y-pled.°
 He gooth ful ny the sothe,° I wol nat lye: *very near the truth*
 A man shal winne us best with flaterye;
 And with attendance° and with bisnesse° *attention / diligence*
 Been we y-lymed, bothe more and lesse.⁶
 935 And somme seyn how that we loven best

4. Be wary, and keep thy neck from the ax (literally, iron).

5. But lo! he cannot do everything just as he pleases.

6. We are ensnared (caught, as with birdlime), both great and small.

	For to be free and do right as us lest, ^o	<i>just as we please</i>
	And that no man reprove us of ^o oure vyce,	<i>reproach us for</i>
	But seye that we be wyse, and no thing nyce. ^o	<i>not at all foolish</i>
	For trewely, ther is noon of us alle,	
940	If any wight wol clawe ^o us on the galle, ^o	<i>scratch / sore spot</i>
	That we nil kike for he seith us sooth: ⁷	
	Assay, ^o and he shal finde it that so dooth.	<i>Try</i>
	For be we never so vicious withinne,	
	We wol been holden ^o wyse, and clene of sinne.	<i>wish to be considered</i>
945	And somme seyn that greet delyt han we	
	For to ben holden stable ^o and eek secree, ^o	<i>steadfast / discreet</i>
	And in ^o purpos stedefastly to dwelle,	<i>one</i>
	And nat biwreye ^o thing that men us telle—	<i>reveal</i>
	But that tale is nat worth a rake-stele. ^o	<i>rake handle</i>
950	Pardee, we wommen conne nothing hele: ⁸	
	Witnesse on Myda ^o —wol ye here the tale?	<i>Midas</i>
	Ovyde, ^o amonges othere thinges smale,	<i>Ovid</i>
	Seyde Myda hadde under his longe heres, ^o	<i>hair</i>
	Growinge upon his heed two asses eres, ^o	<i>ears</i>
955	The whiche vyce ^o he hidde as he best mighte ^o	<i>deformity / could</i>
	Ful subtilly ^o from every mannes sighte,	<i>cleverly</i>
	That, save his wyf, ther wiste of it namo. ⁹	
	He loved hire most, and trusted hire also;	
	He preyede ^o hire that to no creature	<i>begged</i>
960	She sholde tellen of his disfigure. ^o	<i>disfigurement</i>
	She swoor him nay, for al this world to winne,	
	She nolde ^o do that vileinye ^o or sinne,	<i>would not / bad deed</i>
	To make hir housbond han so foul a name.	
	She nolde nat telle it for ^o hir owene shame.	<i>i.e., to spare</i>
965	But nathelees, hir thoughte that she dyde ¹	
	That ^o she so longe sholde a conseil ^o hyde.	<i>If / secret</i>
	Hir thoughte it swal ^o so sore ^o aboute hir herte	<i>swelled / painfully</i>
	That nedely som word hire moste asterolde, ²	
	And sith ^o she dorste ^o telle it to no man,	<i>since / dared</i>
970	Doun to a mareys ^o faste by ^o she ran.	<i>marsh / close by</i>
	Til she came there hir herte was a fyre, ^o	<i>on fire</i>
	And as a bitore bombleth in the myre, ³	
	She leyde ^o hir mouth unto the water doun:	<i>laid</i>
	“Biwreye ^o me nat, thou water, with thy soun,” ^o	<i>Betray / sound</i>
975	Quod she, “to thee I telle it, and namo; ^o	<i>no one else</i>
	Myn housbond hath longe asses eres ^o two!	<i>ears</i>
	Now is myn herte all hool, ^o now is it oute.	<i>whole (again)</i>
	I mighte no lenger kepe it, out of doute.”	
	Heer ^o may ye se, though we a tyme abyde, ^o	<i>Here / wait for a time</i>
980	Yet out it moot, ^o we can no conseil ^o hyde.	<i>must / secret</i>

7. Who will not kick back, because he tells us the truth. (The metaphor is of horses.)

8. By heaven, we women don't know how to conceal anything.

9. So that no one else knew about it except his wife.

1. But nonetheless, it seemed to her that she would die.

2. That of necessity some word must burst out of her.

3. And as a bittern (a marsh bird) booms in the mire.

- The remenant of the tale⁴ if ye wol here,
 Redeth Ovyde,^o and ther ye may it lere.^o *Read Ovid / learn*
- This knight of which my tale is specially,
 Whan that he saugh he mighte nat come therby,^o *i.e., learn the answer*
- 985 This is to seye, what wommen loven moost,
 Withinne his brest ful sorweful was the goost,^o *spirit*
 But hoom he gooth, he mighte nat sojourne.^o *linger*
 The day was come that hoomward moste^o he tourne,
 And in his wey it happed him to ryde *must*
- 990 In al this care under a forest-syde,^o *on the edge of a forest*
 Wheras he saugh^o upon a daunce go^o *saw / moving in a dance*
 Of ladies foure and twenty and yet mo;
 Toward the whiche daunce he drow^o ful yerne,^o *drew / eagerly*
 In hope that som wisdom sholde he lerne.
- 995 But certeinly, er^o he came fully there, *before*
 Vanished was this daunce, he niste^o where. *knew not*
 No creature saugh he that bar^o lyf, *bore*
 Save on the grene^o he saugh sittinge a wyf^o— *grass / woman*
 A fouler wight^o ther may no man devyse.^o *An uglier being / imagine*
- 1000 Agayn^o the knight this olde wyf gan ryse,^o *i.e., to meet / rose up*
 And seyde, “Sire knight, heerforth^o ne lyth no wey. *through here*
 Tel me what that ye seken,^o by youre fey!^o *seek / faith*
 Paraventure^o it may the better be: *By chance*
 These olde folk can muchel thing,” quod she.⁵
- 1005 “My leve^o mooder,” quod this knight, “certeyn^o *dear / certainly*
 I nam but deed, but if that I can seyn⁶
 What thing it is that wommen most desyre.
 Coude ye me wisse,^o I wolde wel quyte your *inform*
 hyre.”^o *repay your trouble*
 “Plighte^o me thy trouthe,^o heer in myn hand,” *Pledge / promise*
 quod she,
- 1010 “The nexte thing that I requere^o thee, *request of*
 Thou shalt it do, if it lye in thy might,^o *power*
 And I wol telle it yow er it be night.”
 “Have heer my trouthe,”^o quod the knight, “I grante.”^o *pledge / grant (it)*
 “Thanne,” quod she, “I dar me wel avante^o *dare well boast*
 1015 Thy lyf is sauf,^o for I wol stonde therby.^o *safe / i.e., I guarantee it*
 Upon my lyf, the queen wol seye as I.
 Lat see which is the proudeste of hem alle,
 That wereth^o on a coverchief^o or a calle,^o *wears / kerchief / hairnet*
 That dar^o seye nay of that^o I shal thee teche. *dares to / to that which*
- 1020 Lat us go forth withouten lenger speche.”
 Tho rounded^o she a pistel^o in his ere,^o *Then whispered / message / ear*
 And bad him to be glad and have no fere.
 Whan they be comen to the court, this knight
 Seyde he had holde^o his day, as he hadde hight,^o *kept to / promised*

4. In Ovid's conclusion—his version differs in several ways from the Wife of Bath's—the marsh reeds whisper the secret aloud whenever the wind blows.

5. “These old folk (i.e., *we* old folk) know many things,” said she.

6. I'm as good as dead unless I can say.

- 1025 And redy was his answe^re, as he sayde.
 Ful many a noble wyf, and many a mayde,
 And many a widwe^o—for that^o they ben wyse—
 The quene hirself sittinge as a justyse,^o
 Assembled been, his answe^re for to here;
 1030 And afterward this knight was bode appere.^o
 To every wight^o comanded was silence,
 And that the knight sholde telle in audience^o
 What thing that worldly wommen loven best.
 This knight ne stood nat stille as doth a best,^o
 1035 But to his questioun anon^o answerde
 With manly voys,^o that^o al the court it herde:
 “My lige^o lady, generally,” quod he,
 “Wommen desyren to have sovereyntee^o
 As wel over hir housbond as hir love,⁷
 1040 And for to been in maistrie^o him above.
 This is youre moste^o desyr, thogh ye me kille.
 Doth as yow list^o—I am heer at your wille.”
 In al the court ne was ther wyf, ne mayde,
 Ne widwe that contraried^o that^o he sayde,
 1045 But seyden he was worthy han^o his lyf.
 And with that word up stirte^o the olde wyf,
 Which that the knight saugh^o sittinge in the grene:
 “Mercy,” quod she, “my sovereyn lady quene!
 Er that youre court departe, do me right.^o
 1050 I taughte this answe^re unto the knight;
 For which he plighte me his trouthe there:
 The firste thing I wolde of him requere^o
 He wolde it do, if it lay in his might.^o
 Bifore the court thanne preye I thee, sir knight,”
 1055 Quod she, “that thou me take unto thy wyf,
 For wel thou wost^o that I have kept^o thy lyf.
 If I sey fals, sey nay, upon thy fey!”^o
 This knight answerde, “Allas and weylawey!^o
 I woot^o right wel that swich^o was my biheste.^o
 1060 For Goddes love, as chees^o a newe requeste:
 Tak al my good,^o and lat my body go.”
 “Nay thanne,” quod she, “I shrewe^o us bothe two!
 For thogh that I be foul^o and old and pore,
 I nolde^o for al the metal ne for ore
 1065 That under erthe is grave^o or lyth^o above
 But if^o thy wyf I were, and eek thy love.”
 “My love?” quod he, “Nay, my dampnacioun!^o
 Allas! that any of my nacioun^o
 Sholde evere so foule disparaged^o be!”
 1070 But al for noght, the ende^o is this, that he
 Constreynd was: he nedes moste^o hire wedde,
 And taketh his olde wyf and gooth to bedde.
 Now wolden som men seye, paraventure,^o

7. Over their husband(s) as well as over their lover(s).

	That for ^o my negligence I do no cure ^o	<i>out of / omit</i>
1075	To tellen yow the joye and al th'array ^o	<i>the pomp</i>
	That at the feste ^o was that ilke ^o day.	<i>feast / same</i>
	To whiche thing shortly ^o answe're I shal:	<i>in brief</i>
	I seye ther nas ^o no joye ne feste at al;	<i>was not</i>
	Ther nas but ^o hevynesse and muche sorwe,	<i>was only</i>
1080	For prively ^o he wedded hire on morwe, ^o	<i>privately / in the morning</i>
	And al day after hidde him as an oule, ^o	<i>like an owl</i>
	So wo was him, his wyf looked so foule. ⁸	
	Greet was the wo the knight hadde in his thought,	
	Whan he was with his wyf abedde ^o y-brought;	<i>to bed</i>
1085	He walweth, ^o and he turneth to and fro.	<i>tosses about</i>
	His olde wyf lay smylinge everemo, ^o	<i>all the while</i>
	And seyde, "O dere housbond, <i>benedicite!</i> ^o	<i>bless us</i>
	Fareth ^o every knight thus with his wyf as ye? ²	<i>Acts, behaves</i>
	Is this the lawe of King Arthures hous? ²	
1090	Is every knight of his so dangerous? ^o	<i>haughty, reluctant</i>
	I am youre owene love and eek youre wyf;	
	I am she which that saved hath youre lyf;	
	And certes yet dide I yow nevere unright. ^o	<i>wrong</i>
	Why fare ^o ye thus with me this firste night? ²	<i>act</i>
1095	Ye faren lyk a man had ^o lost his wit!	<i>(who) had</i>
	What is my gilt? ² for Goddes love, tel me it,	<i>error</i>
	And it shal been amended, if I may." ^o	<i>can</i>
	"Amended?" quod this knight, "allas! nay, nay!	
	It wol nat been amended nevere mo! ^o	<i>more</i>
1100	Thou art so loothly, ^o and so old also,	<i>loathsome, ugly</i>
	And therto comen of so lowe a kinde, ^o	<i>such low birth</i>
	That litel wonder is ^o thogh I walwe and winde. ^o	<i>it is / toss and turn</i>
	So wolde God myn herte wolde breste!" ^o	<i>burst</i>
	"Is this," quod she, "the cause of youre unreste?"	
1105	"Ye, certainly," quod he, "no wonder is." ^o	<i>it is</i>
	"Now, sire," quod she, "I coude amende al this,	
	If that me liste, er it were dayes three,	
	So wel ye mighte bere yow unto me." ⁹	
	But for ye speken of swich gentillesse ¹	
1110	As is descended out of old richesse ^o —	<i>wealth</i>
	That therefore sholden ye be gentil men ² —	
	Swich ^o arrogance is nat worth an hen.	<i>Such</i>
	Loke who that ^o is most vertuous alway,	<i>See who</i>
	Privee and apert, and most entendeth ay ³	
1115	To do the gentil dedes that he can,	
	And tak him for the grettest gentil man.	

8. So woeful was he, (because) his wife looked so ugly.

9. If it pleased me, before three days were past, if you could behave well toward me.

1. "Gentillesse" implies the kind of behavior and sensibility proper to good ("gentil") birth—openness, generosity, compassion, courtesy—but as the Wife points out (with learned authority to support her), a high ancestry is no guarantee of these things, nor does low birth necessarily preclude them.

2. That because of this, you must necessarily be "gentle"-men.

3. In private and in public, and always seeks most diligently.

	Crist wol ^o we clayme of ^o him oure gentillesse,	<i>desires (that) / from</i>
	Nat of oure elders ^o for hire old richesse.	<i>elders, ancestors</i>
	For thogh they yeve ^o us al hir heritage—	<i>give</i>
1120	For which we clayme to been of heigh parag ^o —	<i>parentage, birth</i>
	Yet may they nat biquethe, ^o for no thing, ^o	<i>bestow / by any means</i>
	To noon of us hir vertuuous living	
	That made hem gentil men y-called be,	
	And bad us folwen hem in swich degree. ^o	<i>in a similar condition</i>
1125	Wel can the wyse poete of Florence,	
	That highte Dant, speken in this sentence. ⁴	
	Lo, in swich maner rym ^o is Dantes tale:	<i>this sort of rhyme</i>
	'Ful selde ^o up ryseth by his branches ³ smale	<i>seldom</i>
	Prowesse ^o of man, for God of ^o his goodnesse	<i>The excellence / out of</i>
1130	Wol ^o that of ^o him we clayme oure gentillesse. ⁵	<i>Desires / from</i>
	For of oure elders may we no thing clayme	
	But temporel thing, that man may hurte and mayme. ⁶	
	Eek ^o every wight ^o wot ^o this as wel as I,	<i>Also / being / knows</i>
	If gentillesse were planted naturelly ^o	<i>by nature</i>
1135	Unto a certeyn linage doun the lyne,	
	Privee and apert, than wolde they nevere fyne ^o	<i>cease</i>
	To doon of gentillesse the faire offyce ^o —	<i>function(s)</i>
	They mighte ^o do no vileinye or vyce. ^o	<i>could / vicious act</i>
	Tak fyr, and ber it in ^o the derkeste hous	<i>bear it into</i>
1140	Bitwix this ^o and the Mount of Caucasus,	<i>here</i>
	And lat men shette ^o the dores and go thenne, ^o	<i>shut / away</i>
	Yet wol the fyr as faire lye and brenne, ^o	<i>burn</i>
	As ^o twenty thousand men mighte it biholde:	<i>As when</i>
	His office ^o naturel ay ^o wol it holde, ^o	<i>Its function / ever / perform</i>
1145	Up ^o peril of my lyf, til that it dye. ^o	<i>Upon / die out</i>
	Heer may ye see wel how that genterye ^o	<i>nobility</i>
	Is nat annexed ^o to possessioun,	<i>attached</i>
	Sith ^o folk ne doon hir operacioun ^o	<i>Since / perform their function</i>
	Alwey, as dooth the fyr, lo, in his kinde. ^o	<i>according to its nature</i>
1150	For, God it woot, men may wel often finde	
	A lordes sone ^o do ^o shame and vileinye;	<i>son / doing</i>
	And he that wol han prys of ^o his gentrye	<i>have praise (esteem) for</i>
	For ^o he was boren ^o of a gentil hous,	<i>Because / born</i>
	And hadde his elders noble and vertuuous,	
1155	And nil ^o himselven do no gentil dedis,	<i>will not</i>
	Ne folwe his gentil auncestre ^o that deed is, ^o	<i>ancestry / which is dead</i>
	He nis nat ^o gentil, be he duk or erl;	<i>is not</i>
	For vileyns ^o sinful dedes make a cherl. ^o	<i>villainous / churl</i>
	For gentillesse nis ^o but renomee ^o	<i>is nothing / the renown</i>
1160	Of thyne auncestres, for hire heigh bountee, ^o	<i>their great goodness</i>
	Which is a straunge thing ^o to thy persone.	<i>a thing foreign</i>
	Thy gentillesse cometh fro God allone.	
	Thanne comth oure verray gentillesse of grace:	

4. Who is called Dante, speak on this theme.

5. I.e., of the family tree.

6. But temporal (worldly) things, which can harm and maim man.

	It was nothing biquethe us with oure place. ⁷	
1165	Thenketh how noble, as seith Valerius, ^o	<i>Valerius Maximus</i>
	Was thilke Tullius Hostilius, ⁸	
	That out of povert ^o roos ^o to heigh noblesse.	<i>poverty / rose</i>
	Redeth Senek, ^o and redeth eek ^o Boëce: ^o	<i>Seneca / also / Boethius</i>
	Ther shul ye seen expres ^o that it no drede ^o is	<i>explicitly / doubt</i>
1170	That he is gentil that doth gentil dedis. ^o	<i>deeds</i>
	And therefore, leve ^o housbond, I thus conclude:	<i>dear</i>
	Al were it that ^o myne auncestres were rude, ^o	<i>Even though / humble</i>
	Yet may the hye ^o God, and so hope I,	<i>high</i>
	Grante me grace to liven vertuously.	
1175	Thanne am I gentil, whan that I biginne	
	To liven vertuously and weyve ^o sinne.	<i>put aside</i>
	And ther as ye of povert ^o me repreve, ^o	<i>poverty / reproach</i>
	The hye God, on ^o whom that we bileve,	<i>in</i>
	In wilful ^o povert chees ^o to live his lyf.	<i>voluntary / chose</i>
1180	And certes every man, mayden, or wyf,	
	May understonde that Jesus, hevene king,	
	Ne wolde nat chese a vicious living. ^o	<i>way of living</i>
	Glad ^o povert is an honest thing, certeyn; ^o	<i>Contented / certainly</i>
	This wol Senek and othere clerkes seyn.	
1185	Whoso that halt him payd of his poverte, ⁹	
	I holde him riche, al ^o hadde he nat a sherte. ^o	<i>although / shirt</i>
	He that coveyteth ^o is a povre wight, ^o	<i>covets / poor creature</i>
	For he wolde han that ^o is nat in his might. ^o	<i>what / power</i>
	But he that noght hath, ne coveyteth have, ^o	<i>desires (to) have</i>
1190	Is riche, although ye holde him but a knave. ^o	<i>one of low estate</i>
	Verray ^o povert, it singeth proprely. ^o	<i>True / by its nature</i>
	Juvenal seith of povert merily:	
	'The povre man, whan he goth by the weye,	
	Bifore the theves he may singe and pleye.'	
1195	Povert is hateful good, ^o and as I gesse,	<i>a hated good</i>
	A ful greet bringere out of businessse; ^o	<i>anxiety, care</i>
	A greet amendere eek of sapience ^o	<i>wisdom</i>
	To him that taketh it in ^o pacience.	<i>accepts it with</i>
	Povert is this, although it seme elenge, ^o	<i>miserable</i>
1200	Possessioun that no wight wol challenge; ^o	<i>claim (as his own)</i>
	Povert ful ofte, whan a man is lowe,	
	Maketh ^o his God and eek himself to knowe;	<i>Makes (him)</i>
	Povert a spectacle ^o is, as thinketh me,	<i>eyeglass</i>
	Thurgh which he may his verray frendes see.	
1205	And therefore, sire, sin that I noght yow greve, ¹	
	Of ^o my povert namore ye me repreve. ^o	<i>For / reproach</i>
	Now, sire, of elde ^o ye repreve me:	<i>old age</i>
	And certes, sire, thogh ^o noon auctoritee	<i>even if</i>
	Were in no book, ye gentils of honour ^o	<i>who are honorable</i>

7. Then our real *gentillesse* comes from (God's) grace; it was in no way bestowed upon us with our social position.

8. Third legendary king of Rome.

9. Whosoever considers himself satisfied with his poverty.

1. And therefore, sir, since I don't trouble you (with it).

- 1210 Seyn that men sholde an old wight^o doon favour (to) an old person
 And clepe^o him fader, for^o youre gentillesse; call / out of
 And auctours^o shal I finden, as I gesse. authorities (for this opinion)
- Now ther ye seye that I am foul^o and old, ugly
 Than drede^o you noght to been a cokewold,^o fear / cuckold
- 1215 For filthe and elde, also moot I thee,^o as I may prosper
 Been grete wardeyns upon^o chastitee. guardians of
 But nathelees, sin^o I knowe youre delyt,^o since / pleasure, wish
 I shal fulfille youre worldy appetyt.^o appetite, lust
- Chese^o now," quod she, "oon of these things tweye:^o Choose / two
- 1220 To han me foul and old til that I deye^o die
 And be to yow a trewe^o humble wyf, faithful
 And nevere yow displese in al my lyf,
 Or elles^o ye wol han me yong and fair, else
 And take youre aventure of^o the repair^o chance with / i.e., the crowd
- 1225 That shal be to youre hous, by cause of me,
 Or in som other place, may wel be.^o (it) may well be
 Now chese yourselfen whether that yow lyketh."^o whichever pleases you
- This knight avyseth him and sore syketh,²
 But atte laste he seyde in this manere:
- 1230 "My lady and my love, and wyf so dere,
 I put me in youre wyse governance:^o under your wise control
 Cheseth^o youreself which may be most Choose
 plesance^o the greatest pleasure
 And most honour to yow and me also.
 I do no fors the whether of the two,
- 1235 For as yow lyketh, it suffiseth me."³
 "Thanne have I gete of^o yow maistrye,"^o quod she, gotten from / mastery
 "Sin^o I may chese and governe as me lest?"^o Since / I please
 "Ye, certes,^o wyf," quod he, "I holde^o it best." certainly / consider
 "Kis me," quod she. "We be no lenger wrothe,^o longer wroth (angry)
- 1240 For by my trouthe,^o I wol be to yow bothe, i.e., I swear
 This is to seyn, ye,^o bothe fair and good. yes
 I prey to God that I mot sterven wood,^o may die mad
 But^o I to yow be also^o good and trewe Unless / just as
 As evere was wyf, sin^o that the world was newe. since
- 1245 And but I be to-morn as fair to sene⁴
 As any lady, emperyce,^o or quene, empress
 That is bitwixe the est and eke the west,
 Doth with my lyf and deeth right as yow lest.^o just as you please
 Cast^o up the curtin:^o loke how that it is." Lift / (bed-)curtain
- 1250 And whan the knight saugh^o verrailly^o al this, saw / in truth
 That she so fair was and so yong therto,
 For joye he hente^o hire in his armes two; clasped
 His herte bathed in a bath of blisse.
 A thousand tyme a-rewe^o he gan hire kisse,^o in a row / did kiss her
- 1255 And she obeyed him in every thing

2. This knight thinks it over and sorrowfully sighs.

3. I don't care which of the two (it be), for as it is pleasing to you, (so) it suffices me.

4. And unless I am in the morning as fair to look upon.

That mighte doon^o him plesance^o or lyking.^o *give / pleasure / delight*
 And thus they live unto hir lyves ende
 In parfit^o joye. And Jesu Crist us sende *perfect*
 Housbondes meke,^o yonge, and fresshe abedde,^o *meek / in bed*
 1260 And grace t'overbyde hem that we wedde.⁵
 And eek I preye Jesu shorte hir lyves^o *to shorten their lives*
 That^o noght wol be governed by hir wyves; *Who*
 And olde and angry nigardes of dispenche,^o *niggards with their money*
 God sende hem sone^o verray^o pestilence! *soon / a real*

The Friar's Prologue and Tale

The Prologue

1265 This worthy limitour,^o this noble Frere, *(see General Prologue, l. 209 and note)*
 He made alwey a maner louring chere^o *a sort of glowering expression*
 Upon^o the Somnour, but for honestee^o *Toward / for (the sake of) propriety*
 No vileyns^o word as yet to him spak he. *churlish, indecent*
 But atte laste he seyde unto the Wyf,
 1270 "Dame," quod he, "God yeve^o yow right good lyf! *give*
 Ye han^o heer touched, also moot I thee,^o *have / as I may thrive*
 In scole-matere greet difficultee.^o *Upon scholastic questions of great difficulty*
 Ye han seyde muchel thing^o right wel, I seye. *many things*
 But dame, here as we ryden by the weye
 1275 Us nedeth nat to speken but of game,^o *entertaining subjects*
 And lete auctoritees,^o on^o Goddes name, *leave (citing) authorities / in*
 To preching and to scoles of clergy.^o *to the learned schools*
 But if it lyke to^o this companye, *please*
 I wol yow of a somnour telle a game.^o *jest, funny story*
 1280 Pardee,^o ye may wel knowe by the name^o *By God / the term itself*
 That of a somnour may no good be sayd.
 I praye that noon of you be yvel apayd.^o *be offended*
 A somnour is a renner^o up and down *runner*
 With mandemens^o for fornicacioun, *summonses*
 1285 And is y-bet^o at every tounes ende."
 Our Host tho^o spak, "A, sire, ye sholde be hende^o *then / polite*
 And curteys, as^o a man of your estaat;^o *as (befits) / position*
 In companye we wol have no debaat.^o *quarreling, strife*
 Telleth your tale, and lat the Somnour be."
 1290 "Nay," quod^o the Somnour, "lat him seye to me *said*
 What so him list.^o Whan it comth to my lot,^o *Whatever pleases him / turn*
 By God, I shal him quyten^o every grot.^o *repay / groat (a coin)*
 I shal him tellen which^o a greet honour *what*
 It is to be a flateringe limitour,
 1295 And of many another manere crime
 Which nedeth nat rehercen for^o this tyme. *mention at*
 And his offyce I shal him telle, ywis."¹

5. And the grace to outlive them that we wed.

1. And I will reveal to him, indeed, (the true nature) of his office (his official duties).