

The Canterbury Tales:
The Wife of Bath's
Prologue and Tale

By Geoffrey Chaucer

Transcription, correction, editorial commentary, and markup by Austin Benson

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THE COMPLETE WORKS
OF
GEOFFREY CHAUCER, ^{intro} *EDITED, FROM NUMEROUS MANUSCRIPTS*
BY THE
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THE CANTERBURY TALES: TEXT

'Let every felawe telle his tale aboute,
And lat see now who shal the soper winne.'

The Knightes Tale; A890

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THE WIFE OF BATH'S PROLOGUE. The Prologe of the Wyves Tale of Bathe.

1 ‘Experience, though noon auctoritee, ^{experience}
2 Were in this world, were right y-nough to me
3 To speke of wo that is in mariage;
4 For, lordinges, sith I twelf yeer was of age, ^{twelf},
5 Thonked be god that is eterne on lyve,
6 Housbondes at chirche-dore I have had fyve;
7 For I so ofte have y-wedded be;
8 And alle were worthy men in hir degree, ^{degree}.
9 But me was told certeyn, nat longe agon is,
10 That sith that Crist ne wente never but onis, ^{once}
11 To wedding in the Cane of Galilee, ^{cana},
12 That by the same ensample taughte he me
13 That I ne sholde wedded be but ones.
14 Herke eek, lo! which a sharp word for the nones
15 Besyde a welle Iesus, ^{welle}, god and man,
16 Spak in reprove of the Samaritan:
17 “Thou hast y-had fyve housbondes,” quod he,
18 “And thilke man, the which that hath now thee,
19 Is noght thyn housbond;” thus seyde he certeyn;
20 What that he mente ther-by, I can nat seyn;, ^{mente}

21 But that I axe, ^{axe}, why that the fifthe man
22 Was noon housbond to the Samaritan?
23 How manye mighte she have in mariage?, ^{many}
24 Yet herde I never tellen in myn age
25 Upon this nombre diffinicioun;
26 Men may devyne, ^{devyne} and glosen up and down, ^{glosen}.
27 But wel I woot expres, with-oute lye, ^{woot}
28 God bad us for to wexe and multiplie, ^{wexe};
29 That gentil text can I wel understonde.
30 Eek wel I woot, ^{woot} he seyde, myn housbonde
31 Sholde lete fader and moder, and take me, ^{fader};
32 But of no nombre mencioniun made he,
33 Of bigamye or of octogamye, ^{bigamye};
34 Why sholde men speke of it vileinye?, ^{vileinye}

35 Lo, here the wyse king, dan Salomon, ^{Salomon};
36 I trowe he hadde wyves mo than oon, ^{oon};
37 As, wolde god, it leveful, ^{leveful} were to me
38 To be refreshed half so ofte as he!
39 Which yifte of god hadde he for alle his wyvis!, ^{yifte}
40 No man hath swich, that in this world alyve is.
41 God woot, ^{woot}, this noble king, as to my wit,
42 The firste night had many a mery fit, ^{fit}
43 With ech of hem, so wel was him on lyve!
44 Blessed be god that I have wedded fyve!
45 Welcome the sixte, whan that ever he shal.
46 For sothe, I wol nat kepe me chast in al, ^{chast};
47 Whan myn housbond is fro the world y-gon,
48 Som Cristen man shal wedde me anon;
49 For thanne thapostle, ^{apostle} seith, that I am free
50 To wedde, a goddes half, wher it lyketh me.
51 He seith that to be wedded is no sinne;
52 Bet is to be wedded than to brinne, ^{brinne}
53 What rekketh, ^{rekketh} me, thogh folk seye vileinye
54 Of shrewed Lameth and his bigamy, ^{Lameth?}

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55 I woot wel Abraham, ^{Abraham} was an holy man,
56 And Iacob, ^{Jacob} eek, as ferforth as I can;
57 And ech of hem hadde wyves mo than two;
58 And many another holy man also.
59 Whan saugh ye ever, in any maner age,
60 That hye god defended mariage
61 By expres word, ^{word?} I pray you, telleth me;
62 Or wher comanded he virginitee?
63 I woot as wel as ye, it is no drede,
64 Thapostel, whan he speketh of maydenhede, ^{maydenhede};
65 He seyde, that precept ther-of hadde he noon.
66 Men may conseille a womman to been oon,
67 But conseilling is no comandement, ^{conseilling};
68 He putte it in our owene Iugement.
69 For hadde god comanded maydenhede,
70 Thanne hadde he dampned wedding with the dede, ^{dampned};
71 And certes, if ther were no seed y-sowe, ^{seed},
72 Virginitee, wher-of than sholde it growe?
73 Poul dorste nat comanden atte leste
74 A thing of which his maister yaf noon heste.
75 The dart, ^{dart} is set up for virginitee;

76 Cacche who so may, who renneth best lat see.

77 But this word is nat take of every wight, ^{take},
78 But ther as god list give it of his might.

79 I woot wel, that thapostel was a mayde, ^{mayde};
80 But natheless, thogh that he wroot and sayde,
81 He wolde that every wight were swich as he,
82 Al nis but conseil to virginitee;
83 And for to been a wyf, he yaf me leve
84 Of indulgence; so it is no repreve
85 To wedde me, if that my make, ^{make} dye,
86 With-oute excepcioun of bigamy, ^{excepcioun}.
87 Al were it good no womman for to touche,
88 He mente as in his bed or in his couche;
89 For peril is bothe fyr and tow, ^{fyr} tasseble;
90 Ye knowe what this ensample may resemble, ^{ensample}.

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91 This is al and som, he heeld virginitee
92 More parfit than wedding in freletee, ^{freletee}.
93 Freelte clepe I, but-if that he and she
94 Wolde leden al hir lyf in chastitee.

95 I graunte it wel, I have noon envye,
96 Thogh maydenhede preferre bigamy, ^{preferre};
97 Hem lyketh to be clene, body and goost,
98 Of myn estaat I nil nat make no boost, ^{estaat}.
99 For wel ye knowe, a lord in his houshold,
100 He hath nat every vessel al of gold, ^{gold};
101 Somme been of tree, ^{tree}, and doon hir lord servyse.
102 God clepeth folk to him in sondry wyse, ^{sondry},
103 And everich hath of god a propre yifte, ^{yifte},
104 Som this, som that,—as him lyketh shifte.

105 Virginitee is greet perfeccioun,
106 And continence eek with devocioun.
107 But Crist, that of perfeccioun is welle, ^{welle},
108 Bad nat every wight he shold go selle, ^{selle},
109 All that he hadde, and give it to the pore,
110 And in swich wyse folwe hime and his fore.
111 He spak to hem that wolde live parfitly;
112 And lordinges, by your leve, that am nat I.
113 I wol bistowe the flour of al myn age
114 In the actes and in fruit, ^{actes} of mariage.

115 Telle me also, to what conclusioun, ^{conclusioun}
116 Were membres maad of generacioun, ^{membres},
117 And for what profit was a wight y-wrought?
118 Trusteth right wel, they wer nat maad for noght.
119 Glose who-so wole, and seye bothe up and down,
120 That they were maked for purgacioun, ^{purgacioun}
121 Of urine, and our bothe thinges smale
122 Were eek to knowe a femele from a male, ^{femele},
123 And for noone other cause: sey ye no?
124 The experience woot wel it is noght so;

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125 So that the clerkes, ^{clerkes} be nat with me wrothe,
126 I sey this, that they maked been for bothe,
127 This is to seye, for office, and for ese, ^{office}
128 Of engendrure, ther we nat god displese.
129 Why sholde men elles in hir bokes sette,
130 That man shal yelde to his wyf hir dette?, ^{dette}
131 Now wher-with sholde he make his payement,
132 If he ne used his sely instrument?
133 Than were they maad up-on a creature,
134 To purge uryne, and eek for engendrure.

135 But I seye noght that every wight is holde,
136 That hath swich harneys, ^{harneys} as I to yow tolde,
137 To goon and usen hem in engendrure;
138 Than sholde men take of chastitee no cure, ^{cure}.
139 Crist was a mayde, and shapen as a man,
140 And many a seint, sith that the world bigan,
141 Yet lived they ever in parfit chastitee.
142 I nil envye no virginitee;
143 Lat hem be breed of pured whete-seed, ^{whete},
144 And lat us wyves hoten barly-breed, ^{barly};
145 And yet with barly-breed, Mark, ^{Mark} telle can,
146 Our lord Iesu refreshed many a man, ^{refreshed}.
147 In swich estaat as god hath cleped us
148 I wol persevere, I nam nat precious, ^{precious}.
149 In wyfhode I wol use myn instrument
150 As frely as my maker hath it sent.
151 If I be daungerous, ^{daungerous}, god yeve me sorwe!
152 Myn housbond shal it have bothe eve and morwe,
153 Whan that him list com forth and paye his dette.
154 An housbonde I wol have, I nil nat lette,
155 Which shal be bothe my dettour, ^{dettour} and my thral, ^{thral},

156 And have his tribulacioun, ^{tribulacioun} with-al
157 Up-on his flessch, whyl that I am his wyf.
158 I have the power duringe al my lyf
159 Up-on his propre body, and nocht he.

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160 Right thus the apostel tolde it un-to me;
161 And bad our housbondes for to love us weel, ^{loveweel}.
162 Al this sentence me lyketh every-deel' —

163 Up sterte the Pardonour, and that anon,
164 'Now dame,' quod he, 'by god and by seint Iohn,
165 Ye been a noble prehour, ^{prehour} in this cas!
166 I was aboute to wedde a wyf; allas!
167 What sholde I bye it on my flesh so dere?, ^{bye}
168 Yet hadde I lever wedde no wyf to-yere!'

169 'Abyde!' quod she, 'my tale is nat bigonne;
170 Nay, thou shalt drinken of another tonne, ^{tonne}
171 Er that I go, shal savoure wors than ale.
172 And whan that I have told thee forth my tale
173 Of tribulacioun in mariage,
174 Of which I am expert in al myn age,
175 This to seyn, my-self have been the whippe;—
176 Than maystow chese whether thou wolt sippe
177 Of thilke tonne that I shal abroche.
178 Be war, ^{war} of it, er thou to ny approche;
179 For I shal telle ensamples mo than ten.
180 'Who-so, ^{whoso} that nil be war by othere men,
181 By him shul othere men corrected be.'
182 The same wordes wryteth Ptholomee, ^{ptolomy};
183 Rede in his Almageste, ^{almageste}, and take it there.'

184 'Dame, I wolde praye yow, if your wil it were,'
185 Seyde this Pardonour, 'as ye bigan,
186 Telle forth your tale, spareth for no man,
187 And teche us yonge men of your praktike, ^{praktike}.'

188 'Gladly,' quod she, 'sith it may yow lyke.
189 But yet I praye to al this companye,
190 If that I speke after my fantasye, ^{fantasye},
191 As taketh not a-grief of that I seye, ^{agrief};
192 For myn entente nis but for to pleye, ^{entente}.

193 Now sires, now wol I telle forth my tale, ^{now}.—

194 As ever mote I drinken wyn or ale,

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195 I shal seye sooth, tho housbondes that I hadde,
196 As three of hem were gode and two were badde.
197 The three men were gode, and riche, and olde, ^{three};
198 Unneth the mighte they the statut holde, ^{unneth}
199 In which that they were bounden un-to me.
200 Ye woot wel what I mene of this, pardee! ^{pardee}
201 As help me god, I laughe whan I thinke
202 How pitously a-night I made hem swinke, ^{swinke};
203 And by my fey, I tolde of it no stoor, ^{stoor}.
204 They had me yeven hir gold and hir tresoor;
205 Me neded nat do lenger diligence, ^{diligence}
206 To winne hir love, or doon hem reverence.
207 They loved me so wel, by god above,
208 That I ne tolde no deynthee of hir love, ^{deynthee}!
209 A wys womman wol sette hir ever in oon, ^{wys}
210 To gete hir love, ther as she hath noon.
211 But sith I hadde hem hoolly in myn hond, ^{hoolly},
212 And sith they hadde me yeven all hir lond,
213 What sholde I taken hede hem for to plese,
214 But it were for my profit and myn ese?
215 I sette hem so a-werke, ^{awerke}, by my fey,
216 That many a night they songen “weilawey!”
217 The bacoun was nat fet for hem, ^{bacoun}, I trowe,
218 That som men han in Essex at Dunmowe, ^{essex}.
219 I governed hem so wel, after my lawe,
220 That ech of hem ful blisful was and fawe, ^{fawe}
221 To bringe me gaye, ^{gaye} thinges fro the fayre.
222 They were ful glad whan I spak to hem fayre;
223 For god it woot, I chidde hem spitously, ^{chidde}.

224 Now herkne, how I bar me proprely,
225 Ye wyse wyves, that can understonde.

226 Thus shul ye speke and bere hem wrong on honde, ^{wrong};
227 For half so boldly can ther no man
228 Swere and lyen as a womman can, ^{swere}.
229 I sey nat this by wyves that ben wyse,

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230 But-if it be whan they hem misavyse.

231 A wys wyf, if that she can hir good, ^{can} ,
 232 Shal beren him on hond the cow is wood, ^{cow} ,
 233 And take wisse of hir owene mayde
 234 Of hir assent; but herkneth how I sayde, ^{herkneth} .

 235 ‘Sir olde kaynard, ^{kaynard} , is this thyn array?
 236 Why is my neighebores, ^{neighebores} wyf so gay?
 237 She is honoured over-al ther she goth;
 238 I sitte at hoom, I have no thrifty cloth, ^{thrifty} .
 239 What dostow at my neighebores hous?
 240 Is she so fair? artow so amorous?
 241 What rowne ye with our mayde?, ^{mayde} *benedicite* !
 242 Sir olde lechour, ^{lechour} , lat thy Iapes, ^{japes} be!
 243 And if I have a gossib or a freend,
 244 With-ouen gilt, thou chydest as a feend, ^{feend} ,
 245 If that I walke or pleye un-to his hous!
 246 Thou comest hoom as dronken as a mous,
 247 And prechest on thy bench, with yvel preef, ^{preef} !
 248 Thou seist to me, it is a greet meschief
 249 To wedde a povre womman, for costage, ^{costage} ;
 250 And if that she be riche, of heigh parage, ^{parage} ,
 251 Than seistow that it is a tormentrye
 252 To suffre hir pryde and hir malencolye, ^{pryde} .
 253 And if that she be fair, thou verray knave, ^{knave} ,
 254 Thou seyst that every holour, ^{holour} wol hir have;
 255 She may no whyle in chastitee abyde,
 256 That is assailed up-on ech a syde.

 257 Thou seyst, som folk desyre us for richesse,
 258 Somme for our shap, ^{shap} , and somme for our fairnesse;
 259 And som, for she can outhere singe or daunce,
 260 And som, for gentillesse and daliaunce, ^{daliaunce} ;
 261 Som, for hir handes and hir armes smale;
 262 Thus goth al to the devel, ^{devel} by thy tale.
 263 Thou seyst, men may nat kepe a castel-wal, ^{castel} ;

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264 It may so longe assailed been over-al.

 265 And if that she be foul, thou seist that she
 266 Coveiteth every man that she may se;
 267 For as a spaynel, ^{spaynel} she wol on him lepe,
 268 Til that she finde som man hir to chepe, ^{chepe} ;

269 Ne noon so grey goos, ^{goos} goth ther in the lake,
270 As, seistow, that wol been with-oute make.
271 And seyst, it is an hard thing for to welde, ^{welde}
272 A thing that no man wol, his thankes, helde.
273 Thus seistow, lore, ^{lore}, whan thow goost to bedde;
274 And that no wys man nedeth for to wedde,
275 Ne no man that entendeth un-to hevене.
276 With wilde thonder-dint and firy levene, ^{levene}
277 Mote thy welked, ^{welked} nekke be to-broke!

278 Thow seyst that dropping houses, and eek smoke,
279 And chyding wyves, maken men to flee
280 Out of hir owene hous; a! *benedicite* !
281 What eyleth swich an old man for to chyde?

282 Thow seyst, we wyves wol our vyces hyde
283 Til we be fast, and than we wol hem shewe;
284 Wel may that be a proverbe of a shrewe!

285 Thou seist, that oxen, asses, hors, and houndes,
286 They been assayed at diverse stoundes, ^{assayed};
287 Bacins, ^{bacins}, lavours, ^{lavours}, er that men hem bye,
288 Spones and stoles, and al swich housbondrye,
289 And so been pottes, clothes, and array;
290 But folk of wyves maken noon assay
291 Til they be wedded; olde dotard shrewe!
292 And than, seistow, we woloure vices shewe.

293 Thou seist also, that it displeseth me
294 But-if that thou wolt preyse my beautee,
295 And but thou poure, ^{poure} alwey up-on my face,
296 And clepe, ^{clepe} me “faire dame” in every place;
297 And but thou make a feste on thilke day
298 That I was born, and make me fresh and gay,

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299 And but thou do to my norice, ^{norice} honour,
300 And to my chamberere with-inne my bour, ^{chamberere},
301 And to my fadres folk and his allyes;—
302 Thus seistow, olde barel ful of lyes!

303 And yet of our apprentice Ianekyn,
304 For his crisp heer, ^{crisp}, shyninge as gold so fyn,
305 And for he squiereth me bothe up and down, ^{squiereth},
306 Yet hastow caught a fals suspecioun;

307 I wol hym noght, thogh thou were deed to-morwe.
308 But tel me this, why hydestow, with sorwe,
309 The keyes of thy cheste away fro me?
310 It is my good as wel as thyn, pardee.
311 What wenestow make an idiot of our dame, ^{wenestow?}
312 Now by that lord, that called is seint Iame,
313 Thou shalt nat bothe, thogh that thou were wood, ^{wood},
314 Be maister of my body and of my good;
315 That oon, ^{forgo} thou shalt forgo, maugree thyne yën, ^{maugree};
316 What nedeth thee of me to enquere or spyën? ^{enquere}
317 I trowe, thou woldest loke me in thy chiste, ^{loke!}
318 Thou sholdest seye, “wyf, go wher thee liste,
319 Tak your disport, I wol nat leve no talis, ^{talis};
320 I knowe yow for a trewe wyf, dame Alis.”
321 We love no man that taketh kepe or charge
322 Wher that we goon, we wol ben at our large.

323 Of alle men y-blessed moot he be,
324 The wyse astrologien Dan Ptholome, ^{ptolomy},
325 That seith this proverbe in his Almageste, ^{almageste},
326 “Of alle men his wisdom is the hyeste,
327 That rekketh never who hath the world in honde, ^{honde}.”
328 By this proverbe thou shalt understonde,
329 Have thou y-nogh, what thar thee recche or care
330 How merily that othere folkes fare?
331 For certeyn, olde dotard, by your leve,

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332 Ye shul have queynte, ^{queynte} right y-nough at eve.
333 He is to greet a nigard that wol werne, ^{nigard}
334 A man to lighte his candle at his lanterne;
335 He shal have never the lasse light, pardee;
336 Have thou y-nough, thee thar nat pleyne thee.

337 Thou seyst also, that if we make us gay
338 With clothing and with precious array,
339 That it is peril of our chastitee;
340 And yet, with sorwe, thou most enforce thee,
341 And seye these wordes in the apostles name,
342 “In habit, ^{habit}, maad with chastitee and shame,
343 Ye wommen shul apparaille yow,” quod he,
344 “And noght in tressed heer and gay perree,
345 As perles, ne with gold, ne clothes riche;”

346 After thy text, ne after thy rubriche, ^{rubriche}
347 I wol nat wirche as muchel as a gnat.
348 Thou seydest this, that I was lyk a cat, ^{cat};
349 For who-so wolde senge a cattes skin,
350 Thanne wolde the cat wel dwellen in his in;
351 And if the cattes skin be slyk and gay,
352 She wol nat dwelle in house half a day,
353 But forth she wole, er any day be dawed,
354 To shewe hir skin, and goon a-caterwawed, ^{caterwawed};
355 This is to seye, ^{borel}, if I be gay, sir shrewe,
356 I wol renne out, my borel for to shewe.

357 Sire olde fool, what eyleth thee to spyen?
358 Thogh thou preye Argus, ^{argus}, with his hundred yën,
359 To be my warde-cors, as he can best,
360 In feith, he shal nat kepe me but me lest;
361 Yet coude I make his berd, so moot I thee.

362 Thou seydest eek, that ther ben thinges three, ^{thinges},
363 The whiche thinges troublen al this erthe,
364 And that no wight ne may endure the ferthe;
365 O leve sir shrewe, Iesu shorte thy lyf!
366 Yet prechestow, and seyst, an hateful wyf
367 Y-rekened is for oon of these meschances.

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368 Been ther none othere maner resemblances
369 That ye may lykne your parables to,
370 But-if a sely wyf be oon of tho?

371 Thou lykenest, ^{lykenest} wommanes love to helle,
372 To bareyne lond, ther water may not dwelle.
373 Thou lyknest it also to wilde fyr;
374 The more it brenneth, ^{brenneth}, the more it hath desyr
375 To consume every thing that brent wol be.
376 Thou seyst, that right as wormes shende a tree,
377 Right so a wyf destroyeth hir housbonde;
378 This knowe they that been to wyves bonde.'

379 Lordinges, right thus, as ye have understonde, ^{lordinges},
380 Bar I stifly myne olde housbondes on honde, ^{baronhonde},
381 That thus they seyden in hir dronkenesse;
382 And al was fals, but that I took witnessse
383 On Ianekin and on my nece also.
384 O lord, the peyne I dide hem and the wo,

385 Ful giltelees, ^{giltelees}, by goddes swete pyne!
386 For as an hors I coude byte and whyne.
387 I coude pleyne, ^{pleyne}, thogh I were in the gilt, ^{gilt},
388 Or elles often tyme hadde I ben spilt, ^{spilt}.
389 Who-so that first to mille comth, first grint, ^{mille};
390 I pleyned first, so was our werre y-stint.
391 They were ful glad to excusen hem ful blyve, ^{excusen}
392 Of thing of which they never agilte hir lyve.

393 Of wenchis wolde I beren him on honde, ^{beren},
394 Whan that for syk unnethes, ^{unnethes} mighte he stonde.
395 Yet tikled it his herte, for that he
396 Wende that I hadde of him so greet chiertee, ^{chiertee}.
397 I swoor that al my walkinge out by nighte
398 Was for tespye wenchis that he dighte, ^{dighte};
399 Under that colour hadde I many a mirthe.
400 For al swich wit is yeven us in our birthe;

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401 Deceite, weping, spinning, ^{spinning} god hath yive
402 To wommen kindely, whyl they may live.
403 And thus of o thing I avaunte me, ^{avaunte},
404 Atte ende I hadde the bettre in ech degree,
405 By sleighte, or force, or by som maner thing,
406 As by continuel murmur or grucching;
407 Namely a bedde, ^{namely} hadden they meschaunce,
408 Ther wolde I chyde and do hem no plesaunce;
409 I wolde no lenger in the bed abyde,
410 If that I felte his arm over my syde,
411 Til he had maad his raunson, ^{raunson} un-to me;
412 Than wolde I suffre him do his nycetee, ^{nycetee}.
413 And ther-fore every man this tale I telle,
414 Winne who-so may, for al is for to selle, ^{winne}.
415 With empty hand, ^{emptyhand} men may none haukes lure;
416 For winning wolde I al his lust endure,
417 And make me a feyned appetyt, ^{appetyt};
418 And yet in bacon, ^{bacon} hadde I never delyt;
419 That made me that ever I wolde hem chyde.
420 For thogh the pope, ^{pope} had seten hem biside,
421 I wolde nat spare hem at hir owene bord.
422 For by my trouthe, I quitte hem word for word, ^{quitte}.
423 As help me verray god omnipotent,
424 Thogh I right now sholde make my testament,

425 I ne owe hem nat a word that it nis quit.
426 I broghte it so aboute by my wit,
427 That they moste yeve it up, as for the beste;
428 Or elles hadde we never been in reste.
429 For thogh he loked as a wood leoun, ^{leoun},
430 Yet sholde he faille of his conclusioun.

431 Thanne wolde I seye, ‘gode lief, tak keep
432 How mekely loketh Wilkinoure sheep, ^{sheep};
433 Com neer, my spouse, lat me ba, ^{ba} thy cheke!
434 Ye sholde been al pacient and meke,
435 And han a swete spyced conscience, ^{conscience},
436 Sith ye so preche of Iobes pacience, ^{Job}.
437 Suffreth alwey, sin ye so wel can preche;

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438 And but ye do, certain we shal yow teche
439 That it is fair to have a wyf in pees.
440 Oon of us two moste bowen, ^{bowen}, doutelees;
441 And sith a man is more resonable, ^{resonable}
442 Than womman is, ye moste been suffrable.
443 What ey leth yow to grucche thus and grone?
444 Is it for ye wolde have my queynte allone, ^{queynte?}
445 Why taak it al, lo, have it every-deel;
446 Peter, ^{peter}! I shrewe yow but ye love it weel, ^{shrewe}!
447 For if I wolde selle my bele chose, ^{chose},
448 I coude walke as fresh as is a rose, ^{fresh};
449 But I wol kepe it for your owene tooth, ^{tooth}.
450 Ye be to blame, by god, I sey yow sooth.’

451 Swiche maner wordes hadde we on honde.
452 Now wol I speken of my fourthe housbonde.

453 My fourthe housbonde was a revelour, ^{revelour},
454 This is to seyn, he hadde a paramour, ^{paramour};
455 And I was yong and ful of ragerye, ^{ragerye},
456 Stiborn and strong, and Ioly as a pye, ^{pye}.
457 Wel coude I daunce to an harpe smale,
458 And singe, y-wis, as any nightingale,
459 Whan I had dronke a draughte of swete wyn.
460 Metellius, ^{metellius}, the foule cherl, the swyn,
461 That with a staf birafte his wyf hir lyf, ^{birafte},
462 For she drank wyn, thogh I hadde been his wyf,

463 He sholde nat han daunted me fro drinke;
464 And, after wyn, on Venus, ^{venus} moste I thinke:
465 For al so siker as cold engendreth hayl, ^{hayl},
466 A likerous mouth moste han a likerous tayl.
467 In womman vinolent, ^{vinolent} is no defence,
468 This knowen lechours by experience.

469 But, lord Crist! whan that it remembreth me, ^{remembreth}
470 Up-on my yowthe, and on my Iolitee,
471 It tikleth me aboute myn herte rote, ^{rote}.
472 Unto this day it dooth myn herte bote, ^{bote}
473 That I have had my world as in my tyme.
474 But age, allas! that al wol envenyme, ^{envenyme},

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475 Hath me biraft my beautee and my pith, ^{pith};
476 Lat go, fare-wel, the devel go therwith!
477 The flour is goon, ther is na-more to telle,
478 The bren, ^{bren}, as I best can, now moste I selle;
479 But yet to be right mery wol I fonde.
480 Now wol I tellen of my fourthe housbonde.

481 I seye, I hadde in herte greet despyt, ^{despyt}
482 That he of any other had delyt.
483 But he was quit, by god and by seint Ioce, ^{ioce}!
484 I made him of the same wode a croce, ^{croce};
485 Nat of my body in no foul manere,
486 But certainly, I made folk swich chere,
487 That in his owene grece I made him frye, ^{grece}
488 For angre, and for verray Ialousye.
489 By god, in erthe I was his purgatorie, ^{purgatorie},
490 For which I hope his soule be in glorie.
491 For god it woot, he sat ful ofte and song, ^{song}
492 Whan that his shoo, ^{shoo} ful bitterly him wrong.
493 Ther was no wight, save god and he, that wiste,
494 In many wyse, how sore I him twiste.
495 He deyde whan I cam fro Ierusalem, ^{jerusalem},
496 And lyth y-grave under the rode-beem, ^{rode},
497 Al is his tombe noght so curious, ^{curious}
498 As was the sepulcre of him, Darius, ^{darius},
499 Which that Appelles, ^{appelles} wroghte subtilly;
500 It nis but wast to burie him preciously.
501 Lat him fare-wel, god yeve his soule reste,

502 He is now in the grave and in his cheste, ^{cheste} .
503 Now of my fifthe housbond wol I telle.
504 God lete his soule never come in helle!
505 And yet was he to me the moste shrewe;
506 That fele I on my ribbes al by rewe, ^{ribbes} ,
507 And ever shal, un-to myn ending-day.
508 But in our bed he was so fresh and gay, ^{bed} ,
509 And ther-with-al so wel coude he me glose, ^{glose} ,
510 Whan that he wolde han my bele chose , ^{belechose} ,
511 That thogh he hadde me bet on every boon, ^{boon} ,

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512 He coude winne agayn my love anoon.
513 I trowe I loved him beste, for that he
514 Was of his love daungerous, ^{daungerous2} to me.
515 We wommen han, if that I shal nat lye,
516 In this matere a queynte fantasye, ^{fantasye2} ;
517 Wayte, ^{wayte} what thing we may nat lightly have,
518 Ther-after wol we crye al-day and crave.
519 Forbode us thing, and that desyren we;
520 Prees, ^{prees} on us faste, and thanne wol we flee.
521 With daunger oute we al our chaffare, ^{chaffare} ;
522 Greet prees, ^{prees2} at market maketh dere ware, ^{dere} ,
523 And to greet cheep is holde at litel prys, ^{cheep} ;
524 This knoweth every womman that is wys.

525 My fifthe housbonde, god his soule blesse!
526 Which that I took for love and no richesse, ^{richesse} ,
527 He som-tyme was a clerk of Oxenford, ^{oxenford} ,
528 And had left scole, and wente at hoom to bord
529 With my gossib, ^{gossib} , dwellinge in oure toun,
530 God have hir soule! hir name was Alisoun.
531 She knew myn herte and eek my privetee, ^{privetee}
532 Bet than our parisshe-preest, so moot I thee!
533 To hir biwreyed I my conseil al, ^{biwreyed} .
534 For had myn housbonde pissed on a wal,
535 Or doon a thing that sholde han cost his lyf,
536 To hir, and to another worthy wyf,
537 And to my nece, which that I loved weel,
538 I wolde han told his conseil every-deel.
539 And so I dide ful often, god it woot,
540 That made his face ful often reed and hoot

541 For verray shame, and blamed him-self for he
542 Had told to me so greet a privetee.

543 And so bifel that ones, in a Lente,
544 (So often tymes I to my gossib wente,
545 For ever yet I lovede to be gay,
546 And for to walke, in March, Averille, and May,
547 Fro hous to hous, to here sondry talis, ^{sondry}),

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548 That Iankin clerk, and my gossib dame Alis,
549 And I my-self, in-to the felde wente.
550 Myn housbond was at London al that Lente;
551 I hadde the bettre leyser for to pleye, ^{leyser},
552 And for to see, and eek for to be seye
553 Of lusty, ^{lusty} folk; what wiste I wher my grace, ^{grace}
554 Was shapen for to be, or in what place?
555 Therefore I made my visitaciouns,
556 To vigilies, ^{vigils} and to processiouns, ^{procession},
557 To preching eek and to thise pilgrimages,
558 To pleyes of miracles, ^{pleyes} and mariages,
559 And wered upon my gaye scarlet gytes, ^{gytes}.
560 Thise wormes, ^{wormes}, ne thise motthes, ne thise mytes,
561 Upon my peril, frete hem never a deel;
562 And wostow why? for they were used weel.

563 Now wol I tellen forth what happed me.
564 I seye, that in the feeldes walked we,
565 Til trewely we hadde swich daliance, ^{daliance},
566 This clerk and I, that of my purveyance
567 I spak to him, and seyde him, how that he,
568 If I were widwe, sholde wedde me, ^{wedde}.
569 For certainly, I sey for no bobance, ^{bobance},
570 Yet was I never with-uten purveyance
571 Of mariage, nof othere thinges eek.
572 I holde a mouses herte nat worth a leek, ^{leek},
573 That hath but oon hole for to sterte to,
574 And if that faille, thanne is al y-do.

575 I bar him on honde, ^{baronhonde}, he hadde enchanted me;
576 My dame, ^{mydame} taughte me that soutiltee, ^{soutiltee}.
577 And eek I seyde, I mette, ^{mette} of him al night;
578 He wolde han slayn me as I lay up-right,
579 And al my bed was ful of verray blood,

580 But yet I hope that he shal do me good;
581 For blood bitokeneth gold, as me was taught.
582 And al was fals, I dremed of it right naught,

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583 But as I folwed ay my dames lore,
584 As wel of this as of other thinges more.

585 But now sir, lat me see, what I shal seyn?
586 A! ha! by god, I have my tale ageyn.

587 Whan that my fourthe housbond was on bere, ^{onbere},
588 I weep algate, ^{algate}, and made sory chere, ^{sory},
589 As wyves moten, for it is usage, ^{usage},
590 And with my coverchief covered my visage;
591 But for that I was purveyed of a make, ^{purveyed},
592 I weep but smal, and that I undertake.

593 To chirche was myn housbond born a-morwe
594 With neighebores, that for him maden sorwe;
595 And Iankinoure clerk was oon of tho.
596 As help me god, whan that I saugh him go
597 After the bere, me thoughte he hadde a paire
598 Of legges and of feet so clene and faire,
599 That al myn herte I yaf un-to his hold.
600 He was, I trowe, a twenty winter old,
601 And I was fourty, if I shal seye sooth;
602 But yet I hadde alwey a coltes tooth, ^{tooth}.
603 Gat-tothed, ^{gap} I was, and that bicam me weel;
604 I hadde the prente of sēynt Venus seel, ^{prente}.
605 As help me god, I was a lusty oon,
606 And faire and riche, and yong, and wel bigoon, ^{bigoon};
607 And trewely, as myne housbondes tolde me,
608 I had the beste quoniam, ^{quoniam} mighte be.
609 For certes, I am al Venerien, ^{venerien}
610 In felinege, and myn herte is Marcien.
611 Venus me yaf my lust, my likerousnesse, ^{likerousnesse},
612 And Mars yaf me my sturdy hardinesse.
613 Myn ascendent was Taur, ^{taur}, and Mars ther-inne.
614 Allas! allas! that ever love was sinne!
615 I folwed ay myn inclinacioun
616 By vertu of my constellacioun;
617 That made me I coude nocht withdrawe

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618 My chambre of Venus, ^{chambre} from a good felawe.
619 Yet have I Martes mark up-on my face, ^{martes},
620 And also in another privee place, ^{privee}.
621 For, god so wis be my savacioun,
622 I ne loved never by no discrecioun,
623 But ever folwede myn appetyt,
624 Al were he short or long, or blak or whyt;
625 I took no kepe, so that he lyked me,
626 How pore he was, ne eek of what degree.

627 What sholde I seye, but, at the monthes ende,
628 This Ioly clerk Iankin, that was so hende,
629 Hath wedded me with greet solempnitee,
630 And to him yaf I al the lond and fee
631 That ever was me yeven ther-bifore;
632 But afterward repented me ful sore.
633 He nolde suffre nothing of my list, ^{list}.
634 By god, he smoot me ones on the list, ^{list2},
635 For that I rente out of his book a leef, ^{leef},
636 That of the strook myn ere wex al deaf.
637 Stiborn I was as is a leonesse,
638 And of my tonge a verray Iangleresse, ^{jangleresse},
639 And walke I wolde, as I had doon biforn,
640 From hous to hous, al-though he had it sworn.
641 For which he often tymes wolde preche,
642 And me of olde Romayn gestes teche, ^{gestes},
643 How he, Simplicius Gallus, ^{gallus}, lefte his wyf,
644 And hir forsook for terme of al his lyf,
645 Noght but for open-heeded he hir say
646 Lokinge out at his dore upon a day.

647 Another Romayn tolde he me by name,
648 That, for his wyf was at a someres game
649 With-oute his witing, he forsook hir eke.
650 And than wolde he up-on his Bible, ^{bible} seke
651 That ilke proverbe of Ecclesiaste, ^{ecclesiastes},
652 Wher he comandeth and forbedeth faste,
653 Man shal nat suffre his wyf go roule aboute;

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654 Than wolde he seye right thus, with-uten doute,
655 “Who-so that buildeth his hous al of salwes, ^{salwes},
656 And priketh his blinde hors over the falwes,
657 And suffreth his wyf to go seken halwes,

658 Is worthy to been hanged on the galwes!"
 659 But al for noght, I sette noght an hawe
 660 Of his proverbes nof his olde sawe,
 661 Ne I wolde nat of him corrected be, ^{corrected} .
 662 I hate him that my vices telleth me,
 663 And so do mo, god woot! of us than I.
 664 This made him with me wood al outrely;
 665 I nolde noght forbere him in no cas.

666 Now wol I seye yow sooth, by seint Thomas, ^{thomas} ,
 667 Why that I rente out of his book a leef,
 668 For which he smoot me so that I was deaf.

669 He hadde a book that gladly, night and day,
 670 For his desport, ^{desport} he wolde rede alway.
 671 He cleped it Valerie and Theofraste, ^{valerie} ,
 672 At whiche book he lough alwey ful faste.
 673 And eek ther was som-tyme a clerk at Rome,
 674 A cardinal, that highte Seint Ierome, ^{jerome} ,
 675 That made a book agayn Iovinian, ^{jovinian} ;
 676 In whiche book eek ther was Tertulan, ^{tertulan} ,
 677 Crisippus, ^{crisippus} , Trotula, ^{trotula} , and Helowys, ^{helowys} ,
 678 That was abbesse nat fer fro Parys;
 679 And eek the Parables of Salomon, ^{parables} ,
 680 Ovydes Art, ^{ovid} , and bokes many on,
 681 And alle thise wer bounden in o volume.
 682 And every night and day was his custume,
 683 Whan he had leyser and vacacioun
 684 From other worldly occupacioun,
 685 To reden on this book of wikked wyves, ^{wyves} .
 686 He knew of hem mo legendes and lyves
 687 Than been of gode wyves in the Bible.
 688 For trusteth wel, it is an impossible
 689 That any clerk wol speke good of wyves,

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690 But-if it be of holy seintes lyves,
 691 Ne of noon other womman never the mo.
 692 Who peyntede the leoun, ^{leon} , tel me who?
 693 By god, if wommen hadde writen stories,
 694 As clerkes han with-inne hir oratories,
 695 They wolde han writen of men more wikkednesse
 696 Than all the mark of Adam may redresse.
 697 The children of Mercurie and of Venus, ^{mercury}

698 Been in hir wirking ful contrarious;
699 Mercurie loveth wisdom and science,
700 And Venus loveth ryot and dispence.
701 And, for hir diverse disposicioun,
702 Ech falleth in otheres exaltacioun;
703 And thus, god woot! Mercurie is desolat
704 In Pisces, ^{pisces}, wher Venus is exaltat;
705 And Venus falleth ther Mercurie is reysed;
706 Therfore no womman of no clerk is preysed.
707 The clerk, whan he is old, and may nocht do
708 Of Venus werkes, ^{werkes} worth his olde sho,
709 Than sit he doun, and writ in his dotage
710 That wommen can nat kepe hir mariage!

711 But now to purpos, why I tolde thee
712 That I was beten for a book, pardee.
713 Up-on a night Iankin, that was our syre,
714 Redde on his book, as he sat by the fyre,
715 Of Eva, ^{eve} first, that, for hir wikkednesse,
716 Was al mankinde broght to wrecchednesse,
717 For which that Iesu Crist him-self was slayn, ^{jesus},
718 That boghte us with his herte-blood agayn.
719 Lo, here expres of womman may ye finde,
720 That womman was the los of al mankinde.

721 Tho redde he me how Sampson, ^{sampson} loste his heres,
722 Slepinge, his lemman kitte hem with hir sheres;
723 Thurgh whiche tresoun loste he bothe his yën.

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724 Tho redde he me, if that I shal nat lyen,
725 Of Hercules, ^{hercules} and of his Dianyre,
726 That caused him to sette himself a-fyre.

727 No-thing forgat he the penaunce and wo
728 That Socrates, ^{socrates} had with hise wyves two;
729 How Xantippa caste pisse up-on his heed;
730 This sely man sat stille, as he were deed;
731 He wyped his heed, namore dorste he seyn
732 But “er that thonder stinte, comth a reyn.”

733 Of Phasipha, ^{phasipha}, that was the quene of Crete,
734 For shrewednesse, him thoughte the tale swete;
735 Fy! spek na-more—it is a grisly thing—
736 Of hir horrible lust and hir lyking.

737 Of Clitemistra, ^{clytemnestra}, for hir lecherye,
738 That falsly made hir housbond for to dye,
739 He redde it with ful good devocioun.

740 He tolde me eek for what occasioun
741 Amphiorax, ^{amphiorax} at Thebes loste his lyf;
742 Myn housbond hadde a legende of his wyf,
743 Eriphilem, that for an ouche of gold
744 Hath prively un-to the Grekes told
745 Wher that hir housbonde hidde him in a place,
746 For which he hadde at Thebes sory grace.

747 Of Lyma, ^{livia} tolde he me, and of Lucye, ^{lucye},
748 They bothe made hir housbondes for to dye;
749 That oon for love, that other was for hate;
750 Lyma hir housbond, on an even late,
751 Empoysoned hath, for that she was his fo.
752 Lucya, likerous, loved hir housbond so,
753 That, for he sholde alwey up-on hir thinke,
754 She yaf him swich a maner love-drinke,
755 That he was deed, er it were by the morwe;
756 And thus algates housbondes han sorwe.

757 Than tolde he me, how oon Latumius, ^{latumius}
758 Compleyned to his felawe Arrius,

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759 That in his gardin growed swich a tree,
760 On which, he seyde, how that his wyves three
761 Hanged hem-self for herte despitous.
762 “O leve brother,” quod this Arrius,
763 “Yif me a plante of thilke blissed tree,
764 And in my gardin planted shal it be!”

765 Of latter date, of wyves hath he red,
766 That somme han slayn hir housbondes in hir bed,
767 And lete hir lechour dighte hir al the night
768 Whyl that the corps lay in the floor up-right.
769 And somme han drive nayles in hir brayn
770 Whyl that they slepte, and thus they han hem slayn.
771 Somme han hem yeve poysoun in hir drinke.
772 He spak more harm than herte may bithinke.
773 And ther-with-al, he knew of mo proverbes
774 Than in this world ther growen gras or herbes.
775 “Bet is, ^{betis},” quod he, “thyn habitacioun
776 Be with a leoun or a foul dragoun,

777 Than with a womman usinge for to chyde.
778 Bet is, ^{betis2},” quod he, “hye in the roof abyde
779 Than with an angry wyf doun in the hous;
780 They been so wikked and contrarious;
781 They haten that hir housbondes loveth ay.”
782 He seyde, “a womman cast hir shame away, ^{shame},
783 Whan she cast of hir smok;” and forther-mo,
784 “A fair womman, but she be chaast also, ^{chaast},
785 Is lyk a gold ring in a sowes nose.”
786 Who wolde wenen, or who wolde suppose
787 The wo that in myn herte was, and pyne?

788 And whan I saugh he wolde never fyne
789 To reden on this cursed book al night,
790 Al sodeynly three leves have I plight
791 Out of his book, right as he radde, and eke,
792 I with my fist so took him on the cheke, ^{cheke},
793 That in our fyr he fil bakward adoun.
794 And he up-stirte as dooth a wood leoun,

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795 And with his fist he smoot me on the heed,
796 That in the floor I lay as I were deed, ^{dead}.
797 And when he saugh how stille that I lay,
798 He was agast, and wolde han fled his way,
799 Til atte laste out of my swogh I breyde:
800 “O! hastow slayn me, false theef, ^{theef}?” I seyde,
801 “And for my land thus hastow mordred me?
802 Er I be deed, yet wol I kisse thee.”

803 And neer he cam, and kneled faire adoun,
804 And seyde, “dere suster Alisoun,
805 As help me god, I shal thee never smyte;
806 That I have doon, it is thy-self to wyte, ^{self}.
807 Foryeve it me, and that I thee biseke”—
808 And yet eft-sones I hitte him on the cheke, ^{cheke2},
809 And seyde, “theef, thus muchel am I wreke;
810 Now wol I dye, I may no lenger speke.”
811 But atte laste, with muchel care and wo,
812 We fille acorded, by us selven two.
813 He yaf me al the brydel in myn hond, ^{brydel}
814 To han the governance of hous and lond,
815 And of his tonge and of his hond also, ^{tonge},
816 And made him brenne his book anon right tho, ^{book}.
817 And whan that I hadde geten un-to me,

818 By maistrie, al the soveraynetee,
819 And that he seyde, “myn owene trewe wyf,
820 Do as thee lust the terme of al thy lyf,
821 Keep thyn honour, and keep eek myn estaat”—
822 After that day we hadden never debaat.
823 God help me so, I was to him as kinde
824 As any wyf from Denmark un-to Inde, ^{denmark},
825 And also trewe, and so was he to me.
826 I prey to god that sit in magestee,
827 So blesse his soule, for his mercy dere!
828 Now wol I seye my tale, if ye wol here.’

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Biholde the wordes bitween the Somonour and the Frere, ^{somonour}.

829 The Frere lough, whan he hadde herd al this,
830 ‘Now, dame,’ quod he, ‘so have I Ioye or blis,
831 This is a long preamble of a tale!, ^{preamble},
832 And whan the Somnour herde the Frere gale,
833 ‘Lo!’ quod the Somnour, ‘goddes armes two!
834 A frere wol entremette him ever-mo., ^{entremette}
835 Lo, gode men, a flye and eek a frere
836 Wol falle in every dish and eek matere.
837 What spekestow of preambulacioun?
838 What! amble, or trotte, or pees, or go sit doun;
839 Thou lettest our disport, ^{lettest} in this manere.’

840 ‘Ye, woltow so, sir Somnour?’ quod the Frere,
841 ‘Now, by my feith, I shal, er that I go,
842 Telle of a Somnour swich a tale or two, ^{taleortwo},
843 That alle the folk shal laughen in this place.’

844 ‘Now elles, Frere, I bishrewe thy face,’
845 Quod this Somnour, ‘and I bishrewe me,
846 But if I telle tales two or thre, ^{talestwo}
847 Of freres er I come to Sidingborne, ^{sidingborne},
848 That I shal make thyn herte for to morne;
849 For wel I wool thy patience is goon.’

850 Our hoste cryde ‘pees! and that anoon!’
851 And seyde, ‘lat the womman telle hir tale.
852 Ye fare as folk that dronken been of ale.
853 Do, dame, tel forth your tale, and that is best.’

854 'Al redy, sir,' quod she, 'right as yow lest,
855 If I have licence of this worthy Frere.'

856 'Yis, dame,' quod he, 'tel forth, and I wol here.'

Here endeth the Wyf of Bathe hir Prologe.

THE TALE OF THE WYF OF BATHE.

Here bigenneth the Tale of the Wyf of Bathe.

857 In tholde dayes of the king Arthour,
858 Of which that Britons, ^{britons} spoken greet honour,
859 All was this land fulfilled of fayerye.
860 The elf-queen, with hir Ioly companye,
861 Daunced ful ofte in many a grene mede;
862 This was the olde opinion, as I rede,
863 I speke of manye hundred yeres ago;
864 But now can no man see none elves mo.
865 For now the grete charitee and prayeres
866 Of limitours, ^{limitours} and othere holy freres, ^{freres},
867 That serchen every lond and every stream,
868 As thikke as motes in the sonne-beem,
869 Blessinge halles, chambres, kichenes, boures,
870 Citees, burghes, castels, hye toures,
871 Thropes, ^{thrope}, bernes, shipnes, dayeryes,
872 This maketh that ther been no fayeryes.
873 For ther as wont to walken was an elf,
874 Ther walketh now the limitour him-self
875 In undermeles, ^{undermeles} and in morweninges,
876 And seyth his matins, ^{matins} and his holy thinges
877 As he goth in his limitacioun, ^{limitacioun}.
878 Wommen may go saufly up and down,
879 In every bush, or under every tree;
880 Ther is noon other incubus, ^{incubus} but he,
881 And he ne wol doon hem but dishonour, ^{dishonour}.

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882 And so bifel it, that this king Arthour
883 Hadde in his hous a lusty bachelor,
884 That on a day cam rydinge fro river;
885 And happed that, allone as she was born,
886 He saugh a mayde walkinge him biforn,
887 Of whiche mayde anon, maugree hir heed, ^{heed},
888 By verray force he rafte hir maydenheed, ^{rafte};
889 For which oppressioun was swich clamour
890 And swich pursute un-to the king Arthour,
891 That dampned was this knight for to be deed, ^{deed}
892 By cours of lawe, and sholde han lost his heed
893 Paraventure, swich was the statut tho;
894 But that the quene and othere ladies mo, ^{quene}
895 So longe preyeden the king of grace,
896 Til he his lyf him graunted in the place,
897 And yaf him to the quene al at hir wille, ^{wille},
898 To chese, whether she wolde him save or spille.

899 The quene thanketh the king with al hir might,
900 And after this thus spak she to the knight,
901 Whan that she saugh hir tyme, up-on a day:
902 ‘Thou standest yet,’ quod she, ‘in swich array,
903 That of thy lyf yet hastow no suretee.
904 I grante thee lyf, if thou canst tellen me
905 What thing is it that wommen most desyren?, ^{desyren}
906 Be war, and keep thy nekke-boon from yren, ^{yren} .
907 And if thou canst nat tellen it anon,
908 Yet wol I yeve thee leve for to gon
909 A twelf-month and a day, to seche and lere, ^{seche}
910 An answeere suffisant in this matere.
911 And suretee, ^{suretee} wol I han, er that thou pace,
912 Thy body for to yelden in this place.’

913 Wo was this knight and sorwefully he syketh, ^{syketh};
914 But what! he may nat do al as him lyketh.
915 And at the laste, he chees him for to wende,
916 And come agayn, right at the yeres ende,

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917 With swich answeere as god wolde him purveye;
918 And taketh his leve, and wendeth forth his weye.

919 He seketh every hous and every place,
920 Wher-as he hopeth for to finde grace,
921 To lerne, what thing wommen loven most;
922 But he ne coude arryven in no cost,
923 Wher-as he mighte finde in this matere
924 Two creatures accordinge in-fere, ^{fere} .

925 Somme seyde, ^{seyde}, wommen loven best richesse,
926 Somme seyde, honour, somme seyde, Iolynesse;
927 Somme, riche array, somme seyden, lust abedde,
928 And ofte tyme to be widwe and wedde.

929 Somme seyde, that our hertes been most esed,
930 Whan that we been y-flatered and y-pled.
931 He gooth ful ny the sothe, ^{sothe}, I wol nat lye;
932 A man shal winne us best with flaterye;
933 And with attendance, and with bisnesse,
934 Been we y-lymed, ^{ylymed}, bothe more and lesse.

935 And somme seyn, how that we loven best
936 For to be free, and do right as us lest,

937 And that no man repreve us of our vyce,
938 But seye that we be wyse, and no-thing nyce, ^{nyce}.
939 For trewely, ther is noon of us alle,
940 If any wight wol clawe us on the galle, ^{galle},
941 That we nil kike, for he seith us sooth;
942 Assay, and he shal finde it that so dooth.
943 For be we never so vicious with-inne,
944 We wol been holden wyse, and clene of sinne.

945 And somme seyn, that greet delyt han we
946 For to ben holden stable and eek secree,
947 And in o purpos stedefastly to dwelle,
948 And nat biwreye thing that men us telle.
949 But that tale is nat worth a rake-stele;
950 Pardee, we wommen conne no-thing hele, ^{hele};
951 Witnesse on Myda, ^{Midas}; wol ye here the tale?

952 Ovyde, amonges othere thinges smale,
953 Seyde, Myda hadde, under his longe heres,
954 Growinge up-on his heed two asses eres,

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955 The which vyce he hidde, as he best mighte,
956 Ful subtilly from every mannes sighte,
957 That, save his wyf, ther wiste of it na-mo.
958 He loved hir most, and trusted hir also;
959 He preyede hir, that to no creature
960 She sholde tellen of his disfigure.

961 She swoor him ‘nay, for al this world to winne,
962 She nolde do that vileinye or sinne,
963 To make hir housbond han so foul a name;
964 She nolde nat telle it for hir owene shame.’
965 But nathelees, hir thoughte that she dyde,
966 That she so longe sholde a conseil hyde;
967 Hir thoughte it swal so sore aboute hir herte, ^{swal},
968 That nedely som word hir moste asterte, ^{asterte};
969 And sith she dorste telle it to no man,
970 Doun to a mareys, ^{mareys} faste by she ran;
971 Til she came there, hir herte was a-fyre,
972 And, as a bitore bombleth in the myre, ^{myre},
973 She leyde hir mouth un-to the water doun:
974 ‘Biwreye me nat, thou water, with thy soun,’
975 Quod she, ‘to thee I telle it, and namo;
976 Myn housbond hath longe asses eres two!

977 Now is myn herte all hool, now is it oute;
978 I mighte no lenger kepe it, out of doute,
979 Heer may ye se, thogh we a tyme abyde,
980 Yet out it moot, we can no conseil hyde;
981 The remenant of the tale if ye wol here,
982 Redeth Ovyde, and ther ye may it lere.

983 This knight, of which my tale is specially,
984 Whan that he saugh he mighte nat come therby,
985 This is to seye, what wommen loven moost,
986 With-inne his brest ful sorweful was the goost,^{goost};
987 But hoom he gooth, he mighte nat sojourne,^{sojourne}.
988 The day was come, that hoomward moste he tourne,
989 And in his wey it happed him to ryde,
990 In al this care, under a forest-syde,

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991 Wher-as he saugh up-on a daunce go
992 Of ladies foure and twenty, and yet mo;
993 Toward the whiche daunce he drow ful yerne,
994 In hope that som wisdom sholde he lerne.
995 But certainly, er he came fully there,
996 Vanished was this daunce,^{vanished}, he niste where.
997 No creature saugh he that bar lyf,
998 Save on the grene he saugh sittinge a wyf;
999 A fouler wight ther may no man devyse,^{fouler}.
1000 Agayn the knight this olde wyf gan ryse,
1001 And seyde, 'sir knight, heer-forth ne lyth no wey.
1002 Tel me, what that ye seken, by your fey?
1003 Paraventure it may the bettre be;
1004 These olde folk can muchel thing,' quod she.

1005 'My leve mooder,' quod this knight certeyn,
1006 'I nam but deed, but-if that I can seyn
1007 What thing it is that wommen most desyre;
1008 Coude ye me wisse, I wolde wel quyte your hyre.,^{wisse}

1009 'Plighte me thy trouthe, heer in myn hand,^{trouthe},' quod she,
1010 'The nexte thing that I requere thee,
1011 Thou shalt it do, if it lye in thy might;
1012 And I wol telle it yow er it be night.'
1013 'Have heer my trouthe,' quod the knight, 'I grante.'

1014 'Thanne,' quod she, 'I dar me wel avante,^{avante},
1015 Thy lyf is sauf, for I wol stonde therby,
1016 Up-on my lyf, the queen wol seye as I.

1017 Lat see which is the proudeste of hem alle,
1018 That wereth on a coverchief or a calle, ^{coverchief},
1019 That dar seye nay, of that I shal thee teche;
1020 Lat us go forth with-ouen lenger speche.’
1021 Tho rouned she a pistel in his ere, ^{pistel},
1022 And bad him to be glad, and have no fere.

1023 Whan they be comen to the court, this knight
1024 Seyde he had holde his day, as he hadde hight, ^{hight},
1025 And redy was his answer, as he sayde.
1026 Ful many a noble wyf, and many a mayde,
1027 And many a widwe, for that they ben wyse,

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1028 The quene hir-self sittinge as a Iustyse, ^{justyse},
1029 Assembled been, his answer for to here;
1030 And afterward this knight was bode appere.

1031 To every wight comanded was silence,
1032 And that the knight sholde telle in audience,
1033 What thing that worldly wommen loven best.
1034 This knight ne stood nat stille, ^{stille} as doth a best,
1035 But to his questioun anon answerde
1036 With manly voys, that al the court it herde:

1037 ‘My lige lady, generally,’ quod he,
1038 ‘Wommen desyren to have sovereyntee
1039 As wel over hir housbond as hir love, ^{love},
1040 And for to been in maistrie, ^{maistrie} him above;
1041 This is your moste desyr, thogh ye me kille,
1042 Doth as yow list, I am heer at your wille, ^{wille},

1043 In al the court ne was ther wyf ne mayde,
1044 Ne widwe, that contraried that he sayde,
1045 But seyden, ‘he was worthy han his lyf.’

1046 And with that word up stirte the olde wyf,
1047 Which that the knight saugh sittinge in the grene:
1048 ‘Mercy,’ quod she, ‘my sovereyn lady quene!
1049 Er that your court departe, do me right.
1050 I taughte this answer un-to the knight;
1051 For which he plighte me his trouthe there,
1052 The firste thing I wolde of him requere,
1053 He wolde it do, if it lay in his might.
1054 Bifore the court than preye I thee, sir knight,’
1055 Quod she, ‘that thou me take un-to thy wyf;

1056 For wel thou wost that I have kept thy lyf.
1057 If I sey fals, sey nay, up-on thy fey!’
1058 This knight answerde, ‘allas! and weylawey!
1059 I woot right wel that swich was my biheste.
1060 For goddes love, as chees a newe requeste,^{chees,}
1061 Tak al my good, and lat my body go.,^{body,}
1062 ‘Nay than,’ quod she, ‘I shrewe us bothe two!
1063 For thogh that I be foul, and old, and pore,

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1064 I nolde for al the metal, ne for ore,
1065 That under erthe is grave, or lyth above,
1066 But-if thy wyf I were, and eek thy love,^{eek}.’
1067 ‘My love?’ quod he; ‘nay, my dampnacioun!
1068 Allas! that any of my nacioun
1069 Sholde ever so foule disparaged be!’
1070 But al for noght, the ende is this, that he
1071 Constreynd was, he nedes moste hir wedde;
1072 And taketh his olde wyf, and gooth to bedde.
1073 Now wolden som men seye, paraventure,
1074 That, for my necligence, I do no cure
1075 To tellen yow the Ioye and al tharray
1076 That at the feste was that ilke day.
1077 To whiche thing shortly answer I shal;
1078 I seye, ther nas no Ioye ne feste at al,^{feste},
1079 Ther nas but hevinesse and mucche sorwe;
1080 For prively he wedded hir on a morwe,
1081 And al day after hidde him as an oule,^{oule};
1082 So wo was him, his wyf looked so foule.
1083 Greet was the wo the knight hadde in his thocht,
1084 Whan he was with his wyf a-bedde y-brought;
1085 He walweth, and he turneth to and fro.
1086 His olde wyf lay smylinge evermo,
1087 And seyde, ‘o dere housbond, *benedicite* !
1088 Fareth every knight thus with his wyf as ye?
1089 Is this the lawe of king Arthures hous?
1090 Is every knight of his so dangerous?,^{dangerous}
1091 I am your owene love and eek your wyf;
1092 I am she, which that saved hath your lyf;
1093 And certes, yet dide I yow never unright;
1094 Why fare ye thus with me this firste night?

1095 Ye faren lyk a man had lost his wit;
1096 What is my gilt? for goddes love, tel me it,
1097 And it shal been amended, if I may.'

1098 'Amended?' quod this knight, 'allas! nay, nay!
1099 It wol nat been amended never mo!
1100 Thou art so loothly, ^{loothly}, and so old also,

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1101 And ther-to comen of so lowe a kinde, ^{kinde},
1102 That litel wonder is, thogh I walwe and winde, ^{walwe}.
1103 So wolde god myn herte wolde breste!, ^{breste},

1104 'Is this,' quod she, 'the cause of your unreste?'
1105 'Ye, certainly,' quod he, 'no wonder is.'

1106 'Now, sire,' quod she, 'I coude amende al this,
1107 If that me liste, er it were dayes three,
1108 So wel ye mighte bere yow un-to me.

1109 But for ye speken of swich gentillesse
1110 As is descended out of old richesse,
1111 That therfore sholden ye be gentil men,
1112 Swich arrogance is nat worth an hen, ^{arrogance}.
1113 Loke who that is most vertuous alway,
1114 Privee and apert, and most entendeth ay
1115 To do the gentil dedes that he can,
1116 And tak him for the grettest gentil man.
1117 Crist wol, we clayme of him our gentillesse,
1118 Nat of our eldres for hir old richesse.
1119 For thogh they yeve us al hir heritage, ^{heritage},
1120 For which we clayme to been of heigh parage,
1121 Yet may they nat biquethe, for no-thing,
1122 To noon of us hir vertuous living,
1123 That made hem gentil men y-called be;
1124 And bad us folwen hem in swich degree.

1125 Wel can the wyse poete of Florence, ^{florence},
1126 That highte Dant, speken in this sentence;
1127 Lo in swich maner rym is Dantes tale:
1128 "Ful, ^{comedia} selde up ryseth by his branches smale
1129 Prowesse of man, for god, of his goodnesse,
1130 Wol that of him we clayme our gentillesse;"
1131 For of our eldres may we no-thing clayme
1132 But temporel thing, that man may hurte and mayme.

1133 Eek every wight wot this as wel as I,
1134 If gentillesse were planted naturelly, ^{gentillesse}
1135 Un-to a certeyn linage, doun the lyne,
1136 Privee ne apert, than wolde they never fyne

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1137 To doon of gentillesse the faire offyce;
1138 They mighte do no vileinye or vyce.

1139 Tak fyr, and ber it in the derkeste hous
1140 Bitwix this and the mount of Caucasus, ^{Caucasus},
1141 And lat men shette the dores and go thenne;
1142 Yet wol the fyr as faire lye and brenne,
1143 As twenty thousand men mighte it biholde;
1144 His office naturel ay wol it holde,
1145 Up peril of my lyf, til that it dye.

1146 Heer may ye see wel, how that genterye, ^{genterye}
1147 Is nat annexed to possessioun,
1148 Sith folk ne doon hir operacioun
1149 Alwey, as dooth the fyr, ^{fyr}, lo! in his kinde.
1150 For, god it woot, men may wel often finde
1151 A lordes sone do shame and vileinye;
1152 And he that wol han prys of his gentrye
1153 For he was boren of a gentil hous,
1154 And hadde hise eldres noble and vertuous,
1155 And nil him-selven do no gentil dedis,
1156 Ne folwe his gentil auncestre that deed is,
1157 He nis nat gentil, be he duk or erl;
1158 For vileyns sinful dedes make a cherl.
1159 For gentillesse nis but renomee, ^{renomee}
1160 Of thyne auncestres, for hir heigh bountee,
1161 Which is a strange, ^{strange} thing to thy persone.
1162 Thy gentillesse cometh fro god allone;
1163 Than comth our verray gentillesse of grace,
1164 It was no-thing biquethe us with our place.

1165 Thenketh how noble, as seith Valerius, ^{valerius},
1166 Was thilke Tullius Hostilius, ^{tullius},
1167 That out of povert roos to heigh noblesse.
1168 Redeth Senek, ^{seneca}, and redeth eek Boëce, ^{boethius},
1169 Ther shul ye seen expres that it no drede is,
1170 That he is gentil that doth gentil dedis;
1171 And therefore, leve housbond, I thus conclude,

1172 Al were it that myne auncestres were rude,
1173 Yet may the hye god, and so hope I,
1174 Grante me grace to liven vertuously.
1175 Thanne am I gentil, ^{thanne}, whan that I biginne
1176 To liven vertuously and weyve sinne.

1177 And ther-as ye of povert me repreve,
1178 The hye god, on whom that we bileve,
1179 In wilful povert chees to live his lyf, ^{povert}.
1180 And certes every man, mayden, or wyf,
1181 May understonde that Iesus, hevene king,
1182 Ne wolde nat chese a vicious living.
1183 Glad povert is an honest thing, certeyn;
1184 This wol Senek and othere clerkes seyn.
1185 Who-so that halt him payd of his povert,
1186 I holde him riche, al hadde he nat a sherte.
1187 He that coveyteth is a povre wight,
1188 For he wolde han that is nat in his might.
1189 But he that noght hath, ne coveyteth have,
1190 Is riche, al-though ye holde him but a knave.

1191 Verray povert, it singeth proprely;
1192 Juvenal, ^{juvenal} seith of povert merily:
1193 “The povre man, whan he goth by the weye,
1194 Bifore the theves he may singe and pleye.”
1195 Povert is hateful good, and, as I gesse,
1196 A ful greet bringer out of businesse;
1197 A greet amender eek of sapience, ^{amender}
1198 To him that taketh it in pacience.
1199 Povert is this, al-though it seme elenge, ^{elenge}:
1200 Possessioun, that no wight wol chalenge.
1201 Povert ful ofte, whan a man is lowe,
1202 Maketh his god and eek him-self to knowe.
1203 Povert a spectacle is, as thinketh me,
1204 Thurgh which he may his verray frendes see, ^{frendes}.
1205 And therefore, sire, sin that I noght yow greve,
1206 Of my povert na-more ye me repreve.

1207 Now, sire, of elde ye repreve me;
1208 And certes, sire, thogh noon auctoritee, ^{thogh}
1209 Were in no book, ye gentils of honour
1210 Seyn that men sholde an old wight doon favour,
1211 And clepe him fader, for your gentillesse;

1212 And auctours shal I finden, as I gesse.
1213 Now ther ye seye, that I am foul and old,
1214 Than drede you noght to been a cokewold, ^{cokewold};
1215 For filthe and elde, al-so moot I thee,
1216 Been grete wardeyns up-on chastitee.
1217 But nathelees, sin I knowe your delyt,
1218 I shal fulfille your worldly appetyt.

1219 Chese now,' quod she, 'oon of these thinges tweye,
1220 To han me foul and old til that I deye,
1221 And be to yow a trewe humble wyf,
1222 And never yow displese in al my lyf,
1223 Or elles ye wol han me yong and fair,
1224 And take your aventure of the repair
1225 That shal be to your hous, by-cause of me,
1226 Or in som other place, ^{place}, may wel be.
1227 Now chese your-selven, whether that yow lyketh.'

1228 This knight avyseth him, ^{avyseth} and sore syketh,
1229 But atte laste he seyde in this manere,
1230 'My lady and my love, and wyf so dere,
1231 I put me in your wyse governance;
1232 Cheseth your-self, which may be most plesance,
1233 And most honour to yow and me also.
1234 I do no fors the whether of the two, ^{fors};
1235 For as yow lyketh, it suffiseth me.'

1236 'Thanne have I gete of yow maistrye,' quod she,
1237 'Sin I may chese, and governe as me lest?'

1238 'Ye, certes, wyf,' quod he, 'I holde it best.'

1239 'Kis me,' quod she, 'we be no lenger wrothe;
1240 For, by my trouthe, I wol be to yow bothe, ^{bothe},
1241 This is to seyn, ye, bothe fair and good.
1242 I prey to god that I mot sterven wood, ^{wood},
1243 But I to yow be al-so good and trewe
1244 As ever was wyf, sin that the world was newe.

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1245 And, but I be to-morn as fair to sene
1246 As any lady, emperyce, or quene,
1247 That is bitwixe the est and eke the west,
1248 Doth with my lyf and deeth right as yow lest, ^{lest}.
1249 Cast up the curtin, loke how that it is.'

1260 And whan the knight saugh verrailly al this,
1251 That she so fair was, and so yong ther-to,
1252 For Ioye he hente hir in his armes two,
1253 His herte bathed in a bath of blisse;
1254 A thousand tyme a-rewe he gan hir kisse.
1255 And she obeyed him in every thing
1256 That mighte doon him plesance or lyking.

1257 And thus they live, un-to hir lyves ende,
1258 In parfit Ioye; and Iesu Crist us sende
1259 Housbondes meke, yonge, and fresshe a-bedde,
1260 And grace toverbyde hem that we wedde.
1261 And eek I preye Iesu shorte hir lyves
1262 That wol nat be governed by hir wyves;
1263 And olde and angry nigardes of dispence,
1264 God sende hem sone verray pestilence.

Here endeth the Wyves Tale of Bathe.

Footnotes

intro *The Wife of Bath's Prologue* and *The Wife of Bath's Tale* are perhaps the most well-known sections of *The Canterbury Tales*. The *Prologue* offers a substantial insight into Alison's (The Wife of Bath's) heterodox views on love and marriage as she recounts her five husbands and the trials of her marriages to them. The *Tale* enshrines Alison's philosophy recounts the story of an Arthurian knight who, after committing an act of sexual assault, is forced to discover what women desire most. Alison's pragmatism and down-to-earth tone has made her one of the most memorable and beloved characters not only of *The Canterbury Tales*, but of the whole of medieval literature.

- [AJB]

skeat Walter William Skeat (1835–1912) was one of the most prolific and learned philologists of his time. While he was most famous for his *Etymological Dictionary of the English Language*, his edition of *The Canterbury Tales* was an academic standard until the publication of Larry Benson's *The Riverside Chaucer*.

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