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## THE MERCHANT'S PROLOGUE



### *The Prologe of the Marchantes Tale.*

“Wepying and waylyng, care and oother sorwe  
I knowe ynogh, on even and a-morwe,” 1214  
Quod the Marchant, “and so doon other mo  
That wedded been. I trowe that it be so,  
For wel I woot it fareth so with me.  
I have a wyf, the worste that may be;  
For thogh the feend to hire ycoupled were,

She wolde hym overmacche, I dar wel swere.  
What sholde I yow reherce in special 1221  
Hir hye malice? She is a shrewe at al.  
Ther is a long and large difference  
Bitwix Grisildis grete pacience  
And of my wyf the passyng crueltee. 1225  
Were I unbounden, also moot I thee,  
I wolde nevere eft comen in the snare.  
We wedded men lyven in sorwe and care.  
Assaye whoso wole, and he shal fynde  
That I seye sooth, by Seint Thomas of Ynde,

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1220 overmacche: outmatch, defeat

1222 at al: in every way

1226 unbounden: free (of marriage)

1230 Seint Thomas of Ynde: St. Thomas of India (the Apostle)

As for the moore part — I sey nat alle. 1231  
 God shilde that it sholde so bifalle!  
 "A, goode sire Hoost, I have ywedded bee  
 Thise monthes two, and moore nat, pardee;  
 And yet, I trowe, he that al his lyve 1235  
 Wyflees hath been, though that men wolde him  
 ryve  
 Unto the herte, ne koude in no manere

Tellen so muchel sorwe as I now heere  
 Koude tellen of my wyves cursednesse!"  
 "Now," quod oure Hoost, "Marchaunt, so  
 God yow blesse, 1240  
 Syn ye so muchel knowen of that art  
 Ful hertely I pray yow telle us part."  
 "Gladly," quod he, "but of myn owene soore,  
 For soory herte, I telle may namoore."

## THE MERCHANT'S TALE



### *Heere bigynneth the Marchantes Tale.*

Whilom ther was dwellynge in Lumbardye  
 A worthy knyght, that born was of Pavye, 1246  
 In which he lyved in greet prosperitee;  
 And sixty yeer a wyflees man was hee,  
 And folwed ay his bodily delyt  
 On wommen, ther as was his appetyt, 1250  
 As doon thise fooles that been seculeer.  
 And whan that he was passed sixty yeer,  
 Were it for hoolynesse or for dotage  
 I kan nat seye, but swich a greet corage 1254  
 Hadde this knyght to been a wedded man  
 That day and nyght he dooth al that he kan  
 T'espian where he myghte wedded be,  
 Preying oure Lord to graunten him that he  
 Mighte ones knowe of thilke blisful lyf  
 That is bitwixe an housbonde and his wyf,  
 And for to lyve under that hooly boond 1261  
 With which that first God man and womman  
 bond.  
 "Noon oother lyf," seyde he, "is worth a bene,  
 For wedlok is so esy and so clene,  
 That in this world it is a paradys." 1265  
 Thus seyde this olde knyght, that was so wys.  
 And certainly, as sooth as God is kyng,  
 To take a wyf it is a glorious thyng,  
 And namely whan a man is oold and hoor;

Thanne is a wyf the fruyt of his tresor. 1270  
 Thanne sholde he take a yong wyf and a feir,  
 On which he myghte engendren hym an heir,  
 And lede his lyf in joye and in solas,  
 Where as thise bachelers synge "allas,"  
 Whan that they fynden any adversitee 1275  
 In love, which nys but childyssh vanytee.  
 And trewely it sit wel to be so,  
 That bachelers have often peyne and wo;  
 On brotel ground they buylde, and brotelnesse  
 They fynde whan they wene sikernesne. 1280  
 They lyve but as a bryd or as a beest,  
 In libertee and under noon arreest,  
 Ther as a wedded man in his estaat  
 Lyveth a lyf blisful and ordinaat  
 Under this yok of mariage ybounde. 1285  
 Wel may his herte in joy and blisse habounde,  
 For who kan be so buxom as a wyf?  
 Who is so trewe, and eek so ententyf  
 To kepe hym, syk and hool, as is his make?  
 For wele or wo she wole hym nat forsake; 1290  
 She nys nat wery hym to love and serve,  
 Though that he lye bedrede til he sterve.  
 And yet somme clerkes seyn it nys nat so,  
 Of whiche he Theofraste is oon of tho.

1231 moore part: greater part, majority  
 1236 ryve: stab, pierce  
 1237 in no manere: in no way  
 1245 Lumbardye: Lombardy  
 1246 Pavye: Pavia  
 1249 delyt: pleasure, desire  
 1251 seculeer: of the laity (?)  
 1262 bond: bound  
 1269 hoor: white-haired

1270 fruyt: the best part  
 1277 sit wel: is fitting, well suits  
 1279 brotel: brittle, insecure  
 1280 wene sikernesne: expect safety, security  
 1282 arreest: restraint  
 1284 ordinaat: orderly  
 1287 buxom: obedient  
 1288 ententyf: eager, diligent  
 1289 make: mate  
 1292 bedrede: bedridden  
 1294 Theofraste: Theophrastus, author of the *Golden Book on Marriage*, a tract attacking marriage

What force though Theofraste liste lye? 1295  
 "Ne take no wyf," quod he, "for housbondrye,  
 As for to spare in houshold thy dispence.  
 A trewe servant dooth moore diligence  
 Thy good to kepe than thyn owene wyf,  
 For she wol clayme half part al hir lyf. 1300  
 And if thou be syk, so God me save,  
 Thy verray freendes, or a trewe knave,  
 Wol kepe thee bet than she that waiteth ay  
 After thy good and hath doon many a day.  
 And if thou take a wyf unto thyn hoold 1305  
 Ful lightly maystow been a cokewold."  
 This sentence, and an hundred thynges worse,  
 Writeth this man, ther God his bones corse!  
 But take no kep of al swich vanytee;  
 Deffie Theofraste, and herke me. 1310  
 A wyf is Goddes yifte verraily;  
 Alle othere manere yiftes hardily,  
 As londes, rentes, pasture, or commune,  
 Or moebles — alle been yiftes of Fortune  
 That passen as a shadwe upon a wal. 1315  
 But drede nat, if pleynty speke I shal:  
 A wyf wol laste, and in thyn hous endure,  
 Wel lenger than thee list, paraventure.  
 Mariage is a ful greet sacrament.  
 He which that hath no wyf, I holde hym shent;  
 He lyveth helples and al desolat — 1321  
 I speke of folk in secular estaat.  
 And herke why — I sey nat this for noght —  
 That womman is for mannes helpe ywroght.  
 The hye God, whan he hadde Adam maked,  
 And saugh him al alone, bely-naked, 1326  
 God of his grete goodnesse seyde than,  
 "Lat us now make an helpe unto this man  
 Lyk to hymself"; and thanne he made him Eve.  
 Heere may ye se, and heerby may ye preve,  
 That wyf is mannes helpe and his confort, 1331  
 His paradys terrestre, and his disport.  
 So buxom and so vertuous is she,  
 They moste nedes lyve in unitee. 1334  
 O fleesh they been, and o fleesh, as I gesse,  
 Hath but oon herte, in wele and in distresse.

1295 What force: what does it matter  
 1296 housbondrye: domestic economy  
 1297 spare: be sparing dispence: expenditures  
 1302 knave: male servant  
 1306 cokewold: cuckold  
 1308 ther: i.e., may (*ther* is not translated; it is used to introduce the subjunctive)  
 1312 hardily: certainly  
 1313 commune: right to use land held in common  
 1314 moebles: personal property  
 1316 drede: doubt  
 1320 shent: ruined  
 1326 bely-naked: stark naked  
 1332 paradys terrestre: earthly paradise  
 1333 buxom: obedient

A wyf! a, Seinte Marie, benedicite!  
 How myghte a man han any adversitee  
 That hath a wyf? Certes, I kan nat seye.  
 The blisse which that is bitwixe hem tweye  
 Ther may no tonge telle, or herte thynke. 1341  
 If he be povre, she helpeth hym to swynke;  
 She kepeth his good, and wasteth never a deel;  
 Al that hire housbonde lust, hire liketh weel;  
 She seith nat ones "nay," whan he seith  
 "ye." 1345  
 "Do this," seith he; "Al reddy, sire," seith she.  
 O blisful ordre of wedlok precious,  
 Thou art so murye, and eek so vertuous,  
 And so commended and appreveed eek  
 That every man that halt hym worth a leek  
 Upon his bare knees oughte al his lyf 1351  
 Thanken his God that hym hath sent a wyf,  
 Or elles preye to God hym for to sende  
 A wyf to laste unto his lyves ende.  
 For thanne his lyf is set in sikernesne; 1355  
 He may nat be deceived, as I gesse,  
 So that he werke after his wyves reed.  
 Thanne may he boldely beren up his heed,  
 They been so trewe and therwithal so wyse;  
 For which, if thou wolt werken as the wyse,  
 Do alwey so as wommen wol thee rede. 1361  
 Lo, how that Jacob, as thise clerkes rede,  
 By good conseil of his mooder Rebekke,  
 Boond the kydes skyn aboute his nekke,  
 For which his fadres benyson he wan. 1365  
 Lo Judith, as the storie eek telle kan,  
 By wys conseil she Goddes peple kepte,  
 And slow hym Olofernus, whil he slepte.  
 Lo Abigayl, by good conseil how she  
 Saved hir housbonde Nabal whan that he 1370  
 Sholde han be slayn; and looke, Ester also  
 By good conseil delyvered out of wo  
 The peple of God, and made hym Mardochee  
 Of Assuere enhaunced for to be.  
 Ther nys no thyng in gree superlatyf, 1375  
 As seith Senek, above an humble wyf.

1343 never a deel: not a bit, not at all  
 1349 appreveed: tested, proven  
 1361 rede: advise  
 1362 rede: tell, advise  
 1363 Rebekke: Rebecca, who counselled Jacob to trick his father, Isaac, into blessing him  
 1365 benyson: blessing  
 1368 Olofernus: Holofernes, slain by Judith; for the story see Mkt VII.2551-74.  
 1369 Abigayl: Abigail saved Nabal from the wrath of King David (cf. VII.1100).  
 1371 Ester: Esther, who saved her uncle Mordecai (*Mardochee*) and her people by an appeal to her husband Ahasuerus (*Assuere*)  
 1374 enhaunced: exalted, advanced  
 1375 in gree superlatyf: superior (in degree of virtue)  
 1376 Senek: Seneca

Suffre thy wyves tonge, as Catoun bit;  
 She shal comande, and thou shalt suffren it,  
 And yet she wole obeye of curteisye.  
 A wyf is kepere of thyn housbondrye; 1380  
 Wel may the sike man biwaille and wepe,  
 Ther as ther nys no wyf the hous to kepe.  
 I warne thee, if wisely thou wolt wirche,  
 Love wel thy wyf, as Crist loved his chirche.  
 If thou lovest thyself, thou lovest thy wyf;  
 No man hateth his flessch, but in his lyf 1386  
 He fostreth it, and therefore bidde I thee  
 Cherisse thy wyf, or thou shalt nevere thee.  
 Housbonde and wyf, what so men jape or  
 pleye,  
 Of worldly folk holden the siker weye; 1390  
 They been so knyght ther may noon harm bityde,  
 And namely upon the wyves syde.  
 For which this Januarie, of whom I tolde,  
 Considered hath, inwith his dayes olde,  
 The lusty lyf, the vertuous quyete, 1395  
 That is in mariage hony-sweete,  
 And for his freendes on a day he sente,  
 To tellen hem th'effect of his entente.

With face sad his tale he hath hem toold.  
 He seyde, "Freendes, I am hoor and oold, 1400  
 And almost, God woot, on my pittes brynke;  
 Upon my soule somewhat moste I thynke.  
 I have my body folily despended;  
 Blessed be God that it shal been amended!  
 For I wol be, certeyn, a wedded man, 1405  
 And that anoon in al the haste I kan.  
 Unto som mayde fair and tendre of age,  
 I prey yow, shapeth for my mariage  
 Al sovelyntly, for I wol nat abyde;  
 And I wol fonde t'espian, on my syde, 1410  
 To whom I may be wedded hastily.  
 But forasmuche as ye been mo than I,  
 Ye shullen rather swich a thyng espyen  
 Than I, and where me best were to allyen.

"But o thyng warne I yow, my freendes deere,  
 I wol noon oold wyf han in no manere. 1416  
 She shal nat passe twenty yeer, certayn;  
 Oold fish and yong flessch wolde I have fayn.

Bet is," quod he, "a pyk than a pykerel,  
 And bet than old boef is the tendre veel. 1420  
 I wol no womman thrity yeer of age;  
 It is but bene-straw and greet forage.  
 And eek thise olde wydwes, God it woot,  
 They konne so muchel craft on Wades boot,  
 So muchel broken harm, whan that hem  
 leste, 1425

That with hem sholde I nevere lyve in reste.  
 For sondry scoles maken sotile clerkis;  
 Womman of manye scoles half a clerk is.  
 But certeynly, a yong thyng may men gye,  
 Right as men may warm wex with handes plye.  
 Wherefore I sey yow pleynly, in a clause, 1431  
 I wol noon oold wyf han right for this cause.  
 For if so were I hadde swich myschaunce  
 That I in hire ne koude han no plesaunce,  
 Thanne sholde I lede my lyf in avoutrye 1435  
 And go streight to the devel whan I dye.  
 Ne children sholde I none upon hire geten;  
 Yet were me levere houndes had me eten  
 Than that myn heritage sholde falle  
 In straunge hand, and this I telle yow alle.  
 I dote nat; I woot the cause why 1441  
 Men sholde wedde, and forthermoore woot I  
 Ther speketh many a man of mariage  
 That woot namoore of it than woot my page  
 For whiche causes man sholde take a wyf. 1445  
 If he ne may nat lyven chaast his lyf,  
 Take hym a wyf with greet devocioun,  
 By cause of leveful procreacioun  
 Of children to th'onour of God above,  
 And nat oonly for paramour or love; 1450  
 And for they sholde leccherye eschue,  
 And yelde hir dette whan that it is due;  
 Or for that ech of hem shalde helpen oother  
 In meschief, as a suster shal the brother,  
 And lyve in chastitee ful holly. 1455  
 But sires, by youre leve, that am nat I.  
 For — God be thanked! — I dar make avaunt  
 I feele my lymes stark and suffisaunt  
 To do al that a man bilongeth to;

1419 pykerel: young pike  
 1420 boef: beef veel: veal  
 1422 bene-straw: dried beanstalks greet forage: coarse fodder  
 1424 Wades boot: boat of Wade, an obscure legendary figure,  
 perhaps associated with deception  
 1425 So muchel broken harm: do so much harm, make such  
 mischief  
 1427 sotile: subtle, clever  
 1429 gye: guide  
 1430 wex: wax plye: bend, mold  
 1435 avoutrye: adultery  
 1437 geten: begot  
 1448 leveful: lawful  
 1452 dettee: the marital debt, obligation to engage in intercourse;  
 see Pars' X.940.  
 1455 in chastitee: under a vow to abstain from sex  
 1458 stark: strong

I woot myselven best what I may do. 1460  
 Though I be hoor, I fare as dooth a tree  
 That blometh er that fruyt ywoxen bee;  
 And blosmy tree nys neither drye ne deed.  
 I feele me nowhere hoor but on myn heed;  
 Myn herte and alle my lymes been as grene  
 As laurer thurgh the yeer is for to sene. 1466  
 And syn that ye han herd al myn entente,  
 I prey yow to my wyl ye wole assente."

Diverse men diversely hym tolde  
 Of mariage manye ensamples olde. 1470  
 Somme blamed it, somme preyed it, certeyn,  
 But atte laste, shortly for to seyn,  
 As al day falleth altercacioun  
 Bitwixen freendes in disputisoun,  
 Ther fil a stryf bitwixe his bretheren two, 1475  
 Of whiche that oon was cleped Placebo;  
 Justinus soothly called was that oother.

Placebo seyde, "O Januarie, brother,  
 Ful litel nede hadde ye, my lord so deere,  
 Conseil to axe of any that is heere, 1480  
 But that ye been so ful of sapience  
 That yow ne liketh, for youre heighe prudence,  
 To weyven fro the word of Salomon.  
 This word seyde he unto us everychon:  
 'Wirk alle thyng by conseil,' thus seyde he,  
 'And thanne shaltow nat repente thee.' 1486  
 But though that Salomon spak swich a word,  
 Myn owene deere brother and my lord,  
 So wysly God my soule brynge at reste,  
 I holde youre owene conseil is the beste. 1490  
 For, brother myn, of me taak this motyf:  
 I have now been a court-man al my lyf,  
 And God it woot, though I unworthy be,  
 I have stonden in ful greet degree  
 Abouten lordes of ful heigh estaat; 1495  
 Yet hadde I nevere with noon of hem debaat.  
 I nevere hem contraried, trewely;  
 I woot wel that my lord kan moore than I.  
 With that he seith, I holde it ferme and stable;  
 I sey the same, or elles thyng semblable. 1500  
 A ful greet fool is any conseilour  
 That serveth any lord of heigh honour,  
 That dar presume, or elles thenken it,  
 That his conseil sholde passe his lordes wit.  
 Nay, lordes been no foolles, by my fay! 1505

1462 ywoxen: grown  
 1466 laurer: laurel, an evergreen for to sene: to be seen  
 1476 Placebo: "I shall please" (Psalm 114:9)  
 1477 Justinus: "the just one"  
 1483 weyven fro: depart from  
 1491 motyf: idea, advice  
 1492 court-man: courtier  
 1499 I holde it ferme and stable: I view it as unshakably true  
 1500 semblable: similar

Ye han youreselven shewed heer to-day  
 So heigh sentence, so holily and weel,  
 That I consente and conferme everydele  
 Youre wordes alle and youre opinioun.  
 By God, ther nys no man in al this toun, 1510  
 Ne in Ytaille, that koude bet han sayd!  
 Crist halt hym of this conseil ful wel apayd.  
 And trewely, it is an heigh corage  
 Of any man that stapen is in age  
 To take a yong wyf; by my fader kyn, 1515  
 Youre herte hangeth on a joly pyn!  
 Dooth now in this matiere right as yow leste,  
 For finally I holde it for the beste."

Justinus, that ay stille sat and herde, 1519  
 Right in this wise he to Placebo answerde:  
 "Now, brother myn, be pacient, I preye,  
 Syn ye han seyde, and herkenth what I seye.  
 Senek, amonges othere wordes wyse,  
 Seith that a man oghte hym right wel avyse  
 To whom he yeveth his lond or his catel. 1525  
 And syn I oghte avyse me right wel  
 To whom I yeve my good away fro me,  
 Wel muchel moore I oghte avysed be  
 To whom I yeve my body for alwey.  
 I warne yow wel, it is no childes pley 1530  
 To take a wyf withouten avyement.  
 Men moste enquere — this is myn assent —  
 Wher she be wys, or sobre, or dronkelewe,  
 Or proud, or elles ootherweys a shrewe,  
 A chidestere, or wastour of thy good, 1535  
 Or riche, or poore, or elles mannyssh wood.  
 Al be it so that no man fynden shal  
 Noon in this world that trotteh hool in al,  
 Ne man, ne beest, swich as men koude devysee;  
 But natheles it oghte ynough suffise 1540  
 With any wyf, if so were that she hadde  
 Mo goode thewes than hire vices badde;  
 And al this axeth leyser for t'enquere.  
 For, God it woot, I have wept many a teere  
 Ful pryvely, syn I have had a wyf. 1545  
 Preyse who so wole a wedded mannes lyf,  
 Certein I fynde in it but cost and care  
 And observances, of alle blisses bare.

1507 heigh sentence: good judgment  
 1512 halt hym = *boldeth hym*, considers himself ful wel  
 apayd: very well satisfied  
 1513 an heigh corage: a bold act  
 1514 stapen is in age: is advanced (literally *stepped*) in years  
 1516 hangeth on a joly pyn: is lively, merry  
 1531 avyement: deliberation  
 1532 assent: opinion  
 1533 dronkelewe: addicted to drink, habitually drunk  
 1535 chidestere: scolding woman wastour: waster  
 1536 mannyssh wood: fierce as a man, man-crazy (?)  
 1538 trotteh hool in al: trots perfectly, is perfect in everything  
 1542 thewes: personal traits  
 1548 observances: duties

1377 Suffre: endure, forbear Catoun: Cato bit = *biddeth*,  
 commands  
 1389 what so: however much  
 1390 worldly: lay, secular siker: sure, safe  
 1391 knyght: united  
 1392 syde: behalf  
 1394 inwith: in  
 1398 th'effect: the substance  
 1401 pittes brynke: brink of the pit (of death)  
 1403 folily despended: foolishly wasted  
 1410 fonde t'espian: try to discover  
 1414 allyen: ally myself, marry



And yet, God woot, my neighebores aboute,  
 And namely of wommen many a route, 1550  
 Seyn that I have the mooste stedefast wyf,  
 And eek the mekeste oon that bereth lyf;  
 But I woot best where wryngeth me my sho.  
 Ye mowe, for me, right as yow liketh do;  
 Avyseth yow — ye been a man of age — 1555  
 How that ye entren into mariage,  
 And namely with a yong wyf and a fair.  
 By hym that made water, erthe, and air,  
 The yongeste man that is in al this route  
 Is bisy ynough to bryngen it aboute 1560  
 To han his wyf allone. Trusteth me,  
 Ye shul nat plesen hire fully yeres thre —  
 This is to seyn, to doon hire ful plesaunce.  
 A wyf axeth ful many an observaunce.  
 I prey yow that ye be nat yvele apayd." 1565  
 "Wel," quod this Januarie, "and hastow  
 ysayd?

Straw for thy Senek, and for thy proverbes!  
 I counte nat a panyer ful of herbes  
 Of scole-terms. Wyser men than thow,  
 As thou hast herd, assenteden right now 1570  
 To my purpos. Placebo, what sey ye?"  
 "I seye it is a cursed man," quod he,  
 "That letteth matrimoigne, sikerly."  
 And with that word they rysen sodeynly,  
 And been assented fully that he sholde 1575  
 Be wedded whanne hym liste and where he  
 wolde.

Heigh fantasye and curious bisynesse  
 Fro day to day gan in the soule impressé  
 Of Januarie aboute his mariage.  
 Many fair shap and many a fair visage 1580  
 Ther passeth thurgh his herte nyght by nyght,  
 As whoso tooke a mirour, polished bryght,  
 And sette it in a commune market-place,  
 Thanne sholde he se ful many a figure pace  
 By his mirour; and in the same wyse 1585  
 Gan Januarie inwith his thought devyse  
 Of maydens whiche that dwelten hym bisyde.  
 He wiste nat wher that he myghte abyde.  
 For if that oon have beaute in hir face,  
 Another stant so in the peples grace 1590  
 For hire sadnesse and hire benyngnytee

That of the peple grettest voys hath she;  
 And somme were riche and hadden badde  
 name.  
 But nathelees, bitwixe earnest and game,  
 He atte laste apoynted hym on oon, 1595  
 And leet alle othere from his herte goon,  
 And chees hire of his owene auctoritee;  
 For love is blynd alday, and may nat see.  
 And whan that he was in his bed ybrought,  
 He purtreied in his herte and in his thought  
 Hir fresshe beautee and hir age tendre, 1601  
 Hir myddel smal, hire armes longe and sklen-  
 dre,  
 Hir wise governaunce, hir gentillesse,  
 Hir wommanly berynge, and hire sadnesse.  
 And whan that he on hire was conde-  
 scended, 1605  
 Hym thoughte his choys myghte nat ben  
 amended.

For whan that he hymself concluded hadde,  
 Hym thoughte ech oother mannes wit so badde  
 That impossible it were to repplye  
 Agayn his choys; this was his fantasye. 1610  
 His freendes sente he to, at his instance,  
 And preyed hem to doon hym that plesaunce,  
 That hastily they wolden to hym come;  
 He wolde abregge hir labour, alle and some.  
 Nedeth namoore for hym to go ne ryde; 1615  
 He was apoynted ther he wolde abyde.

Placebo cam, and eek his freendes soone,  
 And alderfirst he bad hem alle a boone,  
 That noon of hem none argumentes make 1619  
 Agayn the purpos which that he hath take,  
 Which purpos was plesant to God, seyde he,  
 And verray ground of his prosperitee.

He seyde ther was a mayden in the toun,  
 Which that of beautee hadde greet renoun,  
 Al were it so she were of smal degree; 1625  
 Suffiseth hym hir yowthe and hir beautee.  
 Which mayde, he seyde, he wolde han to his  
 wyf,

To lede in ese and hoolynesse his lyf;  
 And thanked God that he myghte han hire al,  
 That no wight his blisse parten shal. 1630

1592 voys: praise  
 1595 apoynted hym on: decided on  
 1596 othere: others  
 1598 alday: always  
 1602 sklendre: slender  
 1605 was condescended: had decided, settled  
 1611 instance: request  
 1614 abregge: abridge, shorten  
 1616 was apoynted: had decided  
 1618 alderfirst: first of all bad . . . a boone: asked a favor  
 1621 plesant: pleasing  
 1625 Al were it so: although smal degree: low rank  
 1630 parten: share

And preyed hem to laboure in this nede,  
 And shapen that he faille nat to spede;  
 For thanne, he seyde, his spirit was at ese.  
 "Thanne is," quod he, "no thyng may me dis-  
 plese,  
 Save o thyng priketh in my conscience, 1635  
 The which I wol reherce in youre presence.  
 "I have," quod he, "herd seyde, ful yoore ago,  
 Ther may no man han parfite blisses two —  
 This is to seye, in erthe and eek in hevene.  
 For though he kepe hym fro the synnes sevene,  
 And eek from every branche of thilke tree, 1641  
 Yet is ther so parfite felicitee  
 And so greet ese and lust in mariage  
 That evere I am agast now in myn age  
 That I shal lede now so myrie a lyf, 1645  
 So delicat, withouten wo and stryf,  
 That I shal have myn hevene in erthe heere.  
 For sith that verray hevene is boght so deere  
 With tribulacion and greet penaunce,  
 How sholde I thanne, that lyve in swich ples-  
 aunce 1650

As alle wedded men doon with hire wyvys,  
 Come to the blisse ther Crist eterne on lyve ys?  
 This is my drede, and ye, my bretheren tweye,  
 Assoilth me this question, I preyre."

Justinus, which that hated his folye, 1655  
 Answerde anon right in his japerie;  
 And for he wolde his longe tale abregge,  
 He wolde noon auctoritee allegge,  
 But seyde, "Sire, so ther be noon obstacle  
 Oother than this, God of his hygh myracle  
 And of his mercy may so for yow wirche 1661  
 That, er ye have youre right of hooly chirche,  
 Ye may repente of wedded mannes lyf,  
 In which ye seyn ther is no wo ne stryf.  
 And elles, God forbede but he sente 1665  
 A wedded man hym grace to repente  
 Wel ofte rather than a sengle man!  
 And therefore, sire — the beste reed I kan —  
 Dispeire yow nocht, but have in youre mem-  
 orie,

Paraunter she may be youre purgatorie! 1670  
 She may be Goddes meene and Goddes whippe;

1632 shapen: arrange  
 1641 thilke tree: the tree of the seven deadly sins (see ParsT  
 X.387-90).  
 1646 delicat: pleasing  
 1654 Assoilth me this question: resolve this problem  
 1656 japerie: mockery  
 1657 abregge: abridge, shorten  
 1658 allegge: cite, adduce  
 1662 right of hooly chirche: service (rite) of the Church  
 1665 God forbede but he sente: God forbid that he should not  
 send  
 1667 sengle: single  
 1671 meene: means, instrument

Thanne shal youre soule up to hevene skippe  
 Swifter than dooth an arwe out of a bowe.  
 I hope to God, herafter shul ye knowe  
 That ther nys no so greet felicitee 1675  
 In mariage, ne nevere mo shal bee,  
 That yow shal lette of youre savacion,  
 So that ye use, as skile is and reson,  
 The lustes of youre wyf attemprely,  
 And that ye plese hire nat to amorously, 1680  
 And that ye kepe yow eek from oother synne.  
 My tale is doon, for my wit is thynne.  
 Beth nat agast herof, my brother deere,  
 But lat us waden out of this mateere.  
 The Wyf of Bathe, if ye han understonde, 1685  
 Of mariage, which we have on honde,  
 Declared hath ful wel in litel space.  
 Fareth now wel. God have yow in his grace."

And with this word this Justyn and his  
 brother 1689  
 Han take hir leve, and ech of hem of oother.  
 For whan they saughe that it moste nedes be,  
 They wroghten so, by sly and wys trettee,  
 That she, this mayden which that Mayus  
 highte,

As hastily as evere that she myghte  
 Shal wedded be unto this Januarie. 1695  
 I trowe it were to longe yow to tarie,  
 If I yow tolde of every scrit and bond  
 By which that she was feffed in his lond,  
 Or for to herkennen of hir riche array.  
 But finally ycomen is the day 1700  
 That to the chirche bothe be they went  
 For to receyve the hooly sacrament.  
 Forth comth the preest, with stole aboute his  
 nekke,

And bad hire be lyk Sarra and Rebekke  
 In wysdom and in trouthe of mariage; 1705  
 And seyde his orisons, as is usage,  
 And croucheth hem, and bad God sholde hem  
 blesse,  
 And made al siker ynogh with hoolynesse.

Thus been they wedded with solempnitee,  
 And at the feeste sitteth he and she 1710  
 With othere worthy folk upon the deys.

1677 lette of: keep from  
 1678 skile: reasonable, proper  
 1679 attemprely: moderately  
 1684 waden: wade, go  
 1692 trettee: negotiation  
 1697 scrit: writ, legal document  
 1698 feffed in: enfeoffed, endowed with  
 1702 the hooly sacrament: i. e., marriage  
 1704 Sarra and Rebekke: Sarah and Rebecca, biblical exemplars  
 of faithfulness and wisdom  
 1707 croucheth: makes the sign of the cross over  
 1711 deys: dais

1553 wryngeth: pinches  
 1561 han his wyf allone: have his wife to himself  
 1565 yvele apayd: displeased  
 1568 panyer: bread basket  
 1569 scole-terms: scholastic (philosophical) terms  
 1573 letteth: hinders  
 1577 Heigh fantasye: exaggerated fancy, imagination curious  
 bisynesse: painstaking attention, constant thought (of this)  
 1578 gan . . . impressé: made a mark, became fixed  
 1591 sadnesse: seriousness

Al ful of joye and blisse is the paleys,  
 And ful of instrumentz and of vitaille,  
 The mooste deyntevous of al Ytaille.  
 Biforn hem stooede instrumentz of swich soun  
 That Orpheus, ne of Thebes Amphioun, 1716  
 Ne maden nevere swich a melodye.  
 At every cours thanne cam loud mynstralcye  
 That nevere tromped Joab for to heere,  
 Nor he Theodomas, yet half so cleere 1720  
 At Thebes whan the citee was in doute.  
 Bacus the wyn hem shynketh al aboute,  
 And Venus laugheth upon every wight,  
 For Januarie was bicome hir knyght  
 And wolde bothe assayen his corage 1725  
 In libertee, and eek in mariage;  
 And with hire fyrbrond in hire hand aboute  
 Daunceth biforn the bryde and al the route.  
 And certeinly, I dar right wel seyn this,  
 Ymeneus, that god of weddyng is, 1730  
 Saugh nevere his lyf so myrie a wedded man.  
 Hoold thou thy pees, thou poete Marcian,  
 That writest us that ilke weddyng murie  
 Of hire Philologie and hym Mercurie,  
 And of the songes that the Muses songe! 1735  
 To smal is bothe thy penne, and eek thy tonge,  
 For to descryven of this mariage.  
 Whan tendre youthe hath wedded stoupyng  
 age,  
 Ther is swich myrthe that it may nat be writen.  
 Assayeth it youreself; thanne may ye witen  
 If that I lye or noon in this matiere. 1741  
 Mayus, that sit with so benyngne a chiere,  
 Hire to biholde it semed fayerye.  
 Queene Ester looked nevere with swich an ye  
 On Assuer, so meke a look hath she. 1745  
 I may yow nat devyse al hir beautee.  
 But thus muche of hire beautee telle I may,  
 That she was lyk the brighte morwe of May,  
 Fulfuld of alle beautee and plesaunce.  
 This Januarie is ravysshed in a traunce 1750  
 At every tyme he looked on hir face;

1714 deyntevous: delicious  
 1716 Orpheus: the legendary musician Amphioun: king of Thebes and a famous harper  
 1719 tromped: trumpeted Joab: one of David's generals, who sounded trumpets to direct his army  
 1720 Theodomas: the augur of the army at Thebes  
 1721 doute: danger  
 1722 Bacus: Bacchus, god of wine shynketh: pours out  
 1723 Venus: goddess of love  
 1727 fyrbrond: torch  
 1730 Ymeneus: Hymen  
 1731 his lyf: in his life  
 1732 Marcian: Martianus Capella, author of the *Marriage of Philology and Mercury*  
 1743 fayerye: something enchanting  
 1744 Ester: Esther, whose meekness and beauty won the love of King Ahasuerus (*Assuer*)

But in his herte he gan hire to manace  
 That he that nyght in armes wolde hire streyne  
 Harder than evere Parys dide Eleyne.  
 But natheles yet hadde he greet pitee 1755  
 That thilke nyght offenden hire moste he,  
 And thoughte, "Allas! O tendre creature,  
 Now wolde God ye myghte wel endure  
 Al my corage, it is so sharp and keene!  
 I am agast ye shul it nat susteene. 1760  
 But God forbode that I dide al my myght!  
 Now wolde God that it were woxen nyght,  
 And that the nyght wolde lasten everemo.  
 I wolde that al this peple were ago."  
 And finally he dooth al his labour, 1765  
 As he best myghte, savyng his honour,  
 To haste hem fro the mete in subtil wyse.  
 The tyme cam that resoun was to ryse;  
 And after that men daunce and drynken faste,  
 And spices al aboute the hous they caste, 1770  
 And ful of joye and blisse is every man —  
 Al but a squyer, highte Damyan,  
 Which carf biforn the knyght ful many a day.  
 He was so ravysshed on his lady May 1774  
 That for the verray peyne: he was ny wood.  
 Almost he swelte and swowned ther he stood,  
 So soore hath Venus hurt hym with hire brond,  
 As that she bar it daunsynge in hire hond;  
 And to his bed he wente hym hastily.  
 Namooore of hym at this tyme speke I, 1780  
 But there I lete hym wepe ynogh and pleyne  
 Til fresshe May wol rewen on his peyne.  
 O perilous fyr, that in the bedstraw bredeth!  
 O famulier foo, that his servyce bedeth!  
 O servant traytour, false hoomly hewe, 1785  
 Lyk to the naddre in bosom sly untrewre,  
 God shilde us alle from youre aqueyntaunce!  
 O Januarie, dronken in plesaunce  
 In mariage, se how thy Damyan,  
 Thyn owene squier and thy borne man, 1790  
 Entendeth for to do thee vileynye.  
 God graunte thee thyn hoomly fo t'espye!  
 For in this world nys worse pestilence  
 Than hoomly foo al day in thy presence. 1794

1752 manace: menace, threaten  
 1753 streyne: press  
 1754 Eleyne: Helen of Troy, whose ravishment by Paris (*Parys*) caused the Trojan War (see Tr. 1.57-63)  
 1759 corage: ardor, sexual desire keene: eager  
 1765 dooth al his labour: takes all possible pains  
 1776 swelte: fainted  
 1777 brond: torch  
 1784 famulier foo: enemy in one's own household bedeth: offers  
 1785 hoomly hewe: domestic servant  
 1786 naddre: adder, serpent  
 1792 hoomly fo: foe in the household

Parfourned hath the sonne his ark diurne;  
 No lenger may the body of hym sojurne  
 On th'orizonte, as in that latitude.  
 Night with his mantel, that is derk and rude,  
 Gan oversprede the hemysperie aboute;  
 For which departed is this lusty route 1800  
 Fro Januarie, with thank on every syde.  
 Hoom to hir houses lustily they ryde,  
 Where as they doon hir thynges as hem leste,  
 And whan they sye hir tyme, goon to reste.  
 Soone after that, this hastif Januarie 1805  
 Wolde go to bedde; he wolde no lenger tarye.  
 He drynketh yprocas, clarree, and vernage  
 Of spices hooete t'encreessen his corage;  
 And many a letuarie hath he ful fyn,  
 Swiche as the cursed monk, daun Constantyn,  
 Hath writen in his book *De Coitu*; 1811  
 To eten hem alle he nas no thyng eschu.  
 And to his privee freendes thus seyde he:  
 "For Goddes love, as soone as it may be,  
 Lat voyden al this hous in curteys wyse." 1815  
 And they han doon right as he wol devyse.  
 Men drynken and the travers drawe anon.  
 The bryde was broght abedde as stille as stoon;  
 And whan the bed was with the preest yblessed,  
 Out of the chambre hath every wight hym  
 dressed, 1820  
 And Januarie hath faste in armes take  
 His fresshe May, his paradys, his make.  
 He lulleth hire; he kisseth hire ful ofte;  
 With thikke brustles of his berd unsofte,  
 Lyk to the skyn of houndfyssh, sharp as brere —  
 For he was shave al newe in his manere — 1826  
 He rubbeth hire aboute hir tendre face,  
 And seyde thus, "Allas! I moot trespass  
 To yow, my spouse, and yow greetly offende  
 Er tyme come that I wil doun descende. 1830  
 But natheles, considereth this," quod he,  
 "Ther nys no werkman, whatsoever he be,  
 That may bothe werke wel and hastily;  
 This wol be doon at leysur parfityl.

1795 Parfourned: completed ark diurne: daily transit from horizon to horizon  
 1796 sojurne: remain  
 1797 th'orizonte: the horizon  
 1799 hemysperie: hemisphere (the half of the heavens above the earth)  
 1801 on every syde: from all sides  
 1804 sye: saw  
 1807 yprocas, clarree: strong spiced and sweetened wines;  
 vernage: sweet Italian white wine, Vernaccia  
 1809 letuarie: electuary, medical mixture  
 1810 Constantyn: Constantinus Africanus (Afer), author of a work on sexual intercourse containing recipes for aphrodisiacs  
 1812 eschu: averse  
 1815 Lat voyden: clear out  
 1817 travers: curtain (dividing the room)  
 1825 houndfyssh: dogfish, a small shark brere: briar

It is no fors how longe that we pleye; 1835  
 In trewe wedlok coupled be we tweye,  
 And blessed be the yok that we been inne,  
 For in oure actes we mowe do no synne.  
 A man may do no synne with his wyf,  
 Ne hurte hymselfen with his owene knyf, 1840  
 For we han leve to pleye us by the lawe."  
 Thus laboureth he til that the day gan dawe;  
 And thanne he taketh a sop in fyn clarree,  
 And upright in his bed thanne sitteth he, 1844  
 And after that he sang ful loude and cleere,  
 And kiste his wyf, and made wantown cheere.  
 He was al coltiss, ful of ragerye,  
 And ful of jargon as a flekked pye.  
 The slakke skyn aboute his nekke shaketh 1849  
 Whil that he sang, so chaunteth he and craketh.  
 But God woot what that May thoughte in hir  
 herte,  
 Whan she hym saugh up sityng in his sherte,  
 In his nyght-cappe, and with his nekke lene;  
 She preyseth nat his pleyyng worth a bene.  
 Thanne seide he thus, "My reste wol I take;  
 Now day is come, I may no lenger wake." 1856  
 And doun he leyde his heed and sleep til  
 pryme.  
 And afterward, whan that he saugh his tyme,  
 Up ryseth Januarie; but fresshe May 1859  
 Heeld hire chambre unto the fourthe day,  
 As usage is of wyves for the beste.  
 For every labour somtyme moot han reste,  
 Or elles longe may he nat endure;  
 This is to seyn, no lyves creature,  
 Be it of fyssh, or bryd, or beest, or man. 1865  
 Now wol I speke of woful Damyan,  
 That langwisseth for love, as ye shul heere;  
 Therefore I speke to hym in this manere:  
 I seye, "O sely Damyan, allas!  
 Andswere to my demaunde, as in this cas. 1870  
 How shaltow to thy lady, fresshe May,  
 Telle thy wo? She wole alwey seye nay.  
 Eek if thou speke, she wol thy wo biweyre.  
 God be thyn helpe! I kan no better seye."  
 This sike Damyan in Venus fyr 1875  
 So brenneth that he dyeth for desyr,  
 For which he putte his lyf in aventure.

1835 It is no fors: it doesn't matter  
 1843 sop in fyn clarree: a bit of bread soaked in wine  
 1846 wantown: lecherous  
 1847 coltiss: frisky as a colt ragerye: wantonness  
 1848 jargon: chatter flekked pye: spotted magpie  
 1849 slakke: slack, loose  
 1850 chaunteth: sings craketh: croaks  
 1857 pryme: the first canonical hour (part) of the day (from about 6 to 9 A.M.)  
 1870 demaunde: question  
 1873 biweyre: reveal  
 1877 in aventure: at risk



No lenger myghte he in this wise endure,  
 But prively a penner gan he borwe,  
 And in a lettre wroot he al his sorwe, 1880  
 In manere of a compleynt or a lay,  
 Unto his faire, fresshe lady May;  
 And in a purs of sylk heng on his sherte  
 He hath it put, and leyde it at his herte. 1884  
 The moone, that at noon was thilke day  
 That Januarie hath wedded fresshe May  
 In two of Tawr, was into Cancere glyden;  
 So longe hath Mayus in hir chambre abyden,  
 As custume is unto thise nobles alle.  
 A bryde shal nat eten in the halle 1890  
 Til dayes foure, or three dayes atte leeste,  
 Ypassed been; thanne lat hire go to feeste.  
 The fourthe day compleet fro noon to noon,  
 Whan that the heighe masse was ydoon,  
 In halle sit thise Januarie and May, 1895  
 As fressh as is the brighte someres day.  
 And so bifel how that this goode man  
 Remembred hym upon thise Damyan,  
 And seyde, "Seynte Marie! how may this be,  
 That Damyan entendeth nat to me? 1900  
 Is he ay syk, or how may this bityde?"  
 His squieres, whiche that stouden ther bisyde,  
 Excused hym by cause of his siknesse,  
 Which letted hym to doon his bisynesse; 1904  
 Noon oother cause myghte make hym tarye.  
 "That me forthynketh," quod thise Januarie,  
 "He is a gentil squier, by my trouthe!  
 If that he deyde, it were harm and routhe.  
 He is as wys, discreet, and as secree  
 As any man I woot of his degree, 1910  
 And therto manly, and eek servysable,  
 And for to been a thrifty man right able.  
 But after mete, as soone as evere I may,  
 I wol myself visite hym, and eek May,  
 To doon hym al the confort that I kan." 1915  
 And for that word hym blessed every man,  
 That of his bountee and his gentilnesse  
 He wolde so conforten in siknesse  
 His squier, for it was a gentil dede. 1919  
 "Dame," quod thise Januarie, "taak good hede,

At after-mete ye with youre wommen alle,  
 Whan ye han been in chambre out of this halle,  
 That alle ye go se thise Damyan.  
 Dooth hym disport — he is a gentil man;  
 And telleth hym that I wol hym visite, 1925  
 Have I no thyng but rested me a lite;  
 And spede yow faste, for I wole abyde  
 Til that ye slepe faste by my syde."  
 And with that word he gan to hym to calle  
 A squier, that was marchal of his halle, 1930  
 And tolde hym certeyn thynges, what he wolde.  
 This fresshe May hath streight hir wey  
 yholde  
 With alle hir wommen unto Damyan.  
 Doun by his beddes syde sit she than,  
 Confortyng hym as goodly as she may. 1935  
 Thise Damyan, whan that his tyme he say,  
 In secree wise his purs and eek his bille,  
 In which that he ywriten hadde his wille,  
 Hath put into hire hand, withouten moore,  
 Save that he siketh wonder depe and soore,  
 And softly to hire right thus seyde he: 1941  
 "Mercy! And that ye nat discovere me,  
 For I am deed if that this thyng be kyd."  
 This purs hath she inwith hir bosom hyd  
 And wente hire wey; ye gete namoore of me.  
 But unto Januarie ycomen is she, 1946  
 That on his beddes syde sit ful softe.  
 He taketh hire, and kisseth hire ful ofte,  
 And leyde hym doun to slepe, and that anon.  
 She feyned hire as that she moste gon 1950  
 Ther as ye woot that every wight moot neede;  
 And whan she of thise bille hath taken heede,  
 She rente it al to cloutes atte laste,  
 And in the pryvee softly it caste.  
 Who studieth now but faire fresshe May?  
 Adoun by olde Januarie she lay, 1956  
 That sleep til that the coughe hath hym  
 awaked.  
 Anon he preyde hire strepen hire al naked;  
 He wolde of hire, he seyde, han som plesaunce;  
 He seyde hir clothes dide hym encombraunce,  
 And she obeyeth, be hire lief or looth. 1961  
 But lest that precious folk be with me wrooth,  
 How that he wroghte, I dar nat to yow telle,

1921 after-mete: the time after dinner  
 1926 Have I no thyng but: when I have merely  
 1930 marchal: master of ceremonies (cf. I.751–52)  
 1936 say: saw  
 1937 bille: letter  
 1943 kyd: known  
 1953 cloutes: tatters  
 1960 dide hym encombraunce: got in his way  
 1962 precious: fastidious, prudish

1879 penner: writing case, with pen and ink  
 1881 compleynt: poetic lament (for examples see the Short Poems) lay: song  
 1883 heng: which hung  
 1885–87 The moon was in the second degree of the zodiacal sign of Taurus and has now moved into the sign of Cancer.  
 1893 compleet: completed  
 1900 entendeth nat to: does not attend, wait on  
 1906 That me forthynketh: that grieves me, I am sorry  
 1909 secree: discreet  
 1911 servysable: willing to serve, attentive  
 1912 thrifty: proper, successful  
 1917 bountee: goodness

Or whether hire thoughte it paradys or helle.  
 But heere I lete hem werken in hir wyse 1965  
 Til evensong rong and that they moste aryse.  
 Were it by destyne or by aventure,  
 Were it by influence or by nature,  
 Or constellacion, that in swich estaat  
 The hevене stood that tyme fortunaat 1970  
 Was for to putte a bille of Venus werkes —  
 For alle thyng hath tyme, as seyn thise  
 clerkes —  
 To any womman for to gete hire love,  
 I kan nat seye; but grete God above,  
 That knoweth that noon act is causelees, 1975  
 He deme of al, for I wole holde my pees.  
 But sooth is this, how that thise fresshe May  
 Hath take swich impression that day  
 Of pitee of thise sike Damyan  
 That from hire herte she ne dryve kan 1980  
 The remembrance for to doon hym ese.  
 "Certeyn," thoughte she, "whom that this thyng  
 displese  
 I rekke noght, for heere I hym assure  
 To love hym best of any creature, 1984  
 Though he namoore hadde than his sherte."  
 Lo, pitee renneeth soone in gentil herte!  
 Heere may ye se how excellent franchise  
 In wommen is, whan they hem narwe avyse.  
 Som tyrant is, as ther be many oon  
 That hath an herte as hard as any stoon, 1990  
 Which wolde han lat hym sterven in the place  
 Wel rather than han graunted hym hire grace,  
 And hem rejoysen in hire cruell pryde,  
 And rekke nat to been an homycide.  
 Thise gentil May, fulfilled of pitee, 1995  
 Right of hire hand a lettre made she,  
 In which she graunteth hym hire verray grace.  
 Ther lakketh noght oonly but day and place  
 Wher that she myghte unto his lust suffise,  
 For it shal be right as he wole devyse. 2000  
 And whan she saugh hir tyme, upon a day  
 To visite thise Damyan gooth May,  
 And sotilly thise lettre doun she threste  
 Under his pilwe; rede it if hym leste.  
 She taketh hym by the hand and harde hym  
 twiste 2005

1968 influence: power (transmitted by rays from heavenly bodies)  
 1969 constellacion: configuration of the heavenly bodies  
 1971 putte a bille: present a petition  
 1976 He deme: may he judge  
 1987 franchise: generosity of spirit  
 1988 hem narwe avyse: consider carefully  
 1999 unto his lust suffise: satisfy his desires  
 2003 sotilly: craftily threste: thrust  
 2004 pilwe: pillow

So secrely that no wight of it wiste,  
 And bad hym been al hool, and forth she wente  
 To Januarie, whan that he for hire sente.  
 Up riseth Damyan the nexte morwe;  
 Al passed was his siknesse and his sorwe. 2010  
 He kembeth hym, he preyneth hym and pyketh,  
 He dooth al that his lady lust and lyketh,  
 And eek to Januarie he gooth as lowe  
 As evere dide a dogge for the bowe.  
 He is so plesant unto every man 2015  
 (For craft is al, whoso that do it kan)  
 That every wight is fayn to speke hym good,  
 And fully in his lady grace he stood.  
 Thus lete I Damyan aboute his nede,  
 And in my tale forth I wol procede. 2020  
 Somme clerkes holden that felicitie  
 Stant in delit, and therefore certeyn he,  
 This noble Januarie, with al his myght,  
 In honest wyse, as longeth to a knyght,  
 Shoop hym to lyve ful deliciously. 2025  
 His housyng, his array, as honestly  
 To his degree was made as a kynges.  
 Amonges othere of his honeste thynges,  
 He made a gardyn, walled al with stoon;  
 So fair a gardyn woot I nowher noon. 2030  
 For, out of doute, I verraily suppose  
 That he that wroot the Romance of the Rose  
 Ne koude of it the beautee wel devyse;  
 Ne Priapus ne myghte nat suffise,  
 Though he be god of gardyns, for to telle 2035  
 The beautee of the gardyn and the welle  
 That stood under a laurer alway grene.  
 Ful ofte tyme he Pluto and his queene,  
 Proserpina, and al hire fayerye,  
 Disporten hem and maken melodye 2040  
 Aboute that welle, and daunced, as men tolde.  
 This noble knyght, thise Januarie the olde,  
 Swich deyntee hath in it to walke and pleye,  
 That he wol no wight suffren bere the keye  
 Save he hymself; for of the smale wyket 2045  
 He baar alway of silver a clyket,  
 With which, whan that hym leste, he it un-  
 shette.

2011 kembeth: combs preyneth hym: preens himself, makes himself neat pyketh: cleans, adorns  
 2013 lowe: humbly  
 2014 dogge for the bowe: dog trained to hunt with an archer  
 2024 honest: honorable, respectable  
 2025 deliciously: voluptuously  
 2032 he: Guillaume de Lorris (cf. Rom 49–728)  
 2034 Priapus: a phallic god (cf. PF 253–59)  
 2038–39 Pluto, Proserpina: king and queen of the underworld  
 2043 deyntee hath: takes pleasure  
 2045 wyket: wicket gate  
 2046 clyket: latchkey  
 2047 unshette: unlocked

And whan he wolde paye his wyf hir dette  
In somer seson, thider wolde he go, 2049  
And May his wyf, and no wight but they two;  
And thynges whiche that were nat doon  
abedde,

He in the gardyn parfourned hem and spedde.  
And in this wyse, many a murye day,  
Lyved this Januarie and fresshe May.  
But worldly joye may nat alwey dure 2055  
To Januarie, ne to no creature.

O sodeyn hap! O thou Fortune unstable!  
Lyk to the scorpion so deceyvable,  
That flaterest with thyn heed whan thou wolt  
stynge;

Thy tayl is deeth, thurgh thyn envenyngne.  
O brotil joye! O sweete venym queynte! 2061  
O monstre, that so subtilly kanst peynte  
Thy yiftes under hewe of stidefastnesse,  
That thou deceyvest bothe moore and lesse!  
Why hastow Januarie thus deceyved, 2065  
That haddest hym for thy fulle freend re-  
ceyved?

And now thou hast biraft hym bothe his yen,  
For sorwe of which desireth he to dyen.

Allas, this noble Januarie free,  
Amydde his lust and his prosperitee, 2070  
Is woxen blynd, and that al sodeynly.  
He wepeth and he wayleth pitously;  
And therewithal the fyr of' jealousy,  
Lest that his wyf sholde falle in som folye,  
So brente his herte that he wolde fayn 2075  
That som man bothe hire and hym had slayn.

For neither after his deeth nor in his lyf  
Ne wolde he that she were love ne wyf,  
But evere lyve as wydwe in clothes blake,  
Soul as the turtle that lost hath hire make. 2080  
But atte laste, after a month or tweye,  
His sorwe gan aswage, sooth to seye;  
For whan he wiste it may noon oother be,  
He paciently took his adversitee,  
Save, out of doute, he may nat forgoon 2085  
That he nas jealous everemoore in oon;

Which jealousye it was so outrageous  
That neither in halle, n'yn noon oother hous,  
Ne in noon oother place, neverthemo,  
He nolde suffre hire for to ryde or go, 2090

But if that he had hond on hire away;  
For which ful ofte wepeth fresshe May,  
That loveth Damyan so benyngnely  
That she moot outhir dyen sodeynly  
Or elles she moot han hym as hir leste. 2095  
She wayteth whan hir herte wolde breste.

Upon that oother syde Damyan  
Bicomen is the sorwefulleste man  
That evere was, for neither nyght ne day  
Ne myghte he speke a word to fresshe May,  
As to his purpos, of no swich mateere, 2101  
But if that Januarie moste it heere,  
That hadde an hand upon hire everemo.  
But natheless, by writyng to and fro  
And privee signes wiste he what she mente,  
And she knew eek the fyn of his entente. 2106

O Januarie, what myghte it thee availle,  
Thogh thou myghtest se as fer as shippes saille?  
For as good is blynd deceyved be  
As to be deceyved whan a man may se. 2110

Lo, Argus, which that hadde an hondred yen,  
For al that evere he koude poure or pryen,  
Yet was he blent, and, God woot, so been mo  
That wenen wisly that it be nat so.  
Passe over is an ese, I sey namoore. 2115

This fresshe May, that I spak of so yooere,  
In warm wex hath emprented the clyket  
That Januarie bar of the smale wyket,  
By which into his gardyn ofte he wente;  
And Damyan, that knew al hire entente, 2120  
The clyket countrefeted pryvely.  
Ther nys namoore to seye, but hastily  
Som wonder by this clyket shal bytde,  
Which ye shul heeren, if ye wole abyde. 2124

O noble Ovyde, ful sooth seystou, God woot,  
What sleighte is it, thogh it be long and hoot,  
That Love nyl fynde it out in som manere?  
By Piramus and Tesbee may men leere;  
Thogh they were kept ful longe streite overal,  
They been accorded, rownyngne thurgh a wal,  
Ther no wight koude han founde out swich a  
sleighte. 2131

2096 wayteth: expects (the time)

2111 Argus: mythical guardian of Io

2112 poure: look intently, pore pryen: gaze, see

2113 blent: blinded, deceived

2114 wenen wisly: confidently suppose, believe

2115 Passe over is an ese: to overlook is an advantage (what you don't know won't hurt you)

2117 emprented the clyket: made an impression of the key

2118 wyket: wicket gate

2125 Ovyde: Ovid

2126 sleighte: trick

2128 Piramus and Tesbee: Pyramus and Thisbe; see LGW

706-923.

2129 streite: strictly

2130 rownyngne: whispering

2048 dette: marital debt (obligation to engage in intercourse)

2057 hap: chance

2061 brotil: uncertain

2062 peynte: disguise

2063 hewe: pretense

2080 Soul: solitary turtle: turtdove

2085 Save: except that

2085-86 forgoon That he nas: i.e., refrain from being

2087 outrageous: excessive

2089 neverthemo: no longer

But now to purpos: er that dayes eighte  
Were passed [of] the month of [Juyn], bifil  
That Januarie hath caught so greet a wil, 2134  
Thurgh eggyn of his wyf, hym for to pleye  
In his gardyn, and no wight but they tweye,  
That in a morwe unto his May seith he:  
"Rys up, my wyf, my love, my lady free!  
The turtles voys is herd, my dowve sweete;  
The wynter is goon with alle his reynes  
weete. 2140

Com forth now, with thyne eyen columbyn!  
How fairer been thy brestes than is wyn!  
The gardyn is enclosed al aboute;  
Com forth, my white spouse! Out of doute  
Thou hast me wounded in myn herte, O wyf!  
No spot of thee ne knew I al my lyf. 2146  
Com forth, and lat us taken oure disport;  
I chees thee for my wyf and my confort."

Swiche olde lewed wordes used he.  
On Damyan a signe made she, 2150  
That he sholde go biforn with his clyket.  
This Damyan thanne hath opened the wyket,  
And in he stirte, and that in swich manere  
That no wight myghte it se neither yheere,  
And stille he sit under a bussh anon. 2155

This Januarie, as blynd as is a stoon,  
With Mayus in his hand, and no wight mo,  
Into his fresshe gardyn is ago,  
And clapte to the wyket sodeynly.

"Now wyf," quod he, "heere nys but thou  
and I, 2160

That art the creature that I best love.  
For by that Lord that sit in hevne above,  
Leverich hadde to dyen on a knyf  
Than thee offende, trewe deere wyf!  
For Goddes sake, thank how I thee chees, 2165  
Noght for no covetise, doutelees,  
But oonly for the love I had to thee.

And though that I be oold and may nat see,  
Beth to me trewe, and I wol telle yow why.  
Thre thynges, certes, shal ye wyne therby:  
First, love of Crist, and to youreself honour,  
And al myn heritage, toun and tour, 2172  
I yeve it yow, maketh chartres as yow leste;  
This shal be doon to-morwe er sonne reste,  
So wisly God my soule brynge in blisse. 2175  
I prey yow first, in covenant ye me kisse;

2132-33 On or shortly before June 8

2135 eggyn: incitement

2141 columbyn: dovelike

2150 On: to

2166 covetise: greed

2173 chartres: contracts, deeds

2176 in covenant: to seal the contract

And though that I be jealous, wyte me noght.  
Ye been so depe enprented in my thoght  
That, whan that I considere youre beautee  
And therewithal the unlikely elde of me, 2180  
I may nat, certes, though I sholde dye,  
Forbere to been out of youre compaignye  
For verray love; this is withouten doute.  
Now kys me, wyf, and lat us rome aboute."

This fresshe May, whan she thise wordes  
herde, 2185

Benyngnely to Januarie answerde,  
But first and forward she bigan to wepe.  
"I have," quod she, "a soule for to kepe  
As wel as ye, and also myn honour,  
And of my wyfthod thilke tendre flour, 2190  
Which that I have assured in youre hond,  
Whan that the preest to yow my body bond;  
Wherfore I wole answer in this manere,  
By the leve of yow, my lord so deere:

I prey to God that nevere dawe the day 2195  
That I ne sterve, as foule as womman may,  
If evere I do unto my kyn that shame,  
Or elles I empeyre so my name,  
That I be fals; and if I do that lak,  
Do strepe me and put me in a sak, 2200  
And in the nexte ryver do me drenche.  
I am a gentil womman and no wenche.  
Why speke ye thus? But men been evere un-  
trewe,

And wommen have repreve of yow ay newe.  
Ye han noon oother contenance, I levee, 2205  
But speke to us of untrust and reprevee."

And with that word she saugh wher Damyan  
Sat in the bussh, and coughen she bigan,  
And with hir fynger signes made she  
That Damyan sholde clymbe upon a tree 2210  
That charged was with fruyt, and up he wente.  
For verrailly he knew al hire entente,  
And every signe that she koude make,  
Wel bet than Januarie, hir owene make,

For in a lettre she hadde toold hym al 2215  
Of this matere, how he werchen shal.  
And thus I lete hym site upon the pyrie,  
And Januarie and May romyngne myrie.

Bright was the day, and blew the firmament;  
Phebus hath of gold his stremes doum ysent

2177 wyte: blame

2180 unlikely: unsuitable

2187 first and forward: first of all

2191 assured: entrusted

2198 empeyre: damage

2199 do that lak: commit that offence

2201 do me drenche: have me drowned

2204 ay newe: always

2205 contenance: manner of behavior

2206 But: except untrust: distrust reprevee: reproof

2217 pyrie: pear tree

To gladen every flour with his warmnesse. 2221  
 He was that tyme in Geminis, as I gesse,  
 But litel fro his declynacion  
 Of Cancer, Jovis exaltacion.  
 And so bifel, that brighte morwe-tyde 2225  
 That in that gardyn, in the ferther syde,  
 Pluto, that is kyng of Fayerye,  
 And many a lady in his compaignye,  
 Folwunge his wyf, the queene Proserpyne,  
 Which that he ravysshed out of [Ethna] 2230  
 Whil that she gadered floures in the mede —  
 In Claudyan ye may the stories rede,  
 How in his grisely carte he hire fette —  
 This kyng of Fairye thanne adoun hym sette  
 Upon a bench of turves, fressh and grene, 2235  
 And right anon thus seyde he to his queene:  
 "My wyf," quod he, "ther may no wight seye  
 nay;  
 Th'experience so preveth every day  
 The tresons whiche that women doon to man.  
 Ten hundred thousand [tales] tellen I kan  
 Notable of youre untrouthe and brotilnesse.  
 O Salomon, wys, and richest of riches, 2242  
 Fulfuld of sapience and of worldly glorie,  
 Ful worthy been thy wordes to memorie  
 To every wight that wit and reson kan. 2245  
 Thus preiseth he yet the bountee of man:  
 'Amonges a thousand men yet foond I oon,  
 But of women alle foond I noon.'  
 "Thus seith the kyng that knoweth youre  
 wikkednesse.  
 And Jhesus, *filiius Syrak*, as I gesse, 2250  
 Ne speketh of yow but seelde reverence.  
 A wyld fyr and corrupt pestilence  
 So falle upon youre bodyes yet to-nyght!  
 Ne se ye nat this honorable knyght, 2254  
 By cause, allas, that he is blynd and old,  
 His owene man shal make hym cokewold.  
 Lo, where he sit, the lechour, in the tree!  
 Now wol I graunten, of my magestee,  
 Unto this olde, blynde, worthy knyght  
 That he shal have ayen his eyen syght, 2260  
 Whan that his wyf wold doon hym vileynye.

2222-24 The sun was in the sign of Gemini (*Geminis*), not far from the summer solstice, after which the sun begins to decline in its apparent altitude (*bis declynacion*); this is at the beginning of Cancer, the sign in which Jupiter exerts its greatest influence (*Jovis exaltacion*).

2230 Ethna: Mt. Etna  
 2232 Claudyan: Claudian, author of the *Rape of Proserpina*  
 2235 turves: pieces of turf  
 2241 brotilnesse: frailty, fickleness  
 2242 Salomon: Solomon  
 2250 Jhesus, filiius Syrak: author of *Ecclesiasticus*  
 2251 seelde: seldom  
 2252 wyld fyr: erysipelas, an acute inflammation of the skin  
 corrupt: infectious

Thanne shal he knowen al hire harlotrye,  
 Bothe in repreve of hire and othere mo."  
 "Ye shal?" quod Proserpyne, "wol ye so?  
 Now by my moodres sires soule I swere 2265  
 That I shal yeven hire suffisant answer,  
 And alle women after, for hir sake,  
 That, though they be in any gilt ytake,  
 With face boold they shulle hemself excuse,  
 And bere hem doun that wolden hem accuse.  
 For lak of answer noon of hem shal dyen. 2271  
 Al hadde man seyn a thyng with bothe his yen,  
 Yit shul we wommen visage it hardily,  
 And wepe, and swere, and chydte subtilly,  
 So that ye men shul been as lewed as gees. 2275  
 "What rekketh me of youre auctoritees?  
 I woot wel that this Jew, this Salomon,  
 Foond of us wommen foolles many oon.  
 But though that he ne foond no good womman,  
 Yet hath ther founde many another man 2280  
 Wommen ful trewe, ful goode, and vertuus.  
 Witnesse on hem that dwelle in Cristes hous;  
 With martirdom they preved hire constance.  
 The Romayn geestes eek make remembrance  
 Of many a verray, trewe wyf also. 2285  
 But, sire, ne be nat wrooth, al be it so,  
 Though that he seyde he foond no good  
 womman,  
 I prey yow take the sentence of the man;  
 He mente thus, that in sovereyn bontee  
 Nis noon but God, but neither he ne she. 2290  
 "Ey! for verray God that nys but oon,  
 What make ye so muche of Salomon?  
 What though he made a temple, Goddes hous?  
 What though he were riche and glorious?  
 So made he eek a temple of false goddis. 2295  
 How myghte he do a thyng that moore for-  
 bode is?  
 Pardee, as faire as ye his name emplastre,  
 He was a lechour and an ydolastre,  
 And in his elde he verray God forsook;  
 And if God ne hadde, as seith the book, 2300  
 Yspared him for his fadres sake, he sholde  
 Have lost his regne rather than he wolde.  
 I sette right noght, of al the vileynye  
 That ye of wommen write, a boterflye!

2262 harlotrye: wickedness  
 2265 my moodres sires soule: the soul of Saturn, father of Ceres  
 2273 visage it hardily: face it out boldly  
 2285 Romayn geestes: Roman history make remembrance: remind  
 2289 sovereyn bontee: perfect goodness  
 2290 he ne she: man nor woman  
 2297 emplastre: apply a medicinal plaster (i.e., gloss over)  
 2298 ydolastre: idolater  
 2302 rather: sooner

I am a womman, nedes moot I speke, 2305  
 Or elles swelle til myn herte breke.  
 For sithen he seyde that we been jangleresses,  
 As evere hool I moote brouke my tresses,  
 I shal nat spare, for no curteisye, 2309  
 To speke hym harm that wolde us vileynye."  
 "Dame," quod this Pluto, "be no lenger  
 wrooth;  
 I yeve it up! But sith I swoor myn ooth  
 That I wolde graunten hym his sighte ageyn,  
 My wof shal stonde, I warne yow certeyn.  
 I am a kyng; it sit me noght to lye." 2315  
 "And I," quod she, "a queene of Fayerye!  
 Hir answer shal she have, I undertake.  
 Lat us namoore wordes heerof make;  
 For sothe, I wol no lenger yow contrarie."  
 Now lat us turne agayn to Januarie, 2320  
 That in the gardyn with his faire May  
 Syngeth ful murier than the papejay,  
 "Yow love I best, and shal, and oother noon."  
 So longe aboute the aleyes is he goon,  
 Til he was come agaynes thilke pyrie 2325  
 Where as this Damyan sitteth ful myrie  
 An heigh among the fresshe leves grene.  
 This fresshe May, that is so bright and  
 sheene,  
 Gan for to syke, and seyde, "Allas, my syde!  
 Now sire," quod she, "for aught that may  
 bityde, 2330  
 I moste han of the peres that I see,  
 Or I moot dye, so soore longeth me  
 To eten of the smale peres grene.  
 Help, for hir love that is of hevene queene!  
 I telle yow wel, a womman in my plit 2335  
 May han to fruyt so greet an appetit  
 That she may dyen but she of it have."  
 "Allas," quod he, "that I ne had heer a knave  
 That koude clymbe! Allas, allas," quod he,  
 "For I am blynd!" "Ye, sire, no fors," quod  
 she; 2340  
 "But wolde ye vouche sauf, for Goddes sake,  
 The pyrie inwith youre armes for to take,  
 For wel I woot that ye mystruste me,  
 Thanne sholde I clymbe wel ynogh," quod she,  
 "So I my foot myghte sette upon yowre  
 bak." 2345

2307 jangleresses: chattering women  
 2308 brouke my tresses: remain alive (literally, *enjoy my hair*)  
 2315 sit = *sitteth*, suits, befits  
 2319 contrarie: contradict  
 2322 papejay: parrot  
 2324 aleyes: alleys, garden paths  
 2325 agaynes: in front of pyrie: pear tree  
 2331 peres: pears  
 2335 plit: condition

"Certes," quod he, "theron shal be no lak,  
 Mighte I yow helpen with myn herte blood."  
 He stoupeth doun, and on his bak she stood,  
 And caughte hire by a twiste, and up she gooth —  
 Ladies, I prey yow that ye be nat wrooth;  
 I kan nat glose, I am a rude man — 2351  
 And sodeynly anon this Damyan  
 Gan pullen up the smok, and in he throng.  
 And whan that Pluto saugh this grete wrong,  
 To Januarie he gaf agayn his sighte, 2355  
 And made hym se as wel as evere he myghte.  
 And whan that he hadde caught his sighte  
 agayn,  
 Ne was ther nevere man of thyng so fayn,  
 But on his wyf his thoght was everemo.  
 Up to the tree he caste his eyen two, 2360  
 And saugh that Damyan his wyf had dressed  
 In swich manere it may nat been expressed,  
 But if I wolde speke uncurteisly;  
 And up he yaf a roryng and a cry, 2364  
 As dooth the mooder whan the child shal dye:  
 "Out! Help! Allas! Harrow!" he gan to crye,  
 "O stronge lady stooore, what dostow?"  
 And she answerde, "Sire, what eyleth yow?  
 Have pacience and resoun in youre blynde.  
 I have yow holpe on bothe youre eyen blynde.  
 Up peril of my soule, I shal nat lyen, 2371  
 As me was taught, to heele with youre eyen,  
 Was no thyng bet, to make yow to see,  
 Than strugle with a man upon a tree.  
 God woot, I dide it in ful good entente." 2375  
 "Strugle?" quod he, "Ye, algate in it wente!  
 God yeve yow bothe on shames deth to dyen!  
 He swyved thee; I saugh it with myne yen,  
 And elles be I hanged by the hals!"  
 "Thanne is," quod she, "my medicyne fals;  
 For certeinly, if that ye myghte se, 2381  
 Ye wolde nat seyn thises wordes unto me.  
 Ye han som glymsyng, and no parfit sighte."  
 "I se," quod he, "as wel as evere I myghte,  
 Thonked be God! With bothe myne eyen two,  
 And by my trouthe, me thoughte he hidede thee  
 so." 2386  
 "Ye maze, maze, goode sire," quod she;  
 "This thank have I for I have maad yow see.

2349 twiste: branch  
 2351 glose: use circumlocutions  
 2355 throng: thrust  
 2361 dressed: treated  
 2363 uncurteisly: crudely  
 2364 Harrow!: help!  
 2367 stronge lady stooore: bold, crude woman  
 2370 holpe: helped  
 2378 swyved: copulated with  
 2379 hals: neck  
 2383 glymsyng: glimpse  
 2387 maze: are bewildered, dazed



Allas," quod she, "that evere I was so kynde!"  
 "Now, dame," quod he, "lat al passe out of  
 mynde. 2390

Com doun, my lief, and if I have myssayd,  
 God helpe me so, as I am yvele apayd.  
 But, by my fader soule, I wende han seyn  
 How that this Damyán hadde by thee leyn,  
 And that thy smok hadde leyn upon his  
 brest." 2395

"Ye, sire," quod she, "ye may wene as yow  
 lest.

But, sire, a man that waketh out of his sleep,  
 He may nat sodeynly wel taken keep  
 Upon a thyng, ne seen it parfitly,  
 Til that he be adawed verraily. 2400  
 Right so a man that longe hath blynd ybe,  
 Ne may nat sodeynly so wel yse,

First whan his sighte is newe come ageyn,  
 As he that hath a day or two yseyn.  
 Til that youre sighte ysatled be a while 2405  
 Ther may ful many a sighte yow bigile.  
 Beth war, I prey yow, for by hevene kyng,  
 Ful many a man weneth to seen a thyng,  
 And it is al another than it semeth.  
 He that mysconceyeth, he mysdemeth." 2410  
 And with that word she leep doun fro the tree.

This Januarie, who is glad but he?  
 He kisseth hire and clippeth hire ful ofte,  
 And on hire wombe he stroketh hire ful softe,  
 And to his palays hoom he hath hire lad. 2415  
 Now, goode men, I pray yow to be glad.  
 Thus endeth heere my tale of Januarie;  
 God blesse us, and his mooder Seinte Marie!

*Heere is ended the Marchantes Tale of Januarie.*

## EPILOGUE TO THE MERCHANT'S TALE



"Ey! Goddes mercy!" seyde oure Hooste tho,  
 "Now swich a wyf I pray God kepe me fro!  
 Lo, whiche sleightes and subtilitees 2421  
 In wommen been! For ay as bisy as bees  
 Been they, us sely men for to deceyve,  
 And from the soothe evere wol they weyve;  
 By this Marchauntes tale it preveth weel. 2425  
 But doutelees, as trewe as any steel  
 I have a wyf, though that she povre be,  
 But of hir tonge, a labbyng shrewe is she,  
 And yet she hath an heep of vices mo;

Therof no fors! Lat alle swiche thynges go. 2430  
 But wyte ye what? In conseil be it seyde,  
 Me reweth soore I am unto hire teyd.  
 For and I sholde rekenen every vice  
 Which that she hath, ywis I were to nyce.  
 And cause why? It sholde reported be 2435  
 And toold to hire of somme of this meynee —  
 Of whom, it nedeth nat for to declare,  
 Syn wommen konnen outen swich chaffare;  
 And eek my wit suffiseth nat therto  
 To tellen al; wherfore my tale is do." 2440

2405 ysatled: settled  
 2409 al another: completely otherwise  
 2410 mysconceyeth: misapprehends, misunderstands  
 mysdemeth: misjudges  
 2413 clippeth: embraces

2431 In conseil: confidentially  
 2432 Me reweth: I repent teyd: tied  
 2433 and: if  
 2436 meynee: company  
 2438 outen: display chaffare: wares

2393 wende han seyn: thought to have seen, thought I saw  
 2400 adawed verraily: fully awakened  
 2402 yse: see

2424 weyve: deviate  
 2428 labbyng: blabbing