

## GEOFFREY CHAUCER

ca. 1343–1400

## THE CANTERBURY TALES

The Merchant's Tale<sup>1</sup>*The Introduction*

“Weeping and wailing, care and other sorwe  
 I knowe ynough, on even and amorwe,”<sup>2</sup>  
 Quod the Marchant, “and so doon othere mo<sup>3</sup>  
 That wedded been. I trowe° that it be so, *believe*  
 5 For wel I woot° it fareth so with me. *know*  
 I have a wif, the worste that may be:  
 For though the feend to hire ycoupled were,  
 She wolde him overmacche, I dar wel swere.  
 What sholde I you reherce in special  
 10 Hir heigh malice? She is a shrewe at al.<sup>4</sup>  
 Ther is a long and large difference  
 Bitwixe Grisildis grete pacience<sup>5</sup>  
 And of my wif the passing° crueltee. *surpassing*  
 Were I unbounden, also moote I thee,<sup>6</sup>  
 15 I wolde nevere eft° comen in the snare. *again*  
 We wedded men live in sorwe and care—  
 Assaye° whoso wole and he shal finde *try*  
 I saye sooth, by Saint Thomas of Inde,  
 As for the more° part—I saye nat alle: *larger*

1. The last incident of the Merchant's Tale is a common fabliau, but in preparing for the brief scene in which a wife climbs upon the shoulders of her blind husband into a pear tree in order to copulate with her lover there, Chaucer has shown a most un-fabliau-like expansiveness with his description of the old husband and how he got and treated his young wife: he thus turns a simple bawdy joke into an ample consideration of marriage and wives and of the narrator's very masculine but un-understanding attitude toward them. The Merchant himself has recently been married to what he considers a dreadful shrew, and the Clerk's just-finished story of Griselda, who suffered with extraordinary patience all sorts of abuse from her husband, has made the Merchant most indignant. Since he does not believe in Griselda, he tries to set the record straight by telling of the treachery of young May to old January. But if his intent is misogynistic, in his narrative he is so manipulated by Chaucer that one's sympathies are, if anywhere, as much with the cheating wife as the deceived husband. January is the type of the senile lecher of whom May is the unwilling victim, and if her behavior does nothing to disprove a woman-hater's prejudices, January's behavior provides her with a good excuse for acting as she does.

The tale is a wonderfully—indeed, outrageously—funny one, and many readers will be content to accept it as such; but other readers may be struck by Chaucer's profound exploration of the teller, whose disappointment with marriage seems to stem from a puerile notion of what a woman is, and who consequently blames woman rather than himself for the disappointment. In his assessment of women there is no middle term: women, he finds, are not docile beasts ever ready to serve their husbands' whims; *therefore* they are deceitful adulterers like May. There is nothing between Griselda and May. In his disillusionment the Merchant spews forth hatred—on May for her treachery, on January for his senile folly in believing what the Merchant himself once believed, and, perhaps most of all, on himself.

2. Evening and morning.

3. I.e., so do others too.

4. In every respect.

5. For Griselda see note 1, above. The Clerk has concluded his tale with the humorous advice to wives not to be patient in marriage as Griselda was, but to make their husbands “weep and wail” (see line 1, above).

6. If I were freed, so might I thrive.

- 20 God shilde<sup>o</sup> that it sholde so bifalle. *forbid*  
 A, goode sire Host, I have ywedded be  
 These monthes two, and more nat, pardee,<sup>7</sup>  
 And yit I trowe he that al his live  
 Wiflee<sup>s</sup> hath been, though that men wolde him rive<sup>o</sup> *pierce*  
 25 Unto the herte, ne coude in no manere  
 Tellen so muchel sorwe as I now here  
 Coude tellen of my wives cursednesse."<sup>o</sup> *wickedness*  
 "Now," quod oure Host, 'Marchant, so God you blesse,  
 Sin<sup>o</sup> ye so muchel knowen of that art, *since*  
 30 Ful hertely I praye you telle us part."  
 "Gladly," quod he, "but of myn owene sore  
 For sory herte I telle may namore."

### *The Tale*

- Whilom<sup>8</sup> ther was dwelling in Lumbardy<sup>e</sup> *Lombardy*  
 A worthy knight that born was of Pavie,<sup>o</sup> *Pavia*  
 35 In which he lived in gret prosperitee;  
 And sixty yeer a wiflee<sup>s</sup> man was he,  
 And folwed ay<sup>o</sup> his bodily delit *always*  
 On wommen ther as was his appetit,  
 As doon these fooles that been seculer.<sup>9</sup>  
 40 And whan that he was passed sixty yeer—  
 Were it for holinesse or for dotage  
 I can nat saye—but swich a gret corage<sup>o</sup> *desire*  
 Hadde this knight to been a wedded man,  
 That day and night he dooth al that he can  
 45 T' espyen where he mighte wedded be,  
 Praying oure Lord to graunten him that he  
 Mighte ones<sup>o</sup> knowe of thilke<sup>o</sup> blisful lif *once / that*  
 That is bitwixe an housbonde and his wif,  
 And for to live under that holy bond  
 50 With which that first God man and womman boond.<sup>o</sup> *bound*  
 "Noon other lif," saide he, "is worth a bene,<sup>o</sup> *bean*  
 For wedlok is so esy and so clene  
 That in this world it is a Paradis."  
 Thus saide this olde knight that was so wis.  
 55 And certainly, as sooth as God is king,  
 To take a wif, it is a glorious thing,  
 And namely<sup>o</sup> whan a man is old and hoor:<sup>o</sup> *especially / gray*  
 Thanne is a wif the fruit<sup>o</sup> of his tresor;<sup>o</sup> *best part / treasure*  
 Thanne sholde he take a yong wif and a fair,  
 60 On which he mighte engendren him an heir,  
 And lede his lif in joye and in solas,<sup>o</sup> *delight*  
 Wher as these bacheleres singe allas,  
 Whan that they finde any adversitee  
 In love, which nis but childissh vanitee.  
 65 And trewely, it sit<sup>o</sup> wel to be so *suits*  
 That bacheleres have ofte paine and wo:

7. From French *par Dieu*, "by God."

9. I.e., not in clerical orders.

8. Once upon a time.

	On brotel <sup>o</sup> ground they builde, and brotelnesse	<i>brittle</i>
	They finde whan they weene <sup>o</sup> sikernese; <sup>o</sup>	<i>expect / security</i>
	They live but as a brid <sup>o</sup> or as a beest	<i>bird</i>
70	In libertee and under noon arrest, <sup>o</sup>	<i>control</i>
	Ther as a wedded man in his estat	
	Liveth a lif blisful and ordinat <sup>o</sup>	<i>regulated</i>
	Under this yok of marriage ybounde:	
	Wel may his herte in joye and blisse habounde. <sup>o</sup>	<i>abound</i>
75	For who can be so buxom <sup>o</sup> as a wif?	<i>obedient</i>
	Who is so trewe and eek so ententif <sup>o</sup>	<i>attentive</i>
	To keepe him, sik and hool, as is his make? <sup>1</sup>	
	For wele <sup>o</sup> or wo she wol him nat forsake.	<i>happiness</i>
	She nis nat wery him to love and serve,	
80	Though that he lie bedrede <sup>o</sup> til he sterve. <sup>o</sup>	<i>bedridden / die</i>
	And yit some clerkes sayn it is nat so,	
	Of whiche he Theofraste <sup>2</sup> is oon of tho <sup>o</sup> —	<i>those</i>
	What fors <sup>o</sup> though Theofraste liste <sup>o</sup> lie?	<i>matter / it pleases</i>
	“Ne taak no wif,” quod he, “for housbondrye <sup>o</sup>	<i>economy</i>
85	As for to spare in household thy dispence. <sup>o</sup>	<i>expenses</i>
	A trewe servant dooth more diligence	
	Thy good to keepe than thyn owene wif,	
	For she wol claime half part al hir lif.	
	And if thou be sik, so God me save,	
90	Thy verray <sup>o</sup> freendes or a trewe knave <sup>o</sup>	<i>true / servant</i>
	Wol keepe thee bet <sup>o</sup> than she that waiteth ay <sup>3</sup>	<i>better</i>
	After thy good, and hath do many a day.	
	And if thou take a wif unto thyn hold,	
	Ful lightly <sup>o</sup> maistou been a cokewold.” <sup>o</sup>	<i>easily / cuckold</i>
95	This sentence <sup>o</sup> and an hundred thinges worse	<i>sentiment</i>
	Writeth this man, ther <sup>4</sup> God his bones curse!	
	But take no keep <sup>o</sup> of al swich vanitee:	<i>heed</i>
	Defye Theofraste and herke me.	
	A wif is Goddes yifte verraily;	
100	Alle othere manere yiftes hardily, <sup>o</sup>	<i>certainly</i>
	As landes, rentes, <sup>o</sup> pasture, or commune, <sup>5</sup>	<i>income</i>
	Or moebles, <sup>o</sup> alle been yiftes of Fortune,	<i>furniture</i>
	That passen as a shadwe upon a wal.	
	But drede nat, if plainly speke I shal,	
105	A wif wol laste and in thyn hous endure	
	Wel lenger than thee list, <sup>o</sup> paraventure.	<i>please</i>
	Mariage is a ful greet sacrament.	
	He which that hath no wif I holde him shent. <sup>o</sup>	<i>ruined</i>
	He liveth helpeles and al desolat—	
110	I speke of folk in seculer estat.	
	And herke why I saye nat this for nought	
	That womman is for mannes help ywrought:	
	The hye God, whan he hadde Adam maked	
	And sawgh him allone, bely-naked,	
115	God of his grete goodnesse saide than,	

1. To watch over him, sick and healthy, as is his mate.

2. Theophrastus, author of an anti-feminist argument preserved in St. Jerome's invective against

Jovinian.

3. Lies in wait constantly.

4. I.e., may.

5. Pasturage rights.

“Lat us now make an help unto this man  
 Lik to himself.” And thanne he made him Eve.  
 Heer may ye see, and heerby may ye preve<sup>o</sup> *prove*  
 That wif is mannes help and his confort,  
 120 His Paradis terrestre<sup>o</sup> and his disport. *terrestrial*  
 So buxom<sup>o</sup> and so vertuouus is she *obedient*  
 They moste<sup>o</sup> needes live in unitee: *must*  
 Oo<sup>o</sup> flessch they been, and oo flessch, as I gessc,  
 Hath but oon herte in wele<sup>o</sup> and in distresse. *one*  
 125 A wif, a, Sainte Marye, benedicite,<sup>o</sup> *happiness*  
 How mighte a man han any adversitee *blesse me*  
 That hath a wif? Certes, I can nat saye.  
 The blisse which that is bitwixe hem twaye,  
 Ther may no tonge telle or herte thinke.  
 130 If he be poore, she helpeth him to swinke.<sup>o</sup> *work*  
 She keepeth his good and wasteth neveradeel.<sup>o</sup> *nothing*  
 Al that hir housbonde lust<sup>o</sup> hire liketh<sup>o</sup> weel. *desires / pleases*  
 She saith nat ones “Nay” whan he saith “Ye.”  
 “Do this,” saith he. “Al redy, sire,” saith she.  
 135 O blisful orde of wedlok precious,  
 Thou art so merye and eek<sup>o</sup> so vertuouus, *also*  
 And so commended and appreve<sup>o</sup> eek, *approved*  
 That any man that halt him worth a leek<sup>6</sup>  
 Upon his bare knees oughte al his lif  
 140 Thanken his God that him hath sent a wif,  
 Or elles praye to God him for to sende  
 A wif to laste unto his lives ende:  
 For thanne his lif is set in sikernesse.<sup>o</sup> *security*  
 He may nat be deceived, as I gesse,  
 145 So that he werke after his wives reed;<sup>o</sup> *advice*  
 Thanne may be boldely keepen up his heed,<sup>o</sup> *head*  
 They been so trewe and therwithal so wise;  
 For which, if thou wolt werken as the wise,  
 Do alway so as wommen wol thee rede.<sup>o</sup> *advise*  
 150 Lo how that Jacob, as thise clerkes rede,<sup>7</sup>  
 By good conseil of his moder Rebekke  
 Boond<sup>o</sup> the kides<sup>o</sup> skin aboute his nekke,  
 For which his fadres benison<sup>o</sup> he wan.<sup>o</sup> *bound / kid's*  
*blessing / won*  
 Lo Judith, as the storye eek telle can,  
 155 By good conseil she Goddes peple kepte,<sup>8</sup>  
 And slow<sup>o</sup> him Olofernus<sup>o</sup> whil he slepte. *slew / Holofernes*  
 Lo Abigail by good conseil how she<sup>9</sup>  
 Saved her housbonde Nabal whan that he  
 Sholde han been slain. And looke Ester<sup>1</sup> also

6. Considers himself worth a leek.

7. See Genesis xxv, which tells how Jacob won from his father the blessing that was properly his brother Esau's when, following his mother Rebecca's suggestion, he used a goatskin to simulate Esau's hairiness, thus deceiving the blind Isaac.

8. The Book of Judith tells how she saved her people by decapitating the general of an attacking army, Holofernes, while he was in a drunken sleep.

9. See I Samuel xxv, which tells how Abigail per-

sueded David not to kill her husband Nabal, who had offended him; her action, however, was motivated less by a desire to spare Nabal than by a desire to prevent David from unnecessarily shedding blood: after Abigail told Nabal what she had done, he died, and Abigail became one of David's wives.

1. The Book of Esther tells how she saved her kinsman Mordecai and all her people by charming King Ahasuerus, whose concubine she had been forced to become. She persuaded the king to put

- 160 By good conseil delivered out of wo  
 The peple of God, and made him Mardochee°  
 Of Assuere° enhaunced° for to be. *Mordecai*  
*Ahasuerus / exalted*  
 Ther is nothing in gree° superlatif,  
 As saith Senek,<sup>2</sup> above an humble wif. *degree*
- 165 Suffre thy wives tonge, as Caton<sup>3</sup> bit.° *bids*  
 She shal comande and thou shalt suffren it,  
 And yit she wol obeye of curteisye.  
 A wif is kepere° of thyn housbondrye:° *guardian / household*  
 Wel may the sike man biwaile and weepe
- 170 Theras° ther is no wif the hous to keepe. *where*  
 I warne thee, if wisely thou wolt wirche,° *work*  
 Love wel thy wif as Crist loved his chirche;  
 If thou lovest thyself thou lovest thy wif:  
 No man hateth his flessch, but in his lif
- 175 He fostreth it, and therfore bidde I thee,  
 Cherisse thy wif or thou shalt nevere thee.° *prosper*  
 Housbonde and wif, what so men jape° or playe, *joke*  
 Of worldly folk holden the siker° waye. *sure*  
 They been so knit<sup>4</sup> ther may noon harm bitide,
- 180 And namely° upon the wives side.— *especially*  
 For which this Januarye of whom I tolde  
 Considered hath inwith° his dayes olde *within*  
 The lusty lif, the vertuous quiete  
 That is in mariage hony sweete,
- 185 And for his freendes on a day he sente  
 To tellen hem th'effect of his entente.  
 With face sad° this tale he hath hem told: *sober*  
 He saide, "Freendes, I am hoor° and old, *gray*  
 And almost, God woot, on my pittes brinke:<sup>5</sup>
- 190 Upon my soule somewhat moste° I thinke. *must*  
 I have my body folily° dispended°— *foolishly / expended*  
 Blessed be God that it shal been amended.  
 For I wol be, certain, a wedded man,  
 And that anoon, in al the haste I can,
- 195 Unto som maide fair and tendre of age.  
 I praye you shapeth° for my mariage *arrange*  
 Al sodeinly,° for I wol nat abide; *quickly / wait*  
 And I wol fonde° t'espyn on my side *try*  
 To whom I may be wedded hastily.
- 200 But for as muche as ye been mo° than I, *more*  
 Ye shullen rather° swich a thing espyn *sooner*  
 Than I, and wher me best were to allyen.  
 But oo thing warne I you, my freendes dere:  
 I wol noon old wif han in no manere;
- 205 She shal nat passe twenty yeer certain—  
 Old fissh and young flessch wol I have fain.° *gladly*  
 Bet° is," quod he, "a pik<sup>6</sup> than a pikerel, *better*

to death Haman, the chief enemy of the Jews; his ten sons; and hundreds of Haman's supporters.  
 2. Seneca, the Roman philosopher, who was often cited as the author of pieces of sententious wisdom even though, as here, the remark is not to be found

in his works.

3. I.e., the Cato Book, a school primer.

4. Joined together.

5. Grave's edge.

6. A pike was considered to be an old pickerel.

	And bet than old boef <sup>o</sup> is the tendre veel: <sup>o</sup>	<i>beef / veal</i>
	I wol <sup>o</sup> no womman thritty yeer of age—	<i>wish</i>
210	It is but bene-straw and greet forage. <sup>7</sup>	
	And eek thise olde widwes, God it woot, <sup>o</sup>	<i>knows</i>
	They conne so muche craft on Wades boot, <sup>8</sup>	
	So muchel broken harm whan that hem leste, <sup>9</sup>	
	That with hem sholde I nevere live in reste.	
215	For sondry scoles maketh subtile clerkes:	
	Womman of manye scoles half a clerk is. <sup>1</sup>	
	But certainly a yong thing may men gie, <sup>o</sup>	<i>guide</i>
	Right as men may warm wex <sup>o</sup> with handes plye. <sup>o</sup>	<i>wax / mold</i>
	Wherfore I saye you plainly in a clause,	
220	I wol noon old wif han right for this cause:	
	For if so were I hadde swich meschaunce	
	That I in hire ne coude han no plesaunce,	
	Thanne sholde I lede my lif in avoutrye, <sup>o</sup>	<i>adultery</i>
	And go straight to the devel whan I die;	
225	Ne children sholde I none upon hire geten,	
	Yit me were levere houndes hadde me eten	
	Than that myn heritage sholde falle	
	In straunge <sup>2</sup> hand; and this I telle you alle:	
	I dote nat, I woot <sup>o</sup> the cause why	<i>know</i>
230	Men sholde wedde, and ferthermore woot I	
	Ther speketh many a man of mariage	
	That woot namore of it than woot my page	
	For whiche causes man sholde take a wif:	
	If he ne may nat live chast his lif,	
235	Take him a wif with greet devocioun,	
	By cause of leveful <sup>o</sup> procreacioun	<i>lawful</i>
	Of children, to th'honour of God above,	
	And nat only for paramour <sup>3</sup> or love;	
	And for they sholde lecherye eschue, <sup>o</sup>	<i>eschew</i>
240	And yeelde <sup>4</sup> hir dette whan that it is due;	
	Or for that eech of hem sholde helpen other	
	In meschief, as a suster shal the brother,	
	And live in chastitee ful holily—	
	But sires, by youre leve, that am nat I.	
245	For God be thanked, I dar make avaunt, <sup>o</sup>	<i>boast</i>
	I feele my limes <sup>o</sup> stark <sup>o</sup> and suffisaunt <sup>o</sup>	<i>limbs / strong / competent</i>
	To do al that a man bilongeth to.	
	I woot myself best what I may do.	
	Though I be hoor, I fare as dooth a tree	
250	That blosmeth er the fruit ywoxen <sup>o</sup> be,	<i>grown</i>
	And blosmy tree nis neither drye ne deed: <sup>o</sup>	<i>dead</i>
	I feele me nowher hoor but on myn heed;	
	Myn herte and alle my limes <sup>o</sup> been as greene	<i>limbs</i>
	As laurer <sup>o</sup> thurgh <sup>o</sup> the yeer is for to seene.	<i>laurel / through</i>

7. I.e., a thirty-year-old woman is only bean-straw (dried bean-stems) and coarse winter fodder.

8. They have so much skill in Wade's boat: Wade was a legendary hero, but his relevance here is not clear.

9. I.e., (they can) traffic so much in injuries when

they feel like it.

1. Women are part-time students in many schools.

2. I.e., unlineal.

3. Bodily love.

4. I.e., pay.

- 255 And sin that ye han herd al myn entente,  
I praye you to my wil ye wol assente.”  
Diverse men diversely him tolde  
Of mariage manye ensamples<sup>5</sup> olde:  
Some blamed it, some praised it, certain;
- 260 But at the laste, shortly for to sayn,  
As alday<sup>o</sup> falleth altercacioun *constantly*  
Bitwixe freendes in disputisoun,<sup>o</sup> *argument*  
Ther fil<sup>o</sup> a strif bitwixe his bretheren two,  
Of whiche that oon was cleped Placebo;<sup>6</sup> *occurred*
- 265 Justinus soothly called was that other.  
Placebo saide, “O Januarye brother,  
Ful litel neede hadde ye, my lord so dere,  
Conseil to axe<sup>o</sup> of any that is here, *ask*  
But<sup>o</sup> that ye been so ful of sapience<sup>o</sup> *except / wisdom*
- 270 That you ne liketh, for youre heigh prudence,  
To waiven<sup>o</sup> fro the word of Salomon; *depart*  
This word saide he unto us everichoon:  
‘Werk alle thing by conseil,’ thus saide he,  
‘And thanne shaltou nat repenten thee.’<sup>7</sup>
- 275 But though that Salomon spak swich a word,  
Myn owene dere brother and my lord,  
So wisly<sup>o</sup> God my soule bringe at reste, *surely*  
I holde youre owene conseil is the beste.  
For brother myn, of me take this motif.<sup>o</sup> *proposition*
- 280 I have now been a court-man al my lif,  
And God it woot, though I unworthy be,  
I have stonden in ful greet degree  
Abouten lordes in ful greet estat,  
Yit hadde I nevere with noon of hem debat;
- 285 I nevere hem contraried,<sup>o</sup> trewely; *contradicted*  
I woot wel that my lord can<sup>o</sup> more than I; *knows*  
What that he saith, I hold it ferm<sup>o</sup> and stable; *firm*  
I saye the same or elles thing semblable.<sup>o</sup> *similar*  
A ful greet fool is any conseilour
- 290 That serveth any lord of heigh honour  
That dar presume or elles thenken<sup>o</sup> it *imagine*  
That his conseil sholde passe<sup>8</sup> his lordes wit. *faith*  
Nay, lordes be no fooles, by my fay.<sup>o</sup>
- 295 So heigh sentence<sup>o</sup> so hollyly and weel, *sentiments*  
That I consente and conferme everydeel  
Your wordes alle and your opinioun.  
By God, ther nis no man in al this town,  
Ne in Itaile,<sup>o</sup> coude bet<sup>o</sup> han ysaid. *Italy / better*
- 300 Crist halt him<sup>o</sup> of this conseil wel apaid.<sup>o</sup> *pleased*  
And trewely it is an heigh corage<sup>o</sup> *spirit*

5. Illustrative stories.

6. Placebo takes his name from the first word of the Latin of Psalm cxiv.9 (Vulgate), “I shall please (the Lord in the land of the living).” Justinus in the next line suggests a just man.

7. The quotation is not from any of the works of

Solomon but from Ecclesiasticus xxxii.19. Like Seneca, Solomon was often given credit for bits of sententious wisdom.

8. Be superior to.

9. Considers himself.

	Of any man that stapen <sup>o</sup> is in age	<i>advanced</i>
	To take a yong wif! By my fader kin,	
	Youre herte hangeth on a joly pin!	
305	Dooth now in this matere right as you leste, <sup>o</sup>	<i>please</i>
	For finally, I holde it for the beste.”	
	Justinus that ay <sup>o</sup> stille sat and herde,	<i>always</i>
	Right in this wise he to Placebo answerde:	
	“Now, brother myn, be pacient I praye,	
310	Sin <sup>o</sup> ye han said, and herkneth what I saye:	<i>since</i>
	Senek <sup>1</sup> amonges othere wordes wise	
	Saith that a man oughte him right wel avise	
	To whom he yiveth his land or his catel; <sup>o</sup>	<i>property</i>
	And sin I oughte avisen me right wel	
315	To whom I give my good away fro me,	
	Wel muchel more I oughte avised be	
	To whom I give my body for alway.	
	I warne you wel, it is no childes play	
	To taken a wif withouten avisement. <sup>o</sup>	<i>deliberation</i>
320	Men moste enquere <sup>o</sup> —this is myn assent <sup>o</sup> —	<i>inquire / opinion</i>
	Wher <sup>o</sup> she be wis, or sobre, or dronkelewe, <sup>2</sup>	<i>whether</i>
	Or proud, or elles otherways a shrewe,	
	A chidestere, <sup>o</sup> or wastour of thy good,	<i>chider</i>
	Or riche, or poore, or elles mannissh wood <sup>3</sup> —	
325	Al be it so that no man finden shal	
	Noon in this world that trotteth <sup>4</sup> hool <sup>o</sup> in al,	<i>whole</i>
	Ne man ne beest swich as men coude devise. <sup>o</sup>	<i>imagine</i>
	But nathelees, it oughte ynough suffise	
	With any wif, if so were that she hadde	
330	Mo <sup>o</sup> goode thewes <sup>o</sup> than hir vices badde.	<i>more / characteristics</i>
	And al this axeth <sup>o</sup> leiser for t’enquere.	<i>requires</i>
	For God it woot, I have wept many a tere	
	Ful prively sin <sup>o</sup> that I hadde a wif:	<i>since</i>
	Praise whoso wol a wedded mannes lif,	
335	Certain I finde in it but cost and care,	
	And observances <sup>o</sup> of alle blisses bare.	<i>duties</i>
	And yit, God woot, my neighebores aboute,	
	And namely <sup>o</sup> of wommen many a route, <sup>o</sup>	<i>especially / group</i>
	Sayn that I have the moste stedefast wif,	
340	And eek the mekeste <sup>o</sup> oon that bereth lif—	<i>meekest</i>
	But I woot best where wringeth <sup>o</sup> me my sho. <sup>o</sup>	<i>pinches / shoe</i>
	Ye mowe <sup>o</sup> for me right as you liketh do.	<i>may</i>
	Aviseth you—ye been a man of age—	
	How that ye entren into mariage,	
345	And namely <sup>o</sup> with a yong wif and a fair.	<i>especially</i>
	By him that made water, erthe, and air,	
	The youngeste man that is in al this route	
	Is bisy ynough to bringen it aboute	
	To han his wif allone. Trusteth me,	
350	Ye shul nat plesen hire fully yeres three—	

1. For Seneca, see note to line 164, above.

2. Given to drunkenness.

3. Unfemininely inclined to rage.

4. Trots, i.e., appears.

This is to sayn, to doon hire ful plesaunce:  
 A wif axeth ful many an observaunce.<sup>5</sup>  
 I praye you that ye be nat yuele apaid.<sup>6</sup>  
 “Wel,” quod this Januarye, “and hastou said?  
 355 Straw for thy Senek and for thy proverbes!  
 I counte<sup>o</sup> nat a panier<sup>o</sup> ful of herbes *value / basket*  
 Of scole-terms.<sup>7</sup> Wiser men than thou,  
 As thou hast herd, assenteden right now  
 To my purpos. Placebo, what saye ye?”  
 360 “I saye it is a cursed man,” quod he  
 “That letteth<sup>o</sup> matrimoigne,<sup>o</sup> sikerly.”<sup>o</sup> *hinders / matrimony / certainly*  
 And with that word they risen sodeinly,  
 And been assented fully that he sholde  
 Be wedded whan him liste and wher<sup>8</sup> he wolde.  
 365 Heigh fantasy<sup>o</sup> and curious<sup>o</sup> bisnesse<sup>o</sup> *imagining / careful / attentiveness*  
 Fro day to day gan in the soule impresse<sup>o</sup>  
 Of Januarye aboute his mariage:  
 Many fair shap and many a fair visage  
 Ther passeth thurgh his herte night by night;  
 370 As whoso tooke a mirour polished bright,  
 And sette it in a commune market-place,  
 Thanne sholde he see ful many a figure pace<sup>o</sup> *pass*  
 By his mirour; and in the same wise  
 Gan Januarye inwith<sup>o</sup> his thought devise *within*  
 375 Of maidens whiche that dwelten him biside.  
 He wiste<sup>o</sup> nat wher that he mighte abide:<sup>o</sup> *knew / settle*  
 For if that oon have beautee in hir face,  
 Another stant<sup>o</sup> so in the peples grace *stands*  
 For hir sadnesse<sup>o</sup> and hir benignitee,  
 380 That of the peple grettest vois<sup>1</sup> hath she;  
 And some were riche and hadden badde name.  
 But nathelees, bitwixe earnest and game,  
 He atte laste appointed him on<sup>2</sup> oon,  
 And leet<sup>o</sup> alle othere<sup>o</sup> from his herte goon, *let / others*  
 385 And chees<sup>o</sup> hire of his owene auctoritee<sup>o</sup>— *chose / authority*  
 For Love is blind alday<sup>o</sup> and may nat see. *always*  
 And whan that he was in his bed ybrought,  
 He portrayde in his herte and in his thought  
 Hir fresshe beautee and hir age tendre,  
 390 Hir middel smal, hir armes longe and sclendir,  
 Hir wise governance,<sup>o</sup> hir gentillesse,<sup>o</sup> *behavior / gentility*  
 Hir wommanly bering and hir sadnesse.<sup>o</sup> *constancy*  
 And whan that he on hire was condescended,<sup>o</sup> *settled*  
 Him thoughte his chois mighte nat been amended;<sup>3</sup>  
 395 For whan that he himself concluded<sup>4</sup> hadde,  
 Him thoughte eech other mannes wit so badde,  
 That impossible it were to replye<sup>5</sup>

5. Little ritual.

6. Ill-pleased.

7. School terms, i.e., subtle arguments.

8. I.e., to whom.

9. I.e., took hold upon the spirit.

1. I.e., loudest acclaim.

2. Determined upon.

3. Improved upon.

4. Come to a decision.

5. I.e., to object.

	Again his chois: this was his fantasye.	
	His freendes sente he to at his instaunce,	
400	And prayed hem to doon him that plesaunce	
	That hastily they wolden to him come:	
	He wolde abregge <sup>o</sup> hir labour alle and some; <sup>6</sup>	<i>shorten</i>
	Needeth namore for him to go ne ride;	
	He was appointed <sup>o</sup> ther he wolde abide.	<i>determined</i>
405	Placebo cam and eek his freendes soone,	
	And alderfirst <sup>7</sup> he bad <sup>o</sup> hem alle a boone,	<i>prayed</i>
	That noon of hem none argumentes make	
	Again the purpos which that he hath take,	
	Which purpos was plesant to God, saide he,	
410	And verray <sup>o</sup> ground of his prosperitee.	<i>true</i>
	He saide ther was a maiden in the town	
	Which that of beautee hadde greet renown;	
	Al <sup>o</sup> were it so she were of smal degree, <sup>8</sup>	<i>although</i>
	Suffiseth him hir youthe and hir beautee;	
415	Which maide he saide he wolde han to his wif,	
	To lede in ese and holinesse his lif,	
	And thanked God that he mighte han hire al, <sup>9</sup>	
	That no wight his blisse parten <sup>o</sup> shal;	<i>share</i>
	And prayde hem to labouren in this neede,	
420	And shapen <sup>o</sup> that he faille not to speede. <sup>1</sup>	<i>arrange</i>
	For thanne he saide his spirit was at ese.	
	“Thanne is,” quod he, “no thing may me displese.	
	Save oo thing priketh in my conscience,	
	The which I wol reherce in youre presence.	
425	I have,” quod he, “herd said ful yore <sup>2</sup> ago	
	Ther may no man han parfite <sup>o</sup> blisses two—	<i>perfect</i>
	This is to saye, in erthe and eek in hevene.	
	For though he keepe him fro the sinnes sevene,	
	And eek from every braunche <sup>3</sup> of thilke <sup>o</sup> tree,	<i>that</i>
430	Yit is ther so parfit <sup>o</sup> felicitee	<i>perfect</i>
	And so greet ese and lust <sup>o</sup> in mariage,	<i>pleasure</i>
	That evere I am agast now in myn age	
	That I shal lede now so merye a lif,	
	So delicat, <sup>o</sup> withouten wo and strif,	<i>delightful</i>
435	That I shal han myn hevene in erthe here.	
	For sith <sup>o</sup> that verray hevene is bought so dere	<i>since</i>
	With tribulaciouns and greet penaunce,	
	How sholde I thanne, that live in swich plesaunce	
	As alle wedded men doon with hir wives,	
440	Come to the blisse ther Crist eterne on live is?	
	This is my drede, and ye, my bretheren twaye,	
	Assoileth <sup>o</sup> me this question, I praye.”	<i>resolve</i>
	Justinus, which that hated his folye,	
	Answerde anoonright <sup>o</sup> in his japerye; <sup>o</sup>	<i>straightway / joking</i>
445	And for he wolde his longe tale abregge. <sup>o</sup>	<i>shorten</i>

6. Each and every one of them.

7. First of all.

8. Low social rank.

9. Her youth and beauty are enough for him.

1. Attain his end.

2. I.e., long.

3. The seven deadly sins were divided into branches and sub-branches, so that the total number of sins one was in danger of committing was very high.

He wolde noon auctoritee allegge,<sup>o</sup> *adduce*  
 But saide, "Sire, so there be noon obstacle  
 Other than this, God of his heigh miracle  
 And of his mercy may so for you wirche,<sup>o</sup> *work*  
 450 That er ye have youre right<sup>4</sup> of holy chirche,  
 Ye may repente of wedded mannes lif,  
 In which ye sayn ther is no wo ne strif.  
 And elles God forbede but<sup>o</sup> he sente *unless*  
 A wedded man him grace to repente  
 455 Wel ofte rather<sup>o</sup> than a sengle<sup>o</sup> man. *sooner / single*  
 And therefore, sire, the beste reed<sup>o</sup> I can:<sup>5</sup> *advice*  
 Despaire you nought, but have in youre memorye  
 Paraunter<sup>o</sup> she may be youre purgatorye;  
 She may be Goddes mene<sup>6</sup> and Goddes whippe!  
 460 Thanne shal youre soule up to hevene skippe  
 Swifter than dooth an arwe out of a bowe.  
 I hope to God heerafter shul ye knowe  
 That ther nis noon so greet felicitee  
 In marriage, ne nevere mo<sup>o</sup> shall be, *more*  
 465 That you shal lette<sup>o</sup> of youre savacioun, *hinder*  
 So that ye use, as skile<sup>o</sup> is and resoun, *reason*  
 The lustes<sup>o</sup> of youre wif attemprely,<sup>o</sup> *pleasures / moderately*  
 And that ye ples hire nat too amorously,  
 And that ye keepe you eek from other sinne.  
 470 My tale is doon, for my wit is thinne.  
 Beeth nat agast heerof, my brother dere,  
 But lat us waden<sup>o</sup> out of this matere. *move*  
 The Wif of Bathe, if ye han understonde,  
 Of mariage which ye han on honde  
 475 Declared hath ful wel in litel space.  
 Fareth now wel. God have you in his grace."  
 And with that word this Justin and his brother  
 Han take hir leve and eech of hem of other,  
 For whan they saw that it moste<sup>o</sup> needes be *must*  
 480 They wroughten so by sly<sup>o</sup> and wis trettee<sup>o</sup> *clever / negotiation*  
 That she, this maiden which that Mayus highte,<sup>o</sup> *was named*  
 As hastily as evere that she mighte,  
 Shal wedded be unto this Januarye.  
 I trowe it were too longe you to tarye  
 485 If I you tolde of every scrit<sup>o</sup> and bond *writ*  
 By which that she was feffed in<sup>7</sup> his lond,  
 Or for to herkennen of hir riche array;  
 But finally yeomen is that day  
 That to the chirche bothe be they went  
 490 For to receive the holy sacrament.  
 Forth comth the preest with stole aboute his nekke,  
 And bad hire be lik Sarra and Rebekke<sup>8</sup>  
 In wisdom and in trouthe<sup>o</sup> of mariage, *fidelity*  
 And saide his orisons as is usage,

4. Due, i.e., burial.

5. Am capable of.

6. Means, i.e., agent.

7. Endowed with.

8. In the medieval marriage ceremony, the priest enjoined the bride to imitate Sarah and Rebecca. Sarah was Abraham's wife, the mother of Isaac; for Rebecca, see note to line 150, above.

- 495 And croucheth<sup>9</sup> hem, and bad God sholde hem blesse,  
 And made al siker<sup>o</sup> ynough with holinesse. *secure*
- Thus been they wedded with solempnitee,  
 And at the laste sitteth he and she  
 With other worthy folk upon the dais.
- 500 Al ful of joye and blisse is the palais,  
 And ful of instruments<sup>1</sup> and of vitaile,<sup>o</sup> *foodstuffs*  
 The moste daintevous<sup>o</sup> of al Itaile. *tasty*  
 Biforn hem stode instruments of swich soun,<sup>o</sup> *sound*  
 That Orpheus n<sup>o</sup>f Thebes Amphioun<sup>2</sup>
- 505 Ne maden nevere swich a melodye.  
 At every cours thanne cam loud minstralcye,  
 That nevere tromped Joab<sup>3</sup> for to heere,  
 Ne he Theodamas<sup>4</sup> yit half so clere  
 At Thebes whan the citee was in doute.
- 510 Bacus<sup>o</sup> the win hem shenketh<sup>o</sup> al aboute, *Bacchus / pours*  
 And Venus laugheth upon every wight,  
 For Januarye was bicomme hir knight,  
 And wolde bothe assayen his corage  
 In libertee and eek in mariage;
- 515 And with hir firbrand in hir hand aboute  
 Daunceth bifore the bride and al the route.<sup>o</sup> *company*  
 And certainly, I dar right wel saye this:  
 Ymeneus<sup>o</sup> that God of Wedding is *Hymen*  
 Sawgh nevere his lif so merye a wedded man.
- 520 Hold thou thy pees, thou poete Marcian,<sup>5</sup>  
 That writest us that ilke wedding murye<sup>o</sup> *merry*  
 Of hire Philologye and him Mercurye,  
 And of the songes that the Muses songe<sup>o</sup>— *sang*  
 Too smal is bothe thy penne and eek thy tonge
- 525 For to descriven<sup>o</sup> of this mariage. *describe*  
 Whan tendre youthe hath wedded stouping<sup>o</sup> age, *stooping*  
 Ther is swich mirthe that it may nat be writen;  
 Assayeth it yourself, thanne may ye witen<sup>o</sup> *learn*  
 If that I lie or noon in this matere.
- 530 Mayus, that sit<sup>o</sup> with so benigne a cheere<sup>o</sup> *sits / expression*  
 Hire to biholde it seemed fairye<sup>o</sup>— *magic*  
 Queene Ester<sup>6</sup> looked nevere with swich an yē  
 On Assuer, so meeke a look hath she—  
 I may you nat devise al hir beautee,
- 535 But thus muche of hir beautee telle I may,  
 That she was lik the brighte morwe of May,  
 Fulild<sup>7</sup> of alle beautee and plesaunce.
- This Januarye is ravished in a trauce  
 At every time he looked on hir face,  
 540 But in his herte he gan hire to manace<sup>o</sup> *menace*

9. Signs with the cross.

1. I.e., provisions.

2. Orpheus and Amphioun were legendary musicians of ancient Greece.

3. Joab, King David's officer, on several occasions controlled the people with the sound of his trumpet.

4. Theodamas was a Theban seer whose auguries

were announced with a trumpet.

5. Martianus Capella, author of a medieval Latin poem which describes the wedding of Philology and Mercury.

6. For Esther and Ahasuerus, see note to line 159, above.

7. Filled full.

	That he that night in armes wolde hire straine <sup>o</sup>	<i>constrain</i>
	Harder than evere Paris dide Elaine. <sup>8</sup>	
	But natheles yit hadde he greet pitee	
	That thilke night offenden hire moste <sup>o</sup> he,	<i>must</i>
545	And thoughte, "Allas, O tendre creature,	
	Now wolde God ye mighte wel endure	
	Al my corage, <sup>9</sup> it is so sharp and keene:	
	I am agast ye shul it nat sustene <sup>o</sup> —	<i>sustain</i>
	But God forbede that I dide al my might!	
550	Now wolde God that it were woxen <sup>o</sup> night,	<i>grown</i>
	And that the night wolde lasten everemo.	
	I wolde that al this peple were ago."	
	And finally he dooth al his labour,	
	As he best mighte, saving his honour,	
555	To haste hem fro the mete in subtil wise.	
	The time cam that reson was to rise,	
	And after that men daunce and drinken faste,	
	And spices al aboute the hous they caste.	
	And ful of joye and blis is every man—	
560	Al but a squier highte <sup>o</sup> Damian,	<i>called</i>
	Which carf <sup>o</sup> bifore the knight ful many a day:	<i>carved</i>
	He was so ravissed on his lady May	
	That for the verray paine he was neigh wood; <sup>o</sup>	<i>mad</i>
	Almost he swelte <sup>o</sup> and swouned <sup>o</sup> ther he stood,	<i>fainted / swooned</i>
565	So sore hath Venus hurt him with hir brand,	
	As that she bar it dauncing in hir hand.	
	And to his bed he wente him hastily.	
	Namore of him at this time speke I,	
	But ther I lete him weepe ynough and plaine, <sup>o</sup>	<i>complain</i>
570	Til fresshe May wol rewen <sup>1</sup> on his paine.	
	O perilous fir that in the bedstraw breedeth! <sup>2</sup>	
	O familier fo that his service bedeth! <sup>o</sup>	<i>offers</i>
	O servant traitour, false hoomly <sup>o</sup> hewe, <sup>o</sup>	<i>domestic / servant</i>
	Lik to the naddre <sup>o</sup> in bosom, sly, untrewel! <sup>o</sup>	<i>adder / treacherous</i>
575	God shilde <sup>o</sup> us alle from youre aquaintaunce!	<i>defend</i>
	O Januarye, dronken in plesauce	
	In mariage, see how thy Damian,	
	Thyn owene squier and thy boren <sup>o</sup> man,	<i>born</i>
	Entendeth for to do thee vilainye! <sup>o</sup>	<i>harm</i>
580	God graunte thee thyn hoomly fo espye,	
	For in this world nis worse pestilence	
	Than hoomly fo alday <sup>o</sup> in thy presence.	<i>always</i>
	Parfourned <sup>o</sup> hath the sonne his ark diurne: <sup>3</sup>	<i>performed</i>
	No lenger may the body of him sojurne	
585	On th'orisonte <sup>o</sup> as in that latitude;	<i>horizon</i>
	Night with his mantel that is derk and rude	
	Gan oversprede th' hemisperye <sup>o</sup> aboute,	<i>hemisphere</i>
	For which departed is this lusty route, <sup>o</sup>	<i>company</i>
	For Januarye with thank on every side.	

8. Helen of Troy.

9. Spirit, but with the added sense of sexual prowess.

1. Have pity.

2. I.e., starts.

3. Diurnal arc.

590	Hoom to hir houses lustily they ride, Wher as they doon hir thinges as hem leste, <sup>o</sup> And whan they sawgh hir time go to reste.	<i>please</i>
	Soone after that this hastif <sup>o</sup> Januarye Wol go to bedde—he wol no lenger tarye.	<i>impatient</i>
595	He drinketh ipocras, clarree and vernage <sup>4</sup> Of spices hote t'encressen <sup>o</sup> his corage, And many a letuarye <sup>o</sup> hadde he ful fin, <sup>o</sup> Swich as the cursed monk daun Constantin <sup>5</sup> Hath writen in his book <i>De Coitu</i> :	<i>increase medicine / pure</i>
600	To eten hem alle he nas no thing eschu. <sup>o</sup> And to his privee freendes thus saide he: “For Goddes love, as soone as it may be, Lat voiden <sup>o</sup> al this hous in curteis wise.” And they han doon right as he wol devise.	<i>averse  empty</i>
605	Men drinken and the travers <sup>o</sup> drawe anoon. The bride was brought abedde as stille as stoon. And whan the bed was with <sup>o</sup> the preest yblessed, Out of the chambre hath every wight him dressed. <sup>o</sup> And Januarye hath faste in armes take	<i>curtains  by turned</i>
610	His fresshe May, his Paradis, his make; <sup>o</sup> He lulleth hire, he kisseth hire ful ofte— With thikke bristles of his beard unsofte, Lik to the skin of houndfishsh, <sup>o</sup> sharpe as brere, <sup>o</sup> For he was shave al newe in his manere—	<i>mate  dogfish / briar</i>
615	He rubbeth hire aboute hir tendre face, And saide thus, “Allas, I moot trespass <sup>6</sup> To you, my spouse, and you greetly offende Er time come that I wol down descende. But nathelees, considereth this,” quod he, 620 “Ther nis no werkman, whatsoever he be, That may bothe werke wel and hastily. This wol be doon at leiser parfitylly. <sup>o</sup> It is no fors <sup>o</sup> how longe that we playe: In trewe wedlok coupled be we twaye, 625 And blessed be the yok that we been inne, For in oure actes we mowe <sup>o</sup> do no sinne; A man may do no sinne with his wif, Ne hurte himselven with his owene knif; For we han leve to playe us by the lawe.”	<i>perfectly matter  may</i>
630	Thus laboureth he til that the day gan dawe, <sup>o</sup> And thanne he taketh a sop in fin clarree, <sup>7</sup> And upright in his bed thanne sitteth he; And after that he soong <sup>o</sup> ful loude and clere, And kiste his wif and made wantoune cheere:	<i>dawn  sang</i>
635	He was al coltishsh, <sup>o</sup> ful of ragerye, <sup>o</sup> And ful of jargon as a flekked pie. <sup>o</sup> The slakke skin aboute his nekke shaketh Whil that he soong, so chaunteth he and craketh. <sup>o</sup>	<i>frisky / flirtatiousness magpie caws</i>

4. The beverages mentioned here were thought to be aphrodisiac.

5. Constantinus Afer, author of a treatise on cop-

ulation.

6. Must do injury.

7. Bread soaked in fine wine.

But God woot what that May thoughte in hir herte  
 640 When she him saw up sitting in his sherte,<sup>o</sup> *shirt*  
 In his night-cappe and with his nekke lene—  
 She praiseth nat his playing worth a bene.<sup>o</sup> *bean*  
 Thanne saide he thus, “My reste wol I take.  
 Now day is come I may no lenger wake.”  
 645 And down he laide his heed and sleep<sup>o</sup> til prime,<sup>8</sup> *slept*  
 And afterward whan that he saw his time  
 Up riseth Januarye. But fresshe May  
 Heeld hir chambre unto the fourthe day,  
 As usage is of wives for the beste,  
 650 For every labour som time moot<sup>o</sup> han reste, *must*  
 Or elles longe may he nat endure—  
 This is to sayn, no lives<sup>o</sup> creature, *living*  
 Be it fissh or brid<sup>o</sup> or beest or man. *bird*  
 Now wol I speke of woful Damian  
 655 That languissheth for love, as ye shal heere.  
 Therefore I speke to him in this manere:  
 I saye, “O sely<sup>o</sup> Damian, allas, *silly*  
 Answere to my demande as in this cas:  
 How shaltou to thy lady fresshe May  
 660 Telle thy wo? She wol away saye nay.  
 Eek if thou speke, she wol thy wo biwraye.<sup>o</sup> *disclose*  
 God be thyn help I can no bettre saye.”  
 This sike Damian in Venus fir  
 So brenneth<sup>o</sup> that he dieth for desir, *burns*  
 665 For which he putte his life in aventure:<sup>9</sup>  
 No lenger mighte he in this wise endure,  
 But prively a penner<sup>o</sup> gan he borwe, *pen-case*  
 And in a lettre wroot he al his sorwe,  
 In manere of a complainte or a lay,  
 670 Unto his faire fresshe lady May;  
 And in a purs of silk heeng<sup>1</sup> on his sherte  
 He hath it put and laid it at his herte.  
 The moone, that at noon was thilke<sup>o</sup> day *that*  
 That Januarye hath wedded fresshe May  
 675 In two of Taur, was into Cancre gliden,<sup>2</sup>  
 So longe hath Mayus in hir chambre abiden,  
 As custume is unto this nobles alle:  
 A bride shal nat eten in the halle  
 Til dayes foure, or three dayes atte leeste,  
 680 Ypassed been—thanne lat hire go to feeste.  
 The fourthe day compleet fro noon to noon,  
 Whan that the hye masse was ydoon,  
 In halle sit<sup>o</sup> this Januarye and May, *sits*  
 As fressh as is the brighte someres day.  
 685 And so bifel how that this goode man  
 Remembred him upon this Damian,  
 And saide, “Sainte Marye, how may it be

8. 9 A.M.

9. Risked his life.

1. That hung.

2. In two degrees of Taurus (the sign of the Bull) had moved into Cancer (the sign of the Crab).

- That Damian entendeth<sup>o</sup> nat to me?  
Is he ay sik, or how may this bitide?" *attends*
- 690 His squiers whiche that stoden ther biside  
Excused him by cause of his siknesse,  
Which letted<sup>o</sup> him to doon his bisnesse: *prevented*  
Noon other cause mighte make him tarye.  
"That me forthinketh,<sup>3</sup>" quod this Januarye.
- 695 "He is a gentil squier, by my trouthe.  
If that he deide, it were harm and routhe.<sup>o</sup> *pity*  
He is as wis, discreet, and eek secree,  
As any man I woot of his degree,  
And therto manly and eek servisable,
- 700 And for to be a thrifty<sup>o</sup> man right able. *proper*  
But after mete as soone as evere I may,  
I wol myself visite him, and eek May,  
To do him al the confort that I can."  
And for that word him blessed every man
- 705 That of his bountee<sup>o</sup> and his gentillesse<sup>o</sup> *goodness / courtesy*  
He wolde so conforten in siknesse  
His squier—for it was a gentil deede.  
"Dame," quod this Januarye, "take good heede:  
At after-mete<sup>4</sup> ye with your wommen alle,
- 710 Whan ye han been in chambre out of this halle,  
That alle ye go to this Damian.  
Dooth him disport<sup>o</sup>—he is a gentil man— *cheer*  
And telleth him that I wol him visite,  
Have I no thing but rested me a lite.<sup>5</sup>
- 715 And speede you faste, for I wol abide  
Til that ye sleepe faste by my side."  
And with that word he gan to him to calle  
A squier that was marchal<sup>6</sup> of his halle,  
And tolde him certain thinges what he wolde.
- 720 This fresshe May hath straight hir way yholde  
With alle hir wommen unto Damian:  
Down by his beddes side sit<sup>o</sup> she than, *sits*  
Conforting him as goodly as she may.  
This Damian, whan that his time he sey,<sup>o</sup> *saw*
- 725 In secree wise his purs and eek his bille,<sup>o</sup> *letter*  
In which that he ywriten hadde his wille,  
Hath put into hir hand withoute more,  
Save that he siketh<sup>o</sup> wonder deepe and sore, *sighs*  
And softly to hire right thus saide he:
- 730 "Mercy, and that ye nat discovere<sup>o</sup> me, *betray*  
For I am deed if that this thing be kid."<sup>7</sup>  
The purs hath she inwith<sup>o</sup> hir bosom hid, *within*  
And wente hir way—ye gete namore of me.  
But unto Januarye ycomen is she,
- 735 That on his beddes side sit ful softe,  
And taketh hire and kisseth hire ful ofte,

3. I regret.

4. After dinner.

5. After I've rested just a little.

6. Marshal, major-domo.

7. Made known.

And laide him down to sleepe and that anoon.  
 She feined hire<sup>8</sup> as that she moste<sup>o</sup> goon *must*  
 Ther as ye woot that every wight moot<sup>o</sup> neede, *must*  
 740 And whan she of this bille hath taken heede,  
 She rente<sup>o</sup> it al to cloutes<sup>o</sup> at the laste, *tore / shreds*  
 And in the privee softly it caste.  
 Who studieth now but faire fresshe May?  
 Adown by olde Januarye she lay,  
 745 That sleep<sup>o</sup> til that the coughe hath him awaked. *slept*  
 Anoon he prayde hire strepen<sup>o</sup> hire al naked; *strip*  
 He wolde of hire, he saide, han som plesaunce;  
 He saide hir clothes dide him encombraunce.  
 And she obeyeth, be hire lief<sup>o</sup> or loth. *agreeable*  
 750 But lest that precious<sup>o</sup> folk be with me wroth, *fastidious*  
 How that he wroughte I dar nat to you telle—  
 Or wheither hire thoughte<sup>9</sup> Paradis or helle.  
 But here I lete hem werken in hir wise  
 Til evensong roong<sup>o</sup> and that they moste arise. *rang*  
 755 Were it by destinee or aventure,<sup>o</sup> *accident*  
 Were it by influence<sup>1</sup> or by nature,  
 Or constellacion that in swich estat  
 The hevene stood that time fortunat  
 As for to putte a bille of Venus werkes<sup>2</sup>—  
 760 For alle thing hath time, as sayn thise clerkes—  
 To any womman for to gete hir love,  
 I can nat saye, but grete God above,  
 That knoweth that noon act is causelees.  
 He deeme<sup>3</sup> of al, for I wol holde my pees.  
 765 But sooth is this: how that this fresshe May  
 Hath taken swich impression that day  
 Of pitee on this sike Damian,  
 That from hir herte she ne drive can  
 The remembrance<sup>o</sup> for to doon him ese. *memorandum*  
 770 “Certain,” thoughte she, “whom that this thing displese  
 I rekke<sup>o</sup> nat. For here I him assure *care*  
 To love him best of any creature,  
 Though he namore hadde than his sherte.”<sup>o</sup> *shirt*  
 Lo, pitee renneth<sup>o</sup> soone in gentil herte! *runs*  
 775 Here may ye see how excellent franchise<sup>o</sup> *generosity*  
 In wommen is whan they hem narwe avise.<sup>4</sup>  
 Som tyrant is, as ther be many oon,  
 That hath an herte as hard as is a stoon,  
 Which wolde han lete him sterven<sup>o</sup> in the place, *die*  
 780 Wel rather than han graunted him hir grace,  
 And hem rejoisen in hir cruel pride,  
 And rekke nat<sup>5</sup> to been an homicide.  
 This gentil May, fulfilled<sup>6</sup> of pitee,  
 Right of hir<sup>7</sup> hand a lettre maked she,

8. Pretended.

9. It seemed.

1. I.e., occult interference.

2. Present a petition for Venus's works.

3. Let him judge.

4. Consider closely.

5. Do not scruple.

6. Filled full.

7. In her own.

- 785 In which she graunteth him hir verray grace:  
 Ther lakketh nought only but day and place  
 Wher that she mighte unto his lust suffise;° *satisfy*  
 For it shal be right as he wol devise.  
 And when she saw hir time upon a day
- 790 To visite this Damian gooth May,  
 And subtilly this lettre down she threste° *thrust*  
 Under his pilwe: rede it if him leste.  
 She taketh him by the hand and harde him twiste,° *twisted*  
 So secreely that no wight of it wiste,° *knew*
- 795 And bad him be al hool,<sup>8</sup> and forth she wente  
 To Januarye whan that he for hire sente.  
 Up riseth Damian the nexte morwe:° *morning*  
 Al passed was his siknesse and his sorwe.  
 He kembeth° him, he preineth° him and piketh,° *combs / preens / cleans*
- 800 He dooth al that his lady lust° and liketh. *pleases*  
 And eek to Januarye he gooth as lowe° *humbly*  
 As evere dide a dogge for the bowe.<sup>9</sup>  
 He is so plesant unto every man—  
 For craft is al, whoso that do it can—
- 805 That every wight is fain° to speke him good. *glad*  
 And fully in his lady grace he stood. *leave*  
 Thus lete° I Damian aboute his neede,  
 And in my tale forth I wol procede.  
 Some clerkes holden that felicittee
- 810 Stant° in delit,<sup>1</sup> and therefore certain he, *stands*  
 This noble Januarye, with al his might  
 In honeste° wise as longeth° to a knight, *honorable / befits*  
 Shoop° him to live ful deliciously: *arranged*  
 His housing, his array as honestly
- 815 To his degree was makid as a kinges.  
 Amonges othere of his honeste thinges,  
 He made a gardin walled al of stoon—  
 So fair a gardin woot I nowher noon,  
 For out of doute I verrailly suppose
- 820 That he that wroth the *Romance of the Rose*<sup>2</sup>  
 Ne coude of it the beautee wel devise;  
 Ne Priapus<sup>3</sup> ne mighte nat suffise—  
 Though he be god of gardins—for to telle  
 The beautee of the gardin, and the welle° *spring*
- 825 That stood under a laurer° alway greene. *laurel*  
 Ful ofte time he Pluto<sup>4</sup> and his queene  
 Proserpina and al hir fairye° *fairies*  
 Disporten hem and maken melodye  
 Aboute that welle, and daunced, as men tolde.
- 830 This noble knight, this Januarye the olde,

8. I.e., get well.

9. The image is of a well-trained hunting dog.

1. Material delight.

2. Guillaume de Lorris's French allegory, set in the garden of love.

3. A fertility god associated with the male sexual organ.

4. Pluto was the god of the underworld who kidnaped the young girl Proserpina and made her his mate. In this tale the two have lost their great mythic stature—though not their history—and have become king and queen of the medieval underworld—"fairyte."

- Swich daintee° hath in it to walke and playe, *delight*  
 That he wol no wight suffre bere the keye,  
 Save he himself; for of the smale wicket° *wicket-gate*  
 He bar alway of silver a cliket,° *latch-key*  
 835 With which whan that him leste he it unshette.° *unlocked*  
 And whan he wolde paye his wif hir dette  
 In somer seson, thider wolde he go,  
 And May his wif, and no wight but they two.  
 And thinges whiche that were nat doon abedde,  
 840 He in the gardin parfourned° hem and spedde. *performed*  
 And in this wise many a merye day  
 Lived this Januarye and fresshe May.  
 But worldly joye may nat alway dure° *continue*  
 To Januarye, ne to no creature.  
 845 O sodein° hap,° O thou Fortune unstable, *unanticipated / change*  
 Lik to the scorpion so deceivable,° *deceitful*  
 That flaterest with thyn heed° whan thou wolt stinge, *head*  
 Thy tail is deeth thurgh thyn enveniminge!<sup>5</sup>  
 O brotel° joye, O sweete venim° quainte!<sup>6</sup> *brittle / poison / curious*  
 850 O monstre, that so subtilly canst painte  
 Thy yiftes under hewe of stedfastnesse,  
 That thou deceivest bothe more and lesse,  
 Why hastou Januarye thus deceived,  
 That haddest him for thy fulle freend received?  
 855 And now thou hast biraft<sup>6</sup> him bothe his yën,  
 For sorwe of which desireth he to dien.  
 Allas, this noble Januarye free,° *generous*  
 Amidde his lust<sup>7</sup> and his prosperitee,  
 Is woxen° blind, and that al sodeinly. *grown*  
 860 He weepeth and he wailleth pitously,  
 And therewithal the fir of jealousye,  
 Lest that his wife sholde falle in som folye,  
 So brente° his herte that he wolde fain° *burned / gladly*  
 That som man bothe hire and him hadde slain;  
 865 For neither after his deeth ne in his lif,  
 Ne wolde he that she were love ne wif,  
 But evere live as widwe in clothes blake,  
 Soul° as the turtle<sup>8</sup> that hath lost hir make.° *sole / mate*  
 But atte laste, after a month or twaye,  
 870 His sorwe gan assuage, sooth to saye,  
 For whan he wiste° it may noon other be, *knew*  
 He paciently took his adversitee—  
 Save out of doute he may nat forgoon  
 That he nas jalous everemore in oon.<sup>9</sup>  
 875 Which jalousye it was so outrageous  
 That neither in halle ne in noon other hous,  
 Ne in noon other place neverthemo,  
 He nolde suffre hire for to ride or go,  
 But if that he hadde hand on hire alway:

5. Poisoning; the scorpion was popularly supposed to charm its victim by the innocent appearance of its head before stinging with its tail.  
 6. Deprived of.

7. Heart's desire.  
 8. Turtle-dove.  
 9. Constantly.

- 880 For which ful ofte weepeth fresshe May,  
 That loveth Damian so benignely  
 That she moot<sup>o</sup> outh<sup>o</sup>er<sup>o</sup> dien sodeinly, *must / either*  
 Or elles she moot han him as hire leste.  
 She waiteth<sup>1</sup> whan hir herte wolde breste.
- 885 Upon that other side Damian  
 Bicomen is the sorwefulleste man  
 That evere was, for neither night ne day  
 Ne mighte he speke a word to fresshe May,  
 As to his purpos of no swich matere,  
 890 But if that Januarye moste<sup>o</sup> it heere, *must*  
 That hadde an hand upon hire evermo;  
 But nathelees, by writing to and fro,  
 And privee signes, wiste<sup>2</sup> what she mente,  
 And she knew eek the fin<sup>o</sup> of his entente. *end*
- 895 O Januarye, what mighte it thee availe  
 Though thou mightest see as fer as shippes saile?  
 For as good is blind deceived be,  
 As be deceived whan a man may see.  
 Lo Argus, which that hadde an hundred yēn,  
 900 For al that evere be coude poure<sup>o</sup> or pryen, *gaze*  
 Yit was he blent,<sup>3</sup> and God woot so been mo<sup>o</sup> *others*  
 That weenen<sup>o</sup> wisly<sup>o</sup> that it be nat so. *think / surely*  
 Passe over is an ese,<sup>o</sup> and saye namore. *relief*
- This fresshe May that I spak of so yore,<sup>4</sup>
- 905 In warm wex<sup>o</sup> hath emprinted the cliket<sup>o</sup> *wax / key*  
 That Januarye bar of that smale wiket,  
 By which into his gardin ofte he wente;  
 And Damian that knew al hir entente  
 The cliket countrefeted<sup>5</sup> prively—
- 910 Ther nis namore to saye, but hastily  
 Som wonder by this cliket shal bitide,  
 Which ye shal heeren if ye wol abide.
- O noble Ovide, sooth saistou, God woot,  
 What sleight<sup>o</sup> it is, though it be long and hoot,<sup>6</sup> *trick*
- 915 That he<sup>7</sup> nil finde it out in som manere!  
 By Pyramus and Thisbee may men lere:<sup>o</sup> *learn*  
 Though they were kept ful longe strait<sup>o</sup> overal, *strictly*  
 They been accorded rouning<sup>8</sup> thurgh a wal,  
 Ther no wight coude han founde out swich a sleighte.
- 920 But now to purpos: er that dayes eighte  
 Were passed, er the month of Juin,<sup>o</sup> bifil *June*  
 That Januarye hath caught so greet a wil—  
 Thurgh egging of his wif—him for to playe  
 In his gardin, and no wight but they twaye,
- 925 That in a morwe unto his May saith he,  
 “Ris up, my wif, my love, my lady free;  
 The turtles<sup>o</sup> vois is herd, my douve<sup>o</sup> sweete; *turtle-dove's / dove*

1. I.e., anticipates the time.

2. I.e., he knew.

3. Blinded, deceived.

4. Long ago.

5. I.e., duplicated.

6. Hot, i.e., perilous.

7. I.e., Love.

8. Whispering: the story of Pyramus and Thisbe is in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.

- The winter is goon with alle his raines wete.  
 Com forth now with thine yën columbin.<sup>o</sup> *dovelike*  
 930 How fairer been thy brestes than is win!  
 The garden is enclosed al aboute:  
 Com forth, my white spouse! out of doute,  
 Thou hast me wounded in myn herte. O wif,  
 No spot of thee ne knew I al my lif.  
 935 Com forth and lat us taken oure disport—  
 I chees<sup>o</sup> thee for my wif and my confort.” *chose*  
 Swiche olde lewed<sup>9</sup> wordes used he.  
 On Damian a signe made she  
 940 That he sholde go biforn with his cliket.  
 This Damian thanne hath opened the wiket,  
 And in he sterte,<sup>o</sup> and that in swich manere *went*  
 That no wight mighte it see neither yheere,  
 And stille he sit<sup>o</sup> under a bussh anoon. *sits*  
 This Januarye, as blind as is a stoon,  
 945 With Mayus in his hand and no wight mo,  
 Into his fresshe gardin is ago,<sup>1</sup>  
 And clapte to<sup>2</sup> the wiket sodeinly.  
 “Now wif,” quod he, “here nis but thou and I,  
 That art the creature that I best love,  
 950 For by that Lord that sit in hevене above,  
 Levere ich hadde to dien on a knif  
 Than thee offende, trewe dere wif.  
 For Goddes sake, think how I thee chees,<sup>o</sup> *chose*  
 Nought for no covetise,<sup>o</sup> douteless, *avarice*  
 955 But only for the love I hadde to thee.  
 And though that I be old and may nat see,  
 Beeth to me trewe, and I wol telle why.  
 Three thinges, certes, shal ye winne therby:  
 First, love of Crist, and to yourself honour,  
 960 And al myn heritage, town and towr<sup>3</sup>—  
 I give it you: maketh chartres as you leste.  
 This shal be doon tomorwe er sonne reste,  
 So wisly<sup>o</sup> God my soule bringe in blisse. *surely*  
 I praye you first in covenant ye me kisse,  
 965 And though that I be jalous, wite<sup>o</sup> me nought: *blame*  
 Ye been so deepe emprinted in my thought,  
 That whan that I considere youre beautee,  
 And therwithal the unlikly elde<sup>4</sup> of me,  
 I may nought, certes, though I sholde die,  
 970 Forbere to been out of youre compaignye  
 For verray<sup>o</sup> love. This is withouten doute. *true*  
 Now kis me, wif, and lat us rome aboute.”  
 This fresshe May, whan she thise wordes herde,  
 Benignely to Januarye answerde,  
 975 But first and forward<sup>o</sup> she bigan to weepe. *foremost*  
 “I have,” quod she, “a soule for to keepe<sup>o</sup> *save*

9. Unskillful: the words are a paraphrase of several passages in the Song of Solomon.

1. Has gone.

2. Slammed shut.

3. I.e., castle.

4. Unsuitable old age.

As wel as ye, and also myn honour,  
 And of my wifhood thilke tendre flowr,  
 Which that I have assured<sup>o</sup> in youre hond, *pledged*  
 980 Whan that the preest to you my body boond;<sup>o</sup> *bound*  
 Wherefore I wol answeere in this manere,  
 By the leve of you, my lord so dere:  
 I praye to God that nevere dawe<sup>o</sup> the day *dawn*  
 That I ne sterve<sup>o</sup> as foule<sup>o</sup> as womman may, *die / shamefully*  
 985 If evere I do unto my kin that shame,  
 Or elles I empaire<sup>o</sup> so my name *impair*  
 That I be fals; and if I do that lak,<sup>o</sup> *crime*  
 Do strepe me,<sup>5</sup> and putte me in a sak,  
 And in the nexte<sup>o</sup> river do me drenche:<sup>6</sup> *nearest*  
 990 I am a gentil womman and no wenche.  
 Why speke ye thus? But men been evere untrewe,  
 And wommen have repreve<sup>o</sup> of you ay newe. *reproof*  
 Ye han noon other countenance,<sup>7</sup> I leve,<sup>o</sup> *believe*  
 But speke to us of untrust and repreve.”  
 995 And with that word she saw wher Damian  
 Sat in the bussh, and coughen she bigan,  
 And with hir finger signes made she  
 That Damian sholde climbe upon a tree  
 That charged<sup>o</sup> was with fruit; and up he wente, *loaded*  
 1000 For verrailly he knew al hir entente,  
 And every signe that she coude make,  
 Wel bet<sup>o</sup> than Januarye, hir owene make,<sup>o</sup> *better / mate*  
 For in a lettre she haddel told him al  
 Of this matere how he werken shal.  
 1005 And thus I lete him sitte on the pirye,<sup>o</sup> *pear tree*  
 And Januarye and May roming mirye.  
 Bright was the day and blew<sup>o</sup> the firmament. *blue*  
 Phebus hath of gold his stremes<sup>o</sup> down sent *beams*  
 To gladen every flowr with his warmnesse.  
 1010 He was that time in Geminis,<sup>8</sup> as I gesse,  
 But litel fro his declinacioun<sup>9</sup>  
 Of Cancer, Joves exaltacioun.<sup>1</sup>  
 And so bifel that brighte morwetide<sup>o</sup> *morning-time*  
 That in that gardin in the ferther side  
 1015 Pluto, that is king of fairye,  
 And many a lady in his compaignye,  
 Folwing his wif, the queene Proserpina  
 Which that he ravished out of Etna  
 Whil that she gadred flowres in the mede—  
 1020 In Claudian<sup>2</sup> ye may the stories rede  
 How in his grisly carte he hire fette<sup>o</sup>— *fetched*  
 This king of fairye thanne adown him sette  
 Upon a bench of turves fressh and greene,  
 And right anoon thus saide he to his queene.

5. Have me stripped.

6. Have me drowned.

7. I.e., way of covering your own fault.

8. The Sign of the Twins.

9. I.e., position upon entering.

1. Of Cancer, the Sign of the Crab, which is Jupiter's exaltation, or position of dominant influence.

2. Claudian was the author of the late Latin poem *The Rape of Proserpine*, which describes Pluto's seizure of Proserpina in Aetna, in Sicily.

- 1025 "My wif," quod he, "ther may no wight saye nay:  
 Th' experience so preveth° every day *proves*  
 The treson which that womman dooth to man.  
 Ten hundred thousand tales tellen I can  
 Notable of youre untrouthe° and brotelnesse.° *infidelity / fickleness*
- 1030 O Salomon, wis and richest of richesse,  
 Fulfuld of sapience° and of worldly glorye, *wisdom*  
 Ful worthy been thy wordes to memory  
 To every wight that wit and reson can°— *recognizes*  
 Thus praiseth he yit the bountee of man:
- 1035 'Amonges a thousand men yit foond° I oon,  
 But of wommen alle foond I noon.'<sup>3</sup> *found*  
 Thus saith the king that knoweth youre wikkednesse.  
 And Jesus filius Syrak<sup>4</sup> as I gesse,  
 Ne speketh of you but selde° reverence— *seldom*
- 1040 A wilde fir and corrupt pestilence  
 So falle upon youre bodies yit tonight!  
 Ne see ye nought this honourable knight?  
 By cause, allas, that he is blind and old,  
 His owene man shal make him cokewold.° *cuckold*
- 1045 Lo wher he sit,° the lechour in the tree!  
 Now wol I graunten of my majestee  
 Unto this olde, blinde, worthy knight  
 That he shal have ayain his yën-sight,  
 Whan that his wif wolde doon him vilainye.
- 1050 Thanne shall he knowen al hir harlotrye,  
 Bothe in repreve° of hire and other mo." *reproof*  
 "Ye shal?" quod Proserpine. "Wol ye so?  
 Now by my modres sires<sup>5</sup> soule I swere  
 That I shal yiven hire suffisant° answeere, *satisfactory*
- 1055 And alle wommen after for hir sake,  
 That though they be in any gilt ytake,  
 With face bold they shul hemself excuse,  
 And bere hem down that wolde hem accuse:  
 For lak of answeere noon of hem shal dien.
- 1060 Al° hadde men seen a thing with bothe his yën,  
 Yit shal we wommen visagen<sup>6</sup> it hardily,° *although*  
 And weepe and swere and chide subtilly,  
 So that ye men shul been as lewed° as gees— *stupid*  
 What rekketh me<sup>7</sup> of youre auctoritees?° *authorities*
- 1065 I woot wel that this Jew, this Salomon,  
 Foond° of us wommen folies many oon, *found*  
 But though that he ne foond no good womman,  
 Yit hath ther founde many another man  
 Wommen ful trewe, ful goode and vertuous.
- 1070 Witnesse on hem that dwelte in Cristes hous:  
 With martyrdom they preved hir constauce.° *constancy*  
 The Romain geestes<sup>8</sup> eek maken remembraunce  
 Of many a verray, trewe wif also.

3. Ecclesiastes vii.28.

4. Jesus, son of Syrak, supposed author of the Book of Ecclesiasticus.

5. Mother's father's.

6. Face out.

7. Do I care.

8. Stories, i.e., the *Gesta Romanorum*, a collection of pious tales.

- But sire, ne be nat wroth, al be it so,  
 1075 Though that he saide he foond no good womman,  
 I praye you, take the sentence<sup>o</sup> of the man: *meaning*  
 He mente thus, that in sovereign bountee<sup>o</sup>  
 Nis noon but God, but neither he ne she.  
 Ey, for verray God that nis but oon,  
 1080 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 goddes:  
 How mighte he do a thing that more forbode<sup>o</sup> is? *forbidden*  
 1085 Pardee, as faire as ye his name emplastre,<sup>o</sup> *whitewash*  
 He was a lechour and an idolastre,<sup>o</sup> *idolator*  
 And in his elde<sup>o</sup> he verray God forsook. *old age*  
 And if God ne hadde, as saith the book,  
 Yspared him for his fadres sake, he sholde  
 1090 Have lost his regne rather<sup>o</sup> than he wolde.<sup>o</sup> *sooner / wanted*  
 I sette<sup>1</sup> right nought of al the vilainye  
 That ye of wommen write a boterflye.<sup>o</sup> *butterfly*  
 I am a womman, needes moot<sup>o</sup> I speke, *must*  
 Or elles swelle til myn herte breke.  
 1095 For sithen<sup>o</sup> he saide that we been jangleresses,<sup>2</sup> *since*  
 As evere hool<sup>3</sup> I moote brouke<sup>o</sup> my tresses, *enjoy*  
 I shal nat spare for no curteisye  
 To speke him harm that wolde<sup>4</sup> us vilainye.”  
 “Dame,” quod this Pluto, “be no lenger<sup>o</sup> wroth. *longer*  
 1100 I yive it up. But sith<sup>o</sup> I swoor myn ooth *since*  
 That I wolde graunten him his sighte ayain,  
 My word shal stonde, I warne you certain.  
 I am a king: it sit<sup>o</sup> me nought to lie.” *suits*  
 “And I,” quod she, “a queene of fairye:  
 1105 Hir answeere shal she have, I undertake.  
 Lat us namore wordes heerof make.  
 Forsoothe, I wol no lenger you contrarye.”<sup>o</sup> *contradict*  
 Now lat us turne again to Januarye  
 That in the gardin with his faire May  
 1110 Singeth ful merier than the papenjay,<sup>o</sup> *parrot*  
 “You love I best, and shal, and other noon.”  
 So longe aboute the aleyes<sup>5</sup> is he goon  
 Til he was come ayains thilke<sup>6</sup> pirye,<sup>o</sup> *pear tree*  
 Wher as this Damian sitteth ful mirye  
 1115 On heigh among the fresshe leves greene.  
 This fresshe May, that is so bright and sheene,<sup>o</sup> *shining*  
 Gan for to sike<sup>o</sup> and saide, “Allas, my side!  
 Now sire,” quod she, “for ought that may bitide,  
 I moste<sup>o</sup> han of the peres<sup>o</sup> that I see, *must / pears*  
 1120 Or I moot die, so sore longeth me<sup>7</sup>  
 To eten of the smale peres greene.  
 Help for hir love that is of hevене queene!

9. Paramount excellence.  
 1. I.e., care.  
 2. Idle talkers.  
 3. I.e., in health.

4. I.e., wished on.  
 5. Garden paths.  
 6. That same.  
 7. I long.

	I telle you wel, a womman in my plit <sup>o</sup>	<i>condition</i>
	May han to fruit so greet an appetit	
1125	That she may dien but <sup>o</sup> she of it have.”	<i>unless</i>
	“Allas,” quod he, “that I ne hadde heer a knave <sup>o</sup>	<i>servant</i>
	That coude climbe! Allas, allas,” quod he,	
	“For I am blind!” “Ye, sire, no fors,” <sup>o</sup> quod she.	<i>matter</i>
	“But wolde ye vouche sauf, for Goddes sake,	
1130	The pirye inwith <sup>o</sup> youre armes for to take—	<i>within</i>
	For wel I woot that ye mistruste me—	
	Thanne sholde I climbe wel ynough,” quod she,	
	“So I my foot mighte sette upon youre bak.”	
	“Certes,” quod he, “theron shal be no lak, <sup>o</sup>	<i>fault</i>
1135	Mighte I you helpen with myn herte blood.”	
	He stoupeth <sup>o</sup> down, and on his bak she stood,	<i>stoops</i>
	And caughte hire by a twiste, <sup>o</sup> and up she gooth.	<i>twig</i>
	Ladies, I praye you that ye be nat wroth:	
	I can nat glose, <sup>s</sup> I am a rude man.	
1140	And sodeinly anon this Damian	
	Can pullen up the smok and in he throong. <sup>o</sup>	<i>pressed</i>
	And whan that Pluto sawgh this grete wrong,	
	To Januarye he yaf again his sighte,	
	And made him see as wel as evere he mighte;	
1145	And whan that he hadde caught his sighte again,	
	Ne was ther nevere man of thing so fain. <sup>o</sup>	<i>glad</i>
	But on his wif his thought was everemo:	
	Unto the tree he caste his yën two,	
	And sawgh that Damian his wif had dressed <sup>o</sup>	<i>placed</i>
1150	In swich manere it may nat been expressed,	
	But if <sup>9</sup> I wolde speken uncurteisly,	
	And up he yaf a roring and a cry,	
	As dooth the moder whan the child shal die.	
	“Out! Help! Allas! Harrow!” <sup>o</sup> he gan to crye.	<i>alarm</i>
1155	“O stronge <sup>o</sup> lady store, <sup>o</sup> what doostou?”	<i>flagrant / crude</i>
	And she answerde, “Sire, what aileth you?	
	Have pacience and reson in youre minde.	
	I have you holpe <sup>o</sup> on bothe youre yën blinde.	<i>helped</i>
	Up <sup>o</sup> peril of my soule, I shal nat lien,	<i>upon</i>
1160	As me was taught, to hele <sup>o</sup> with youre yën	<i>heal</i>
	Was no thing bet <sup>o</sup> to make you to see	<i>better</i>
	Than strugle with a man upon a tree:	
	God woot I dide it in ful good entente.”	
	“Strugle!” quod he. “Ye, algate <sup>1</sup> in it wente!	
1165	God yive you bothe on shames deeth to dien!	
	He swided <sup>2</sup> thee: I saw it with mine yën,	
	And elles be I hanged by the hals.” <sup>o</sup>	<i>neck</i>
	“Thanne is,” quod she, “my medicine al fals.	
	For certainly if that ye mighte see,	
1170	Ye wolde nat sayn thise wordes unto me.	
	Ye han som glimsing <sup>o</sup> and no parfit <sup>o</sup> sighte.”	<i>glimpsing / perfect</i>
	“I see,” quod he, “as wel as evere I mighte,	

8. Speak circumspectly.

9. Unless.

1. At any rate.

2. Copulated with.

- Thanked be God, with bothe mine yēn two,  
 And by my trouthe, me thoughte he dide thee so.”
- 1175 “Ye maze,<sup>3</sup> maze, goode sire,” quod she.  
 “This thank have I for I have maad you see.  
 Allas,” quod she, “that evere I was so kinde!”  
 “Now dame,” quod he, “lat al passe out of minde.  
 Com down, my lief,<sup>o</sup> and if I have missaid, *dear*  
 1180 God help me so as I am yvele apaid.<sup>4</sup>  
 But by my fader soule, I wende have sein<sup>5</sup>  
 How that this Damian hadde by thee lain,  
 And that thy smok hadde lain upon thy brest.”  
 “Ye, sire,” quod she, “ye may weene<sup>o</sup> as you lest. *think*  
 1185 But sire, a man that waketh out of his sleep  
 He may nat sodeinly wel taken keep<sup>o</sup> *notice*  
 Upon a thing, ne seen it parfitly,  
 Til that he be adawed<sup>o</sup> verrailly; *wakened*  
 Right so a man that longe hath blind ybe  
 1190 Ne may nat sodeinly so wel ysee,  
 First whan his sighte is newe come again,  
 As he that hath a day or two ysein.<sup>o</sup> *seen*  
 Til that youre sighte ysatled<sup>o</sup> be a while, *settled*  
 Ther may ful many a sighte you bigile.  
 1195 Beeth war,<sup>o</sup> I praye you, for, by hevene king, *were*  
 Ful many a man weeneth to see a thing  
 And it is al another than it seemeth:  
 He that misconceiveth, he misdeemeth.”<sup>o</sup> *misjudges*  
 And with that word she leep<sup>o</sup> down fro the tree. *leapt*
- 1200 This Januarye, who is glad but he?  
 He kisseth hire and clippeth<sup>o</sup> hire ful ofte, *hugs*  
 And on hir wombe he stroketh hire ful softe,  
 And to his palais hoom he hath hire lad.<sup>o</sup> *led*  
 Now goode men, I praye you to be glad.  
 1205 Thus endeth here my tale of Januarye.  
 God blesse us and moder, Sainte Marye.  
 Amen

### The Epilogue

- “Ey, Goddes mercy,” saide oure Hoste tho,  
 “Now swich a wif I praye God keepe me fro.<sup>o</sup> *from*
- 1210 Lo whiche<sup>o</sup> sleightes<sup>o</sup> and subtilitees *what / tricks*  
 In wommen been, for ay as bisy as bees  
 Been they us sely<sup>o</sup> men for to deceive, *innocent*  
 And from a sooth evere wol they waive.<sup>o</sup> *depart*  
 By this Marchantes tale it preveth<sup>6</sup> weel.  
 1215 But, doutelees, as trewe as any steel  
 I have a wif, though that she poore be;  
 But of hir tonge a labbing<sup>o</sup> shrewe is she, *blabbing*  
 And yit she hath an heap of vices mo—  
 Therof no fors,<sup>o</sup> lat alle swiche thinges go. *matter*

3. Are dazed.  
 4. Ill-pleased.

5. Thought I saw.  
 6. I.e., is proved.

1220	But wite <sup>o</sup> ye what? In conseil <sup>o</sup> be it said, Me reweth <sup>7</sup> sore I am unto hire teyd <sup>o</sup> — For and <sup>o</sup> I sholde rekenen every vice Which that she hath, ywis, I were too nice. <sup>o</sup>	<i>know / secrecy</i> <i>tied</i> <i>if</i> <i>foolish</i>
1225	And told to hire of some of this meinee. <sup>o</sup> Of whom? it needeth nat for to declare, Sin wommen connen oute swich chaffare. <sup>8</sup> And eek my wit suffiseth nat therto To tellen al; wherefore my tale is do.”	<i>group</i>

7. I regret.

8. I.e., since women know how to bring into the open matters of this sort.