Geoffrey Chaucer (*c.* 1343–1400)

Geoffrey Chaucer was born about 1343, only son of a wealthy London wine-merchant who grew richer after bequests from relatives who died in the Black Death (1349), and could afford to send his son into service as a page in the household of the countess of Ulster (1357). From there he progressed to service as a *valettus* in the household of Lionel, second son of the king, Edward III. He saw active service in France (1360), was captured and ransomed, and later became a squire in the royal household. He married Philippa de Roet, a *domicella* in the household of Edward III's queen, Philippa, about 1366. She was the sister of Katherine, who after the death in 1368 of Blanche, duchess of Lancaster, became the mistress of the duke of Lancaster, John of Gaunt, third son of the king, the most wealthy and powerful man in England after the king and the 'patron', in some capacity, of Chaucer's first poem, the *Book of the Duchess*. This poem, written in English and thus signalling Chaucer's determination to assert the poetic potential of English in a mainly French-speaking court, is an elegiac celebration of John of Gaunt's love for Blanche. During these years as royal esquire, Chaucer was frequently employed as a junior member of diplomatic and trading missions to France (on many occasions), to Spain (in 1366) and to Italy (in 1372–3 and 1378). He was fluent in French and Italian, and well read in the literatures of those languages; his Latin was good, especially for one who had no formal education beyond grammar school and what he could pick up at court. In 1374 Chaucer was appointed Controller of the Customs of Hides, Skins and Wools in the port of London, an arduous and responsible position that he held until 1386. He was representative of a new class of government officials, neither of 'gentle' birth nor possessed of a university or clerical training; he was one of the first English 'civil servants'. He was deputized at the Customs from time to time in order that he might go on missions abroad; the Italian journey of 1378, where he became further acquainted with the work of Dante, Petrarch and Boccaccio, was a critical moment in the development of his ambitions for an English poetry that should be the servant of neither court nor church. The dream-poem of the *House of Fame* (1378) was a first, somewhat bewildered response. The *Parliament of Fowls* (1380) is a more matured exploration of Chaucer's new Italian inheritance. The early 1380s see Chaucer at the height of his career as a public poet and a poet of the court. As a royal esquire, he was still technically a member of the royal household, and his great poem of *Troilus and Criseyde* (1381–6) is evidently addressed, in the first instance, to a court or courtly audience. The *Legend of Good Women* (1386–7) is very much a court poem, and is associated explicitly with Queen Anne, whom Richard II had married in 1382. Richard suffered a series of political setbacks in the years after 1386, and Chaucer's career, as that of a royal servant, went into decline. He resigned his government post, gave up his annuity, and retired to live outside London. During these quieter years he conceived the plan of and began to write the *Canterbury Tales*, a poem of London, Europe and the world, but emphatically not a court poem. Chaucer was briefly recalled to the royal service in 1389 (after Richard's resumption of his regality) as Clerk of the King's Works, responsible for the maintenance and upkeep of all royal buildings in the vicinity of London, but he resigned this again very arduous post in 1391. His last years were spent in fairly comfortable semi-retirement, while he worked busily on the *Canterbury Tales*. He died on 25 October 1400, and was buried in Westminster Abbey, in the precincts of which he had recently leased a house. He was reburied in 1556 in a grander tomb in the Abbey that subsequently became the nucleus of 'Poets' Corner'. His son Thomas was a highly successful government servant and parliamentarian in the courts of the Lancastrian kings; of his younger son Lewis nothing is known except that his father wrote for him an introduction to astronomy, the *Treatise on the Astrolabe*, when he was eleven years old, in 1391.

For the documentary evidence of Chaucer's life, see M.M. Crow and C.C. Olson, *Chaucer Life-Records* (Oxford, 1966); for a traditional 'life and works', see D. Pearsall, *The Life of Geoffrey Chaucer: A Critical Biography* (Oxford, 1992); P. Strohm, *Social Chaucer* (Cambridge, MA, 1989), sets the poems in their Chaucerian milieu. Classic studies of Chaucer's poetry include D. Brewer, *An Introduction to Chaucer* (rev. edn, London, 1984), C. Muscatine, *Chaucer and the French Tradition: A Study in Style and Meaning* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1957), and D.W. Robertson, *A Preface to Chaucer* (Princeton, 1962). Recent important studies include D. Aers, *Chaucer, Langland and the Creative Imagination* (London, 1980), C. Dinshaw, *Chaucer's Sexual Poetics* (Madison, WI, 1989), J. Mann, *Geoffrey Chaucer, New Feminist Readings* (London, 1991), and L. Patterson, *Chaucer and the Subject of History* (Madison, WI, 1991). The *Oxford Guides to Chaucer* published by Oxford University Press (*The Canterbury Tales*, by H. Cooper, 1989; *Troilus and Criseyde*, by B. Windeatt, 1992; and *The Shorter Poems*, by A.J. Minnis, 1995) are generally useful. J. Dillon, *Geoffrey Chaucer* (London, 1993), is a good short introduction. The standard edition of Chaucer (with valuable introduction on language and versification) is L.D. Benson (ed.), *The Riverside Chaucer* (Boston, 1987). A year-by-year Chaucer bibliography is kept up in *SAC*.

Metre. All of Chaucer's poetry represented here is in iambic pentameter, the five-beat line with stress fall-

ing on the second syllable of the foot (x/x/x/x/x/) that Chaucer introduced into English verse and that was to become its staple measure. His earlier poems, such as the *Book of the Duchess* and the *House of Fame*, are in the shorter octosyllabic couplet derived from French; the longer line, with its greater amplitude and complexity, was hammered out on the model of the Italians. Chaucer uses it in couplet and, in the *Parliament*, *Troilus* and some of the *Canterbury Tales*, in the seven-line stanza known as 'rhyme royal'. The stanza allowed for an ampler narrative flow, and for a greater degree of emotional expansiveness, lacking the potential crispness and satirical temper of the couplet. Chaucer allows many variations on the basic metrical pattern of the iambic pentameter, including frequent feminine endings, that is, extra syllables after the last stress (GP 1–2), headless lines, lacking the first unstressed syllable (GP 1), occasional 'Lydgate' lines, lacking an unstressed syllable at the caesura (GP 751, 803; *TC* II.588, III.1380), and reversal of stress in the first foot (GP 8) and occasionally elsewhere. Consonantal syllables (e.g. *cloystrer*, GP 259; *motlee*, GP 271; *chauntrye*, GP 510; *borwed*, PardT 871) are not uncommon.

Language. Chaucer's poetry, like that of his contemporaries, needs to be read with some understanding of the nature of late fourteenth-century pronunciation if the full musicality of his versification is to be appreciated. There are two main rules to be remembered. The first is that the long vowels are given their continental rather than their modern English or American values (examples from the opening lines of GP): long *a* (*bathed*) is pronounced like *a* in 'father'; long *e* is pronounced like French *e acute* (not quite [ay]) in words like *sweete* (mostly spelt in modern English with *ee*) or like French *e grave* (not quite [air]) in words like *breeth* (mostly spelt in modern English with *ea*); long *i* (*inspired*) is pronounced [ee] as in 'machine'; long *o* is pronounced like [o] in 'note' in words like *roote* (mostly spelt in modern English with *oo*) and like [oa] in 'broad' in words like *goon* (mostly spelt in modern English with *o* or *oa*); and long *u* (*shoures*) is pronounced [oo] as in 'root'. The second rule is that everything seen should be pronounced, including initial consonant groups like *gn-* and *kn-*, medial and final consonant groups with *gh* (pronounced like *ch* in Scottish 'loch' after *a*, *o* and *u*, and like *ch* in German 'nicht' after *e* and *i*), medial *e* in inflexions such as *-es* and *-en*, and final *-e* in inflexions now lost. The pronunciation of inflexional final *-e* is vital to the understanding of the music of Chaucer's ten-syllable line; it has to be distinguished (probably better by practice in listening to the verse than by learning the complex grammatical rules, with their many exceptions) from redundant final *-e* which is not pronounced. Words of French origin are sometimes pronounced in the French way (e.g. *licour*, GP 3, with accent on the second syllable). There is a good account of Chaucer's language in D. Burnley, *A Guide to Chaucer's Language* (London, 1983).

The Parliament of Fowls

The Parliament of Fowls was written about 1380, perhaps with some allusion, in the final 'parliament', to the rivalry of three suitors for the hand of Anne of Bohemia, who eventually married Richard II in 1382. Such an occasion, like the association with St Valentine's day (386), would be important in reminding us that the *Parliament* is a poem of the court, appealing to a court clientele. But Chaucer loads the conventional form of the French allegorical love-vision with a new weight of significance. It is not just the dream of a lover who sees in his dream the allegorical acting out of his desires; the dreamer here is no lover, is unclear about his desires, and mystified by what unfolds before him. As in the earlier two dream-poems, the device of the guileless narrator allows the opening out of the narrative to a richer array of meanings. The poem's theme is sexual love, as is usual, but the place of love within an ordered moral universe and in relation to the good of the community is put before us as well as the joys and pains of sexual love itself. Those joys and pains are given a new imaginative vividness through borrowings from Boccaccio, who was to be Chaucer's major inspiration at this formative time in his poetic career. As a poem, the *Parliament* is a seeking and exploring, a questioning and doubting, and the effect is to draw the reader into a participation with the dreamer in his search for an answer to his question, or at least to help him find the right question. None of this is a 'cover' for a rationally conducted discourse on the legitimacy of sexuality. Chaucer's poetic techniques are not clever ways of arriving by indirect routes at answers known from other sources to be true. The techniques of indirection, of *not* asserting, are the realities. The second half of the poem explodes out of the frame of the love-vision into the comic framework of the bird-parliament, where Chaucer's ear for the give-and-take of colloquial repartee and gift for brisk character-portrayal are for the first time fully in evidence.

The *Parliament* is Chaucer's first major poem in pentameter, the verse-form of all his subsequent poetry (see headnote to Chaucer above), and in rhyme royal (see headnote to *Troilus* below). There is a study of the poem

by J.A.W. Bennett, *The Parlement of Foules* (Oxford, 1957), and valuable description of the dream-poem genre in A.C. Spearing, *Medieval Dream Poetry* (Cambridge, 1976); see also the edition of the poem by D.S. Brewer (London and Edinburgh, 1960; 2nd edn, 1972). For some more recent essays, see D. Aers, in *ChauR* 16 (1981), 1–17; E. Salter, *Fourteenth-Century English Poetry* (Oxford, 1983), pp. 127–40; A.C. Spearing, in *SAC* (*Proceedings*), 2 (1986), 169–77; K.L. Lynch, in *ChauR* 25 (1990), 1–16, 85–95.

There are 14 MSS of the *Parliament*, some imperfect and fragmentary. The best text is that contained in CUL MS Gg.4.27 (Gg), an early MS (*c.* 1420–30) probably representing an attempt to do a large collection of Chaucer's poetry (a kind of 'First Folio'). This is the base-text here, though with much normalization of the scribe's eccentric spelling and occasional emendation from Bodl.MS Fairfax 16 (F) or CUL MS Ff.1.6 (Ff) or other MSS as listed in *The Riverside Chaucer*.

(craft or art of love) The lyf so short, the craft so longe to lerne,
first trial, winning of success Th'assay so sharp, so hard the conquerynge,
fearful, slides away so quickly The dredful joye alwey that slit so yerne –
Al this mene I be Love, that my felynge
Stuns into bewilderment Astonyeth with his wonderful werkynge
So sore, iwis, that whan I on hym thynke
whether I float or sink Nat wot I wel wher that I flete or synke.

in real life For al be that I knowe nat Love in dede,
pays, reward Ne wot how that he quiteth folk here hyre,
Yit happeth me ful ofte in bokes reede
Of hise myrakles and his crewel yre.
Ther rede I wel he wol be lord and syre:
so severe (as I have read they are) I dar nat seyn his strokes been so sore,
But 'God save swich a lord!' – I sey namoore.

somewhat, pleasure, instruction Of usage – what for lust and what for lore –
On bokes rede I ofte, as I yow tolde.
Not long ago But wherfore that I speke al this? Nat yoore
Agon it happede me for to beholde
Upon a bok, was write with lettres olde,
(the 'real meaning of love'?) And therupon, a certeyn thing to lerne,
intently The longe day ful faste I redde and yerne.

For ofte of olde feldes, as men sey,
Cometh al this newe corn from yer to yere,
faith And out of olde bokes, in good fey,
knowledge Cometh al this newe science that men lere.
But now to purpos as of this matere:
To rede forth so gan me to delite
only a short time That al that day me thoughte but a lyte.

This bok of which I make mencioun
Entitled was al thus, as I shal telle:

1–3 The opening lines allude to the familiar saying, 'Art is long, life is short'. It is a marvellously artful rhetorical opening that seems to announce a new era in English poetry, but that quickly dissolves, Chaucerian-style, into homely bewilderment.

8–14 **Love** is Cupid, the God of Love, not a pink boy with chubby cheeks but a feudal lord, as in *RR* 885–917, stern, demanding and quick to chastise. It is not a 'romantic' image of love: the painful and humiliating imperatives of sexual appetite are as well communicated, allegorically, as its miraculous joys. Chaucer hints timidly at the fearful powers of Love but, even as an outsider, finds it most politic to join the chorus of obeisance.

15–16 Chaucer, in his dream-poems, commonly represents himself taking refuge in books from the sometimes painful realities of experience, thereby parodying the motives of the reader of his poem and also opening out his poem to a larger world of literary discourses.

'Tullyus of the Drem of Scipioun.'
Chapitres sevene it hadde, of hevene and helle
And erthe, and soules that therynne dwelle,
Of whiche, as shortly as I can it trete,
meaning, substance Of his sentence I wol yow seyn the greete.

Fyrst telleth it, whan Scipion was come
In Affrike, how he meteth Massynisse,
taken That hym for joie in armes hath inome;
Thanne telleth he here speche and of the blysse
fail That was betwix hem til that day gan mysse,
And how his auncestre, Affrycan so deere,
Gan in his slep that nyght to hym apere.

Thanne telleth it that, from a sterry place,
How Affrycan hath hym Cartage shewed,
future fortune And warnede hym beforn of al his grace,
whatever, ignorant And seyde what man, lerned other lewed,
(and was) endowed with virtues That lovede comoun profyt, wel ithewed,
He shulde into a blysful place wende
There as joye is that last withouten ende.

Thanne axede he if folk that here been dede
Han lyf and dwellynge in another place,
And Affrican seyde, 'Ye, withouten drede,'
And that oure present worldes lyves space
whatever, tread Nys but a maner deth, what weye we trace;
And rightful folk shul gon, after they dye,
the Milky Way To hevene; and shewede hym the Galaxye.

Thanne shewede he hym the lytel erthe that here is,
Compared to, size At regard of the hevenes quantite,
And after shewede he hym the nyne speres,
And after that the melodye herde he
That cometh of thilke speres thryes thre,
That welle is of musik and melodye
In this world here, and cause of armonye.

little Than bad he hym, syn erthe was so lyte,
deceitful, ill fortune And disseyvable and ful of harde grace,
That he ne shulde hym in the world delyte.

31 The 'Dream of Scipio' formed the last book of Cicero's *Republic*, lost to the Middle Ages except for this book as embedded in the commentary of Macrobius (*c.*400). The lengthy discussion of the nature and significance of dreams in this commentary was well known to the Middle Ages and Chaucer. Here, Chaucer makes reference to the embedded text, which tells how Scipio Africanus the Younger, a Roman general, met Massinissa, king of Numidia, in 149 BC. They talked late into the night of Scipio's adoptive grandfather, the famous Scipio Africanus the Elder, whom Massinissa had known well; it is this Scipio who appears that night to his grandson in a dream.

47 **comoun profyt**: 'the good of the community', alluding to language often used in English documents relating to the conduct of public affairs.

59 **the nyne speres**. The round globe was surrounded by nine concentric transparent revolving spheres: in the first seven were set the seven planets and in the eighth the fixed stars, while the ninth was the sphere of the Primum Mobile, or First Mover, which controlled the complexly differential movement of the others. Each revolving sphere gave off a different note, and so was produced 'the music of the spheres', the heavenly model of musical harmony.

64–6 The account of the Ciceronian (pre-Christian) cosmology, which Chaucer is reading partly through Boethius (*Consolation* II, prose 7; see *TC* II.621n), slips momentarily into a commonplace of Christian *contemptus mundi* ('contempt of the world') belief – that this world is a form of exile or imprisonment, from which we emerge into eternal life.

after a certain period of years

Thanne tolde he hym, in certeyn yeres space
That every sterre shulde come into his place
Ther it was first, and al shulde out of mynde
That in this world is don of al mankynde.

Thanne preyede hym Scipion to telle hym al
The weye to come into that hevene blisse.
And he seyde, 'Know thyself first immortal,
direct yourself (and others) And loke ay besyly thow werche and wysse
To comoun profit, and thow shalt not mysse
To comen swiftly to this place deere
bright That ful of blysse is and of soules cleere.

'But brekeres of the lawe, soth to seyne,
people devoted to sensual pleasure And lykerous folk, after that they ben dede,
Shul whirle aboute th'erthe alwey in peyne
many ages Tyl manye a world be passed, out of drede,
And that foryeven is hir wikked dede;
Than shul they come into this blysful place,
To whiche to comen God sende us his grace.'

The day gan faylen, and the derke nyght,
removes That reveth bestes from here besynesse,
Berafte me my bok for lak of lyght,
get ready And to my bed I gan me for to dresse,
Fulfyld of thought and busy hevynesse:
For bothe I hadde thyng that I nolde,
And ek I ne hadde thyng that I wolde.

But fynally my spirit at the laste,
Very weary For-wery of my labour al the day,
Tok reste, that made me to slepe faste;
dreamed And in my slep I mette, as that I lay,
How Affrican, ryght in the same aray
saw That Scipion hym say byfore that tyde,
Was come and stod right at my beddes syde.

The wery huntere, slepynge in his bed,
To wode ayen his mynde goth anon;
law-cases The juge dremeth how hise plees been sped;
The cartere dremeth how his carte is gon;
foes The riche, of gold; the knyght fyght with his fon;
dreams The syke met he drynketh of the tunne;
The lovere met he hath his lady wonne.

67–70 The reference is to the 'great year', the period at the end of which all the planets and stars are in the position they were many thousands of years (variously estimated) before. The era thus marked is thought of here as the period of mankind's existence.

84 The mention of **God** contributes further (cf. 73–7) to the Christian colouring of the pagan cosmology.

90–1 Chaucer alludes here to a passage in the *Consolation of Philosophy* (III, prose 3, 33–6) where Boethius confesses to lady Philosophy that his life, though apparently successful, has always *lacked* something: this turns out to be the 'sovereign good' (true knowledge of self and God). What Chaucer has learnt so far, in this quest for *a certeyn thing* (20), is a grand Roman moral theorem of the universe, concerning good and bad action in relation to the service of the state. It is not exactly what he thought he was looking for, though it is a less peremptory answer to the question (of the place of love in human life) than might have been returned by a strict Christian spokesman (namely, that 'love' is concupiscence).

99–105 Familiar medieval explanations of the origin of dreams.

Can I nat seyn if that the cause were
For I hadde red of Affrican byforn
That made me to mete that he stod theere;
But thus seyde he: 'Thow hast the so wel born
In lokynge of myn olde bok to-torn,
was not a little mindful Of whiche Macrobye roughte nat a lyte,
somewhat, I would like to reward That sumdel of thy labour wolde I quyte.'

Venus Cytherea, thow blysful lady swete,
conquer whom you please That with thy fyrbrond dauntest whom thow lest
dream And madest me this swevene for to mete,
Be thow myn helpe in this, for thow mayst best!
As surely as I saw you As wisely as I seye the north-nor-west,
Whan I began my swevene for to write,
So yif me myght to ryme and ek t'endyte!

took hold of This forseyde Affrican me hente anon
And forth with hym unto a gate broughte,
Ryght of a park walled of grene ston;
And over the gate, with lettres large iwrowhte,
verses There were vers iwriten, as me thoughte,
On eyther side, of ful gret difference,
clear import Of which I shal now seyn the pleyn sentence:

'Thorw me men gon into that blysful place
health Of hertes hele and dedly woundes cure;
fountainhead Thorw me men gon unto the welle of grace,
Theere grene and lusty May shal evere endure.
fortune This is the weye to al good aventure.
Be glad, thow redere, and thy sorwe of-caste;
Al open am I – passe in, and sped the faste!'

'Thorw me men gon,' than spak that other side,
'Unto the mortal strokes of the spere
Of whiche Disdayn and Daunger is the gyde,
Ther nevere tre shal fruyt ne leves bere.
weir (with a fish-trap) This strem yow ledeth to the sorweful were
left high and dry There as the fish in prysoun is al drye:
Th'eschewing is only the remedye!'

These vers of gold and blak iwriten were,
bewildered Of whiche I gan astoned to beholde,
Because For with that oon encresede ay my fere
grow bold And with that other gan myn herte bolde:
heated That oon me hette, that other dede me colde.
because of my confusion No wit hadde I, for errour, for to chese
lose To entre or flen or me to save or lese.

117 **north-nor-west**. Venus appeared in this position, to a London observer, every few years (including 1380).

122 The walled garden is the traditional *locus amoenus* ('pleasant place') of European love-poetry, most famously in the *Roman de la Rose* (136–9), a poem Chaucer knew intimately and had partly translated.

127 **Thorw me men gon** echoes Dante's *Per me si va* inscribed over the portal of Hell (*Inferno* 3.1–9). The two very different inscriptions here, over the same double-doored gateway, allegorically suggest that falling in love is something of a gamble.

136 **Daunger** is the quality of cold reserve in a lady which makes her resist the lover's blandishments.

lode-stones Right as betwixen adamauntes two
equal power Of evene myght, a pece of yren set
Ne hath no myght to meve to ne fro –
attract, repels For what that oon may hale, that other let –
So it was with me, better Ferde I, that nyste whether me was bet
To entre or leve, til Affrycan, my gide,
pushed Me hente and shof in at the gates wide,

And seyde, 'It stant iwriten in thy face,
Thyn errour, thogh thow telle it not to me;
But dred the not to come into this place,
has no relevance to you For this writyng nys nothing ment bi the,
Ne by non but he Loves servaunt be –
For thow of love hast lost thy tast, I gesse,
sick As sek man hath of swet and bytternesse.

'But natheles, althogh that thow be dul,
Yit that thow canst not do, yit mayst thow se.
bout of wrestling For manye a man that may nat stonde a pul
It liketh hym at wrastlyng for to be,
whether this one … or that one And demen yit wher he do bet or he.
And there if thow haddest connyng for t'endite,
I shal the shewe mater for to wryte.'

With that myn hand he tok in his anon,
Of which I confort caughte, and went in faste.
in a happy situation But, Lord, so I was glad and wel begoon!
For overal where that I myne eyen caste
Were trees clad with leves that ay shal laste,
according to its nature Eche in his kynde, of colour fresh and greene
As emeraude, that joye was to seene.

oak for building The byldere ok, and ek the hardy assh;
for posts, corpse The pilere elm, the cofere unto carayne;
for making pipes, holly The box-tre pipere, holm to whippes lash;
for sailing-ships' masts The saylynge fyr; the cipresse, deth to pleyne;
(see n.) The shetere ew; the asp for shaftes pleyne;
'drunken' (for making drink) The olyve of pes, and ek the dronke vyne;
laurel used in divination The victor palm, the laurer to devyne.

A gardyn saw I ful of blosmy bowes
river-bank Upon a ryver, in a grene mede,
There as that swetnesse everemore inow is,

167–8 Chaucer, characterized as Love's outsider, a mere observer, is nevertheless to be given the opportunity to gather material for his poetry.

176–82 The tree-catalogue is a rhetorical *tour de force* of classical poetic tradition, which is sufficient reason for Chaucer to try his hand at it. The evergreen beauty of the trees (173) is part of the theme of the paradisal garden; the emphasis on service to mankind, in the series of unusual and witty epithets, is an unrelated (and somewhat contradictory) topos. The 'luxury of naming', above all, seems to partake in the energy of first creation.

180 'The shooter yew (for making bows), the aspen for smooth-shafted arrows'.

183–210 The garden of love is first viewed as a paradise of natural joy and harmony, imaged in flowers and small fish and clean friendly animals. The procreative impulse is there (192), but the delight and beauty of natural existence seems sufficient to itself. Chaucer borrows heavily (as in the whole description up to 294) from the *Teseida* of Boccaccio (who in turn borrowed from earlier writers), tuning the Italian poet's brilliance to gentler harmonies (204–10 are new).

With floures white, blewe and yelwe and rede,
springs, sluggish And colde welle-stremes, nothyng dede,
darting about That swymmen ful of smale fishes lighte,
With fynnes rede and skales sylver bryghte.

On every bow the bryddes herde I synge
With voys of aungel in here armonye,
So besyede hem here bryddes forth to brynge.
rabbits The litele conyes to here pley gonne hye,
And ferthere al aboute I gan aspye
timid The dredful ro, the buk and hert and hynde,
refined (i.e. not rats, etc.) Squyrels, and bestes smale of gentil kynde.

Of instrumentes of strenges in acord
Herde I so pleye, and ravyshyng swetnesse,
That God that makere is of all and lord
Ne herde nevere beter, as I gesse.
it could hardly be softer Therwith a wynd, unnethe it myghte be lesse,
Made in the leves grene a noyse softe
Acordaunt to the bryddes song alofte.

temperate Th'aire of that place so attempre was
That nevere was grevaunce of hot ne cold.
herb There wex ek every holsom spice and gras;
No man may waxe there sek ne old.
Yit was there joye more a thousandfold
become night Than man can telle; ne nevere wolde it nyghte,
But ay cler day to ony mannes syghte.

saw Under a tre, besyde a welle, I say
Cupide, oure lord, hise arwes forge and file,
And at his fet his bowe al redy lay;
And Wil, his doughter, temperede al this whyle
cunning skill The hevedes in the welle, and with hire wile
filed to a point She touchede hem, after they shulde serve
Some for to sle, and some to wounde and kerve.

Tho was I war of Plesaunce anon-ryght,
And of Aray, and Lust, and Curteysie,
Cunning (devious prompting of sex) And of the Craft that can and hath the myght
To don by force a wyght to don folye –
Disfigurat was she, I nyl nat lye;
And by hemself, under an ok, I gesse,
Saw I Delyt, that stod with Gentilesse.

I saw Beute withouten ony atyr,
And Youthe, ful of game and jolyte;
Foolhardynesse and Flaterye and Desyr,

211–17 With the mention of **Cupide** and the detail of his arrows, a shadow seems to fall across the garden: sexual desire (**Wil**, Italian *Volutta*) is associated only with pain. The single **tre** might recall the tree at the centre of the garden of Eden.

218 **Plesaunce**, etc. The allegorical personifications are sketched in only briefly, like personages in a tableau, standing in attendance upon Venus (and representing the qualities needed and rewards expected in her service).

sending messages, giving bribes Messagerye and Meede and other thre –
as far as I am concerned Here names shul not here be told for me–
tall (i.e. the pillars) And upon pileres greete of jasper longe
I saw a temple of bras ifounded stronge.

Aboute that temple daunseden alwey
in plenty Wemen inowe, of whiche some ther weere
richly dressed Fayre of hemself, and some of hem were gay;
with hair hanging loose In kerteles, al dishevele, wente they there:
That was here offyce alwey, yer be yeere.
And on the temple, of dowves white and fayre
pair Saw I syttynge manye an hundrede peyre.

Byfore the temple-dore ful soberly
Dame Pes sat, with a curtyn in hire hond,
And by hire syde, wonder discretly,
Dame Pacience syttynge there I fond,
With face pale, upon an hil of sond;
nearest of all And aldernext, withinne and ek withoute,
Promise (the making of promises) Byheste and Art, and of here folk a route.

sighs Withinne the temple, of sykes hoote as fyr
sound as of wind (soughing), run I herde a swogh that gan aboute renne,
Whiche sikes were engenderede with desyr,
altar, burn That maden every auter for to brenne
Of newe flaume; and wel espyed I thenne
suffer That al the cause of sorwe that they drye
Cam of the bittere goddesse Jelosye.

The god Priapus saw I, as I wente,
Withinne the temple in sovereyn place stonde,
state, spoilt his plans In swich aray as whan the asse hym shente
With cri be nyghte, and with sceptre in his honde.
Ful besyly men gonne assaye and fonde
Upon his hed to sette, of sondry hewe,
Garlondes ful of floures freshe and newe.

And in a prive corner in desport
Fond I Venus and hire porter Richesse,
dignified, demeanour That was ful noble and hautayn of hyre port –
Derk was that place, but afterward lightnesse
little, hardly I saw a lyte, unnethe it myghte be lesse –

231 The **temple of bras**, with its pillars of jasper (the walls of the heavenly city are of jasper in Rev. 21:18–19), seems grandly discordant in the garden of natural beauty; yet, allegorically representing heightened and glamorized forms of sexual passion (brass, like copper, is a metal of Venus), it is still *within* the garden.

240 **curtyn**. The lady Peace has in her hand the curtain that conceals the hidden mysteries of the temple, like the veil of the Tabernacle (Ex. 26:1) or the veil of the Temple (Matt. 27:51) in the Bible (such allusions are never far from mind in the cult of the 'religion of love'). When the curtain is drawn, the entry is made to loss of all peace of mind.

243 **an hil of sond**: a little allegory of the uncertainty of love.

253–9 **Priapus**, god of gardens and fertility, was all set, erect penis in hand, to ravish a sleeping nymph when everyone was woken up by the braying of Silenus's ass (Ovid, *Fasti* 1.415–40). It is not a very 'romantic' statue.

260–73 Images of oppressive heat, stifling enclosure, glamorous artifice and voyeuristic pleasure vie with images of Botticellian beauty, simultaneously repelling and attracting, provoking yet silencing rebuke.

And on a bed of gold she lay to reste
sink in the west Tyl that the hote sonne gan to weste.

golden tresses Hyre gilte heres with a goldene thred
with her hair loose Ibounden were, untrussede as she lay,
And naked from the brest up to the hed
Men myghte hire sen; and, sothly for to say,
covered, pleasure The remenaunte was wel keverede, to my pay,
delicately woven Ryght with a subtyl covercheif of valence –
that would obstruct the view Ther nas no thikkere cloth of no defense.

sweet The place yaf a thousand savoures sote,
And Bachus, god of wyn, sat hire besyde,
remedy And Ceres next, that doth of hunger boote,
Venus And, as I seyde, amyddes lay Cypride,
To whom on knees two yonge folk there cryde
To ben here helpe. But thus I let hem lye,
And ferthere in the temple I gan espie

That in dispit of Dyane the chaste
Ful manye a bowe ibroke heng on the wal
Of maydenes swiche as gonne here tymes waste
everywhere In hyre servyse; ipeyntede were overal
Ful manye a story, of whiche I touche shal
A fewe, as of Calyxte and Athalante,
And many a mayde of whiche the name I wante.

Semyramus, Candace and Hercules,
Biblis, Dido, Thisbe and Piramus,
Isolde Tristram, Isaude, Paris and Achilles,
Helen Eleyne, Cliopatre and Troylus,
Silla, and ek the moder of Romulus –
Alle these were peynted on that other syde
And al here love and in what plyt they dyde.

Whan I was come ayen unto the place
That I of spak, that was so sote and grene,
walked Forth welk I tho, myselven to solace.
Tho was I war wher that ther sat a queene
shining bright That, as of lyght the someres sonne shene
beyond measure Passeth the sterre, right so over mesure
She fayrere was than ony creature.

grassy glade And in a launde, upon an hil of floures,
Was set this noble goddesse of Nature.

272 **valence**: fine cloth made at Valence, in France.

282 **manye a bowe ibroke**. Broken bows of Diana's maidens were hung in Venus's temple as trophies when, like Callisto and Atalanta, they gave up their dedication to chastity.

288–94 Lists of famous unhappy lovers were commonly inscribed, or their stories painted (as here), on the walls of love's temple in medieval poetry, enriching the poems with allusion and evidencing the irresistible power of love. Among the less well known, **Semyramus** was queen of Assyria, usually figured as rapaciously lustful; **Candace** was the Indian queen who fell in love with Alexander (or else *Canace*, who fell in love with her brother); **Biblis** also fell in love with her brother; **Silla** (Scylla) betrayed her father and city for love of king Minos; the mother of Romulus, Rhea Silvia, was beloved of Mars.

303 **Nature** was portrayed in medieval philosophical and love-poetry, and especially by Alain de Lille (see 316 below) and in the *Roman de la Rose*, as a noble queen and goddess, the mediator of God's will (see 379 below) for the continuance and ordered being of his creatures.

Of braunches were here halles and here boures
design Iwrought after here cast and here mesure;
bird, procreation Ne there was foul that cometh of engendrure
eagerly ready That they ne were al prest in here presence
receive her decision To take hire dom and yeve hire audyence.

For this was on Seynt Valentynes day
choose its mate Whan every bryd cometh there to chese his make
Of every kynde that men thynke may,
And that so huge a noyse gan they make
That erthe and eyr and tre and every lake
So ful was that unethe was there space
For me to stonde, so ful was al the place.

And right as Aleyn, in the Pleynt of Kynde,
Devyseth Nature in aray and face,
In swich aray men myghte hire there fynde.
This noble emperesse ful of grace
Bad every foul to take his owene place,
accustomed As they were woned alwey fro yer to yeere,
Seynt Valentynes day, to stonden theere.

birds of prey That is to seyn, the foules of ravyne
Were hyest set, and thanne the foules smale
That eten, as hem Nature wolde enclyne,
As worm or thyng of which I telle no tale;
And water-foul sat lowest in the dale;
But foul that lyveth by sed sat on the grene,
many And that so fele that wonder was to sene.

There myghte men the ryal egle fynde,
That with his sharpe lok perseth the sonne,
And othere egles of a lowere kynde,
know how to Of whiche that clerkes wel devyse conne.
dull-brown feathers Ther was the tiraunt with his federes donne
causes suffering And grey – I mene the goshauk, that doth pyne
ravenousness To bryddes for his outrageous ravyne;

grasps The gentyl faucoun, that with his feet distrayneth
sparrow-hawk The kynges hand; the hardy sperhauk eke,
The quayles foo; the merlioun, that payneth
Hymself ful ofte the larke for to seke.
There was the douve with hire yen meke;

309 **Seynt Valentynes day** was the day when birds (and humans) chose their mates, and the occasion of several poems by Chaucer and his circle, among whom this bit of whimsical 'folk'-lore may have been invented. The date of 14 February grew to be attached to it, but is not specified by Chaucer: a day in spring seems more appropriate (see 680 below). The choice of birds for the allegory of love's choices is in accord with medieval convention, deriving from the association of bird-song with human love, as also from the comparatively discreet and restrained nature of avian sexuality as described in the natural history encyclopaedias (see 323n).

316 **Aleyn**: Alain de Lille (d. 1203), philosopher-poet, author of the *De planctu Naturae*, in which the goddess Nature, elaborately portrayed, complains that her laws (including sexual laws) are not obeyed by men.

323–9 The division of birds into groups according to their eating habits was familiar in medieval encyclopaedias of natural history such as the *Speculum naturale* of Vincent of Beauvais and the *De proprietatibus rerum* of Bartholomaeus Anglicus. The **foules of ravyne** are clearly to be understood to represent the aristocracy, but the other kinds of bird cannot be associated with specific social classes, though it is tempting to try.

(see n.) The jelous swan, ayens hire deth that syngeth;
forewarning The oule ek, that of deth the bode bryngeth;

The crane geaunt, with his trompes soun;
magpie The thef, the chough; and ek the jangelynge pye;
The skornynge jay; the eles fo, heroun;
(see n.) The false lapwynge, ful of trecherye;
The starlyng, that the conseyl can bewrye;
robin redbreast The tame rudok, and the coward kyte;
chronometer, small villages The kok, that orloge is of thorpes lyte;

(because reputed to be so lecherous) The sparwe, Venus sone; the nyhtyngale,
That clepeth forth the grene leves newe;
(bee-eater) The swalwe, mortherere of the foules smale
That maken hony of floures freshe of hewe;
turtledove The wedded turtil, with hire herte trewe;
The pokok, with his aungeles clothes bryghte;
(seducer of hens) The fesaunt, skornere of the cok be nyghte;

watchful, unnatural (see 613 below) The waker goos; the cukkow ever unkynde;
parrot, fancy tastes The popinjay, ful of delicasye;
(in the frenzy of copulation) The drake, stroyere of his owene kynde;
(see n.) The stork, the wrekere of avouterye;
hot (inflamed by appetite) The hote cormeraunt of glotenye;
of 'take care' (warning of rain) The raven wys; the crowe with vois of care;
white-chested (or winter-resident?) The throstil old; the frosty feldefare.

What shulde I seyn? Of foules every kynde
That in this world hath federes and stature
Men myghten in that place assemblede fynde
Byfore the noble goddesse of Nature,
diligence And everiche of hem dede his besy cure
Benygnely to chese or for to take,
female (of bird of prey) By hire acord, his formel or his make.

But to the poynt: Nature held on hire hond
A formele egle, of shap the gentilleste
created That evere she among hire werkes fond,
The moste benygne and the goodlieste.
settled in its proper place In hire was everi vertu at his reste,
So ferforth that Nature hireself hadde blysse
beak To loke on hire, and ofte hire bek to kysse.

appointed deputy Nature, vicarye of the almyghty Lord,
That hot, cold, hevy, lyght, moyst and dreye
in equal and harmonious proportions Hath knyt with evene noumberes of acord,

342 'The swan, jealous (of her territory), that sings at the approach of her death'.

347–8 The lapwing feigns injury to distract pursuers, and the starling can betray secrets because it can be taught to speak.

358 **waker goos**: alluding to the story of the geese whose cackling warned the defenders of the Roman Capitol of the approaching enemy. Like the trees earlier in the poem, the birds are often characterized, following the encyclopaedias of Vincent and Bartholomaeus, in terms of their service to mankind.

361 The stork is the avenger of adultery because unfaithful females are killed.

380 The reference is to the mixing or 'tempering' of the elements in the harmony of the divinely ordered universe (cf. Boethius, *Consolation* III, metre 9).

gentle In esy voys gan for to speke and seye,
decision 'Foules, tak hed of my sentence, I preye,
And for youre ese in fortheryng of youre nede
As faste as I may speke I wol yow speede.

'Ye knowe wel how, Seynt Valentynes day,
By my statut and thorw my governaunce,
Ye come for to cheese – and fle youre wey –
desire Youre makes, as I prike yow with plesaunce;
But natheles, my ryghtful ordenaunce
even to win the whole world May I nat breke for al this world to wynne,
That he that most is worthi shal begynne.

tercel (male eagle or hawk) 'The terslet egle, as that ye knowe ful wel,
The foul ryal, aboven every degre,
discreet The wyse and worthi, secre, trewe as stel,
Whiche I have formed, as ye may wel se,
In every part as it best liketh me –
It nedeth not his shap yow to devyse –
manner He shal first chese and speken in his gyse.

'And after hym by ordere shul ye chese,
According to your nature After youre kynde, everich as yow lyketh,
fortune And as youre hap is shul ye wynne or lese.
entangles But which of yow that love most entriketh,
God sende hym hire that sorest for hym syketh!'
And therwithal the tersel gan she calle,
And seyde, 'My sone, the choys is to yow falle.

'But natheles, in this condicioun
Mot be the choys of everich that is heere,
That she agre to his eleccioun,
mate What-so he be that shulde be hire feere.
This is oure usage alwey fro yer to yeere
And who-so may at this tyme have his grace
In blisful tyme he cam into this place.'

With hed enclyned and with humble cheere
This ryal tersel spak, and tariede noght:
equal partner 'Unto my soverayn lady, and not my fere,
I chese, and ches with wil and herte and thought,
The formel on youre hond, so wel iwrought,
Whos I am al, and evere wol hire serve,
die Do what hire lest, to do me lyve or sterve;

'Besekynge hire of merci and of grace,
As she that is my lady sovereyne,
at once Or let me deye present in this place.
For certes, longe I may nat lyve in payne,

387, 390 **statut** and **ordenaunce** are terms from constitutional law: Nature behaves like the king's Chancellor opening a session of parliament.

cut (and bleeding) For in myn herte is korven every veyne.
regard And havynge only reward to my trouthe,
My deere herte, have of my wo som routhe.

'And if that I to hyre be founde untrewe,
Disobeysaunt or wilful necligent,
A boaster, in course of time Avauntour, or in proces love a newe,
I preye to yow this be my jugement –
torn to pieces That with these foules be I al to-rent
That ilke day that evere she me fynde
by my fault To hir untrewe or in my gilt unkynde.

'And syn that hire loveth non so wel as I,
promised Al be it that she me nevere of love behette,
Thanne ouhte she be myn thorw hire mercy,
fasten For other bond can I non on hire knette.
stop Ne nevere for no wo ne shal I lette
To serven hire, how fer so that she wende.
Say what yow leste, my tale is at an ende.'

Ryght as the freshe rede rose newe
In face of Ayen the somer sonne coloured is,
Ryght so for shame al wexen gan the hewe
Of this formel, whan she herde al this;
favourably, anything unfavourable She neyther answerde wel ne seyde amys,
So sore abasht was she, tyl that Nature
Seyde, 'Doughter, drede the nought, I yow assure.'

Another tersel egle spak anon,
Of lower kynde, and seyde, 'That shal nat be!
I love hire bet than ye don, be Seynt John,
Or at the leste I love as wel as ye,
And longere have served hire in my degre;
should have And if she shulde a loved for long lovynge,
granting of the prize To me ful longe hadde be the gerdonynge.

'I dar ek seyn, if she me fynde fals,
an idle gossip Unkynde or janglere or rebel ony wyse,
neck Or jelous, do me hangen by the hals!
And, but I bere me in hire servyse
As wel as that my wit can me suffyse,
beginning to end From poynt to poynt, hyre honour for to save,
Take she my lif and al the good I have!'

The thredde tercel egle answerde tho,
time to spare 'Now, sires, ye seen the lytel leyser heere,
to depart For every foul cryeth out to ben ago
Forth with his make or with his lady deere;
And ek Nature hireself ne wol not heere,

449, 463 The arguments of the second and third tercel eagles to some extent match the historical experience of the unsuccessful suitors for the hand of Anne of Bohemia. Their speeches are not bombastic or absurd or excessively high-flown, but they are less fine, to the discriminating observer, than that of the royal eagle.

In order to avoid tarrying
For taryinge here, not half that I wolde seye;
And but I speke, I mot for sorwe deye.

boast
'Of long servyse avante I me nothing,
But as possible is to me to deye to-day
For wo as he that hath ben languyssynge
This twenty yeer, and, as wel happen may,
more satisfactorily
A man may serven bet and more to pay
In half a yer, althogh it were no moore,
Than som man doth that hath served ful yoore.

in my own cause
'I sey not this by me, for I ne can
Don no servyse that may my lady plese;
But I dar seyn, I am hire treweste man
As to my dom, and fayneste wolde hire ese.
seize
At shorte wordes, til that deth me sese
hers, whether
I wol ben heres, wher I wake or wynke,
And trewe in al that herte may bethynke.'

Of al my lyf, syn that day I was born,
petition
So gentil ple in love or other thyng
Ne herde nevere no man me beforn –
Whoever had
Who that hadde leyser and connyng
For to reherse hyre chere and hire spekyng;
And from the morwe gan this speche laste
Tyl dounward drow the sonne wonder faste.

dismissed
The noyse of foules for to ben delyvered
So loude ronge, 'Have don, and lat us wende!'
(see n.)
That wel wende I the wode hadde al to-slyvered.
Get a move on!
'Com of!' they crieden, 'allas, ye wol us shende!
making of pleas
Whan shal youre cursede pletynge have an ende?
believe
How shulde a juge eyther partie leve
For ye or nay withouten other preve?'

The goos, the cokkow, and the doke also
So cryede, 'Kek kek! kokkow! quek quek!' hye,
That thourw myne eres the noyse wente tho.
The goos seyde, 'Al this nys not worth a flye!
But I can shape herof a remedie,
quickly
And I wol seye my verdit fayre and swythe
For water-foul, who-so be wroth or blythe!'

foolish
'And I for worm-foul,' quod the fol kokkow;
'And I wol of myn owene autorite,
responsibility
For comun profit, take on the charge nowe,
For to delyvere us is gret charite.'
'Ye may abyde a while yit, parde!'

485 **ple**. Many words in these stanzas (e.g. 491, 495, 530–2; cf. 387–90 above) have a legal or parliamentary flavour, and the outbreak of abuse and name-calling that follows is suggestive of a parliamentary atmosphere in which an old world of *noblesse oblige* confronts a new world of loud-mouthed upstart ducks and geese.

493 'That I fully thought the wood would have shattered into fragments (with the noise)'.

the will of you all Quod the turtel, 'If it be youre wille
(see n.) A wiht may speke, hym were as fayr ben stylle.

'I am a sed-foul, oon the unworthieste,
That wot I wel, and litel of connynge.
But bet is that a wyhtes tonge reste
interfere in Than entermeten hym of suche doinge,
speak (with any knowledge) Of which he neyther rede can ne synge;
takes on sorely too much And who-so doth ful foule hymself acloyeth,
(see n.) For offyce uncommytted ofte anoyeth.'

Nature, which that alwey hadde an ere
ill-bred ignorance To murmur of the lewednesse behynde,
eloquent With facound voys seyde, 'Hold youre tonges there!
an advisory formula And I shal sone, I hope, a conseyl fynde
Yow to delyvere and from this noyse unbynde:
every bird-group I juge, of every folk men shul oon calle
To seyn the verdit for yow foules alle.'

Assented was to this conclusioun
The briddes alle; and foules of ravyne
unanimous choice Han chosen fyrst, by playn electioun,
male of the falcon, state exactly The terselet of the faucoun to diffyne
(see n.) Al here sentence as hem lest to termyne;
they proceeded to And to Nature hym gonne to presente,
And she accepteth hym with glad entente.

The terslet seyde thanne in this manere:
'Ful hard were it to prove by resoun
Who loveth best this gentil formele heere,
skill in reply For everych hath swich replicacioun
reasonable arguments That non by skilles may been brought adoun.
I can not se that argumentes avayle:
trial by battle (judicial duel) Thanne semeth it there moste be batayle.'

'Al redy!' quod this egles terslet tho.
'Nay, sires,' quod he, 'if that I durste it seye,
finished Ye don me wrong, my tale is not ido!
don't take offence For, sires – ne taketh not agref, I preye –
It may not gon as ye wolde in this weye;
(see n.) Oure is the voys that han the charge on honde,
decision, must abide And to the juges dom ye moten stonde.

'And therfore, pes! I seye, as to my wit,
Me wolde thynke how that the worthieste
Of knyghthod, and lengest hath used it,
Most of estat, of blod the gentilleste,
most suitable Were sittyngest for hire, if that hir leste;
And of these thre she wot hireself, I trowe,
it is easy for her to know Which that he be, for hire is light to knowe.'

511 'That one (i.e. myself) might speak, (I would say) that the cuckoo would be as well to keep quiet'.
518 **offyce uncommytted**: doing something one is not asked to do.
530 'All their opinion as it pleased them to articulate (it) in its final form'.
545 'Ours is the voice that has the responsibility for deciding'.

The water-foules han here hedes leid
after a short deliberation Togedere, and of a short avysement,
mouthful Whan everyche hadde his large gole seyd,
They seyden sothly, al be oon assent,
genteel eloquence How that the goos, with hire facounde so gent,
what is necessary for us to say 'That so desyreth to pronounce oure nede,
Shal telle oure tale,' and preyede God hire spede!

As for these water-foules tho began
The goos to speke, and in hire kakelynge
She seyde, 'Pes! Now tak kep every man,
good argument And herkeneth which a resoun I shal brynge!
My wit is sharp – I love no taryinge:
advise, though I seye I rede hym, thogh he were my brother,
But she wol love hym, lat hym take another!'

'Lo, here a parfit resoun of a goos!'
prosper Quod the sperhauk; 'Nevere mot she the!
Lo, swich it is to have a tonge loos!
fool Now parde, fol, now were it bet for the
foolishness Han holde thy pes than shewe thy nycete.
(i.e. the fool's) It lyth nat in his might ne in his wille,
But soth is seyd, "a fol can not be stille."'

The laughtere aros of gentil foules alle,
And right anon the sed-foul chosen hadde
The turtil trewe and gonne hire to hem calle
sober truth And preyede hire for to seyn the sothe sadde
would advise Of this matere, and axede what she radde.
And she answerde that pleynly hire entente
She wolde it shewe and sothly what she mente.

'Nay, God forbede a lovere shulde chaunge!'
The turtil seyde, and wex for shame red;
Though … cold and distant 'Thogh that his lady everemore be straunge,
Yit lat hym serve hire til that he be ded.
advice Forsothe, I preyse nat the goses red,
For thogh she deyede I wolde non other make;
I wol ben hires til that the deth me take.'

That's a good joke 'Wel borded,' quod the doke, 'by myn hat!
That men shul loven alwey causeles!
sense Who can a resoun fynde or wit in that?
Daunseth he murye that is myrtheles?
care about him who does not care What shulde I rekke of hym that is recheles?'
'Kek kek!' yit seith the goos, ful wel and fayre:
'There been mo sterres, God wot, than a payre!'

558–9 The slithering from indirect to direct speech is not unusual in medieval poetry, which was close still to the more relaxed conventions of oral delivery.

587–8 The turtledove's feelings are so strong that she momentarily takes on the person of the disappointed male lover.

589–95 The duck and the goose speak with a kind of coarse pragmatism. The advantage of the debate-form is that it can accommodate their views alongside those of the turtledove and the falcon without necessarily making the one the measure of the other.

noble 'Now fy, cherl!' quod the gentil terselet,
'Out of the donghil cam that word ful right!
appropriately applied Thow canst nat seen what thyng is wel beset!
behave concerning Thow farst by love as oules don by lyght:
blinds The day hem blent but wel they se by nyght.
Thy kynde is of so low a wrechednesse
That what love is thow canst nat seen ne gesse.'

push himself forward Tho gan the kokkow putte hym forth in pres
briskly For foul that eteth worm, and seyde blyve:
'So I,' quod he, 'may have my make in pes,
care I reche nat how longe that ye stryve.
single Lat eche of hem ben soleyn al here lyve!
This is my red, syn they may nat acorde;
(see n.) This shorte lessoun nedeth nat recorde.'

if the glutton has filled 'Ye, have the glotoun fild inow his paunche,
Thanne are we wel!' seyde thanne a merlioun;
hedge-sparrow 'Thow mortherere of the heysoge on the braunche
most pitiful That broughte the forth, thow reufullest glotoun!
Lyve thow soleyn, wormes corupcioun,
(see n.) For no fors is of lak of thy nature!
stay ill-bred and ignorant Go, lewed be thow whil that the world may dure!'

'Now pes,' quod Nature, 'I comaunde heer!
For I have herd al youre opynyoun
nearer (to a conclusion) And in effect yit be we not the neer.
But fynally, this is my conclusioun,
That she hireself shal han the eleccioun
whoever Of whom hire lest, and, who be wroth or blythe,
immediately Hym that she cheseth, he shal hire han aswithe.

decided 'For syn it may nat here discussed be
Who loveth hire best, as seyth the terselet,
Thanne wol I don hire this favour, that she
Shal han ryght hym on whom hire herte is set,
fastened And he hire that his herte hath on hire knet.
Thus juge I, Nature, for I may not lye:
(see n.) To non estat I have non other ye.

'But as for conseyl for to chese a make,
If I were Resoun, certis thanne wolde I
Conseyle yow the ryal tersel take,
reasonably As seyde the terselet ful skylfully,
As for the gentilleste and most worthi,

609 recorde: 'to be recorded' (it's simple enough to be remembered).

613 broughte the forth: 'hatched you'. Some cuckoos lay their eggs in the nests of other birds, and the young eject the young of their hosts.

615 'It is no matter if your kind dies out'.

630 'I have no eye (desire) to be anything else' (other than perfectly fair and impartial).

632 If I were Resoun. Nature stands for the natural order of creation, including natural desire for a mate, but she seems to appreciate the role of Reason, or rational understanding, as another of God's officers.

633 The **ryal tersel** gets Nature's vote as well as that of the spokesman for the aristocracy (553), which is appropriate if the poem alludes to Richard II's eventually successful candidacy for the hand of Anne of Bohemia.

Which I have wrought so wel to my plesaunce
That to yow oughte to been a suffisaunce.'

fearful With dredful vois the formel tho answerde,
'My rightful lady, goddesse of Nature!
rod (subject to your authority) Soth is that I am evere under youre yerde,
any other As is another lyves creature,
must be yours And mot be youre whil that my lyf may dure;
this first boon that I have asked And therfore graunteth me my firste bone
And myn entent that wol I sey wel sone.'

'I graunte it yow,' quod she, and ryght anon
in this manner This formel egle spak in this degre:
until 'Almyghty queen, unto this yer be gon
period of delay, consider I axe respit for to avise me
And after that to have my choys al fre.
This al and som that I wol speke and seye:
Ye gete no more althogh ye do me deye!

'I wol nat serve Venus ne Cupide
Forsothe as yit, by no manere weye.'
'Now syn it may non otherwise betyde,'
Quod tho Nature, 'heere is no more to seye.
Thanne wolde I that these foules were aweye,
so as to avoid tarrying Eche with his make, for taryinge lengere heere!'
And seyde hem thus, as ye shul after here.

'To yow speke I, ye terslets,' quod Nature:
'Beth of good herte, and serveth alle thre –
A yer nis nat so longe to endure –
taking pains And eche of yow peynynge in his degre
released from obligation For to do wel, for, God wot, quyte is she
As far as you are concerned, whatever For yow this yer, what after so befalle:
between-courses dish is prepared This entermes is dressed for yow alle.'

And whan this werk al brought was to an ende,
To every foul Nature yaf his make
mutual agreement By evene acord, and on here way they wende.
But Lord, the blisse and joye that they make!
For ech gan other in his wynges take,
And with here nekkes eche gan other wynde,
Thankynge alwey the noble queen of Kynde.

But fyrst were chosen foules for to synge,
As yer by yer was alwey the usance
To synge a roundele at here departynge
To don to Nature honour and plesaunce –
tune The note I trow imaked were in Fraunce;

648 respit. Poetic debates usually end in a deferred decision (as does the twelfth-century *Owl and the Nightingale*, the most famous bird-debate in English before this one), so that the poem can be removed from too crude a relation to the world of action.

675 roundele: a French lyric form, on two rhymes, in which one or more lines from the beginning are repeated as a variable refrain. The form is reconstructed below (680–92) from the evidence of the MSS.

677 note. Some MSS insert after 679 the words, 'Qui bien aime a tard oublie', presumably to indicate a tune, familiarly known by the first line of the French song that was sung to it, that could be appropriate for the roundel.

The wordes were swiche as ye may fynde
The nexte vers, as I now have in mynde.

'Nowe welcome, somer, with thy sonne softe,
storms shaken off That hast thes wintres wedres overeshake
And drivene away the longe nyghtes blake!

'Saynt Valentyne, that art ful hy o-lofte,
Thus syngen smale foules for thy sake:
[Nowe welcome, somer, with thy sonne softe,
That hast thes wintres wedres overshake.]

be glad
secured possession of
may
'Wel han they cause for to gladen ofte,
Sethe ech of hem recoverede hathe hys make.
Ful blisseful mowe they synge when they wake:
[Nowe welcome, somer, with thy sonne softe,
That hast thes wintres wedres overeshake
And drivene away the longe nyghtes blake!']

And with the shoutyng, whan the song was do,
in their flying away That the foules maden at here flyght awey,
I wok, and othere bokes tok me to
To reede upon, and yit I rede alwey
In hope, ywis, to rede so som day
shall find That I shal mete som thyng for to fare
The bet, and thus to rede I nyl nat spare.

TROILUS AND CRISEYDE

Chaucer's great poem of *Troilus and Criseyde* was written about 1381–6, when he had acquired some reputation in fashionable court circles as a poet of courtly love. His poem is based on Boccaccio's *Il Filostrato* ('The man stricken down by love'), completed about 1338, though Chaucer makes no acknowledgement of his deep indebtedness; he expands the courtly love theme with material from the *Roman de la Rose* and from the French love-poems of his older contemporary Guillaume de Machaut. What Boccaccio had done was to disentangle from the story of the siege of Troy (as it had been 'romanced' from Latin prose redactions in the *Roman de Troie* of the twelfth-century French poet Benoit de Sainte-Maure) the episode of Criseida's parting from Troilo and subsequent surrender of her affections to the Greek Diomede; to balance the story of loss and betrayal with a lyrical account of the passionate beginning of the love-affair in the wooing and winning of Criseida; to introduce a new character, Pandaro, as go-between; and to cast over the whole a colouring of passionate sensuality and fashionable urban sophistication. Chaucer heightens the courtly tone, raises the emotional stakes, and develops Boccaccio's poem as a more prolonged and luxuriously expansive, infinitely more subtle and poignant narrative of the intensities and frustrations of high courtly passion, the anxious subterfuges of winning, the ecstasies of possession, and the sadness and sad consequence of parting. The role of Pandarus is much extended, so that he is not just the worldly pragmatist and busy manipulator but also guide, priest and confessor of love to Troilus and uncle and trusted advisor to Criseyde. Criseyde herself is given a completely new depth and complexity as a woman of richly realized independent subjectivity, who tries to play the few cards she has – her father, Calchas, is a traitor who has gone over to the Greeks, and she, a young widow, is living on suffrance in Troy – so as to preserve her reputation and independence and yet not be left out of the blissful 'game' of romantic love. In her, Chaucer explores, more deeply and subtly than in any other of his creations, the nature – or even the possibility – of human agency and free will, as a woman finds herself so compromised by inner conflicts and so brutally constrained by circumstance that acquiescence in the choicelessness of the socially determined self seems almost a necessity. The colouring that Chaucer gives to this story of passionate sexual yearning, fulfilment and loss is different from Boccaccio's: he adds much to make

the poem into a high Boethian meditation on fate, free will and mutability: he modifies Boccaccio's urbane sensuality in the direction of comedy in the role of Pandarus, with much consequent ironic complication of the love-story; and he portrays the narrator as a mere looker-on of love (unlike Boccaccio's passionately involved young narrator) who follows in a good-natured and bumbling way in the wake of his own narrative. There is a tendency on the narrator's part helplessly to invoke the workings of Fortune at every juncture in the story, and a corresponding tendency on Troilus's part to play the Boethian fatalist, only sure of what is happening when everything is going wrong. The management of these complexly different elements is a miracle of imaginative concentration and fusion. Chaucer's care with this poem, his care to revise and prepare it for 'publication' and to provide for it an ending of unexampled sonorousness, is remarkably to be contrasted with the *insouciance* of his handling of the *Canterbury Tales*. It is, and he knew it was, his masterpiece.

Troilus is written in the seven-line stanza, rhyming *ababbcc*, called 'rhyme royal', the form that Chaucer used for his first experiments with iambic pentameter in the *Parliament of Fowls*. After going over to the couplet, in the *Legend of Good Women* and the *Canterbury Tales*, he still used rhyme royal for religious poems of an affecting kind (e.g. the Man of Law's Tale, the Prioress's Tale and the Clerk's Tale) involving a direct appeal to the readers' emotions. This quality of 'affect' is important in *Troilus*, as well as the greater amplitude in expression that the stanza allows.

The poem survives in 16 MSS, with fragments or extracts in a further 16. The three most important MSS are CCCC MS 61 (Cp) (which has as frontispiece the famous picture of Chaucer reciting his poem to the assembled court), Cambridge, St John's College MS L.1 (J), and New York, Pierpont Morgan Library MS M817 (Cl) (the 'Campsall' MSS, which once belonged to Prince Hal). Another group of MSS seems to represent a first draft of the poem, perhaps never intended to be released as a 'version' of the poem. There is full discussion of these and other textual matters in B.A. Windeatt, *Troilus and Criseyde: A New Edition of 'The Book of Troilus'* (London, 1984), which has a full apparatus, including the Italian of Boccaccio in parallel text with the corresponding English. In the present text, Cp is followed, with corrections and emendations from J, Cl, and other MSS where necessary.

Troilus is discussed in the general works on Chaucer cited above. On *Troilus* specifically, the following are important: C.S. Lewis, *The Allegory of Love* (Oxford, 1936), pp. 176–97 (an enormously influential account of the poem), and 'What Chaucer really did to *Il Filostrato*', *E&S* 17 (1932), 56–75; D.W. Robertson, 'Chaucerian Tragedy', *ELH* 19 (1952), 1–37; E. Salter, '*Troilus and Criseyde*: A Reconsideration', in J. Lawlor (ed.), *Patterns of Love and Courtesy* (London, 1966), pp. 86–106; G. Shepherd, 'Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*', in D. Brewer (ed.), *Chaucer and Chaucerians* (London, 1966), pp. 65–87; A.C. Spearing, *Chaucer's Troilus and Criseyde* (London, 1976); J. Mann, 'Troilus's Swoon', *ChauR* 14 (1980), 319–35. There is valuable translation of the relevant parts of the Italian poem in N. Havely, *Chaucer's Boccaccio* (Woodbridge, 1980), and collections of essays in M. Salu (ed.), *Essays on Chaucer's Troilus and Criseyde* (Woodbridge, 1979); S.A. Barney (ed.), *Chaucer's Troilus: Essays in Criticism* (London, 1980); and C.D. Benson (ed.), *Critical Essays on Chaucer's Troilus and Criseyde and Major Early Poems* (Toronto, 1991).

{The poem is in five books, of which Books II and III, most fully represented here, are freest in their treatment of Boccaccio, with much new and independent material. Book I introduces briefly the story of the siege of Troy, and describes how Criseyde, left alone in Troy after the defection of her father Calchas to the Trojans, is taken under the protection of Hector and allowed to live as a free and independent woman in Troy. Troilus, one of king Priam's younger sons, sees her at a gathering in the temple and falls headlong in love with her but is unable to speak his love because of feelings of unworthiness and fear of rebuff. His friend Pandarus, who is Criseyde's uncle, agrees to act as mediator.}

Proem to Book II

waves Owt of thise blake wawes for to saylle,
begins to clear O wynde, O wynde, the weder gynneth clere!
boat, difficulty For in this see the bote hath swych travaylle
skill, with difficulty Of my connyng that unneth I it steere –

1–7 In the proems to these early books, Chaucer takes up a lofty poetic posture, using allusion and invocation in emulation of the classical poets and the great Italians. The image here of the **bote** of his **connyng** sailing into calmer waters is from Dante, *Purgatorio* I.1–3 ('la navicella del mio ingegno').

call This see clepe I the tempestous matere
Of disespeir that Troilus was inne;
the first day (of the month) But now of hope the kalendes bygynne.

Clio (muse of History) O lady myn, that called art Cleo,
helper to succeed Thow be my speed fro this forth and my Muse
finished To ryme wel this book til I have do:
Me nedeth here noon othere art to use.
Wherefore Forwhi to every lovere I me excuse
out of no personal feeling That of no sentement I this endite,
But out of Latyn in my tonge it write.

Wherfore I nyl have neither thank ne blame
Of al this werk, but prey yow mekely
Disblameth me if any word be lame,
author (of authoritative text) For as myn auctour seyde, so sey I.
Ek though I speeke of love unfelyngly
there's nothing new about it No wondre is, for it nothyng of newe is:
colours A blynd man kan nat juggen wel in hewis.

Ye knowe ek that in fourme of speche is chaunge
then Withinne a thousand yeer, and wordes tho
value, foolish That hadden pris now wonder nyce and straunge
Us thenketh hem, and yet thei spake hem so –
And spedde as wel in love as men now do;
Ek for to wynnen love in sondry ages,
In sondry londes, sondry ben usages.

And forthi if it happe in any wyse
That here be any lovere in this place
That herkneth, as the storie wol devise,
achieved, lady's How Troilus com to his lady grace,
would I not And thenketh, 'So nold I nat love purchace,'
is surprised at Or wondreth on his speche or his doynge,
I do not know I noot; but it is me no wonderynge.

goes For every wight which that to Rome wente
Keeps not to one path Halt nat o path or alwey o manere;
ruined Ek in som lond were al the game shente
behaved If that they ferde in love as men don here,
public actions or behaviour As thus, in opyn doyng or in chere,
(see n.) In visityng in forme, or seyde hire sawes;
Which is why Forthi men seyn, 'Ecch contree hath hise lawes.'

14 **Latyn**. Chaucer's pretence is that he is the slavish translator of the Latin of one 'Lollius' (I.394). Boccaccio, as being of less 'authority', is set aside, as also the passionate personal involvement (**sentement**) of his narrator in the story of the lovers.

30 **in this place**: the image of a listening audience is one that Chaucer cultivates (cf. 43 below) in order to give immediacy to the narrative and ambiguity to his own role as 'performer'. The frontispiece of MS Cp follows out literally the implication of the image (which was not, of course, a total fabrication in an age of oral delivery and recitation and public reading).

40–1 The point of this long apologia for accurately portraying the manners of the ancients (which is as transparently insincere as the similar apologia of GP 725–42) is focused here: Chaucer endeavours to explain that the behaviour of Troilus, in not presenting his suit directly to Criseyde, has to be understood in the light of the social customs of his day. Pseudo-history is invoked for the tactical artistic purpose of rendering the go-between respectable.

41 'In formal visiting, or (if they) spoke openly what they thought'.

Ek scarsly ben ther in this place thre
said alike and done (alike) That have in love seide like, and don, in al;
be pleasing to thee For to thi purpos this may liken the,
And to thee, shall (be said) And the right nought – yet al is seid or schal;
carve, wood Ek som men grave in tree, som in ston wal,
happens, since As it bitit. But syn I have bigonne,
Myn auctour shal I folwen if I konne.

Book II

In May, that moder is of monthes glade,
When That fresshe floures, blew and white and rede,
alive Ben quike agayn that wynter dede made,
balmy odours, overflowing And ful of bawme is fletyng every mede,
Whan Phebus doth his bryghte bemes sprede
Bull (Taurus), happened Right in the white Bole, it so bitidde,
As I shal synge, on Mayes day the thrydde,

That Pandarus for al his wise speche
sharp arrows Felt ek his parte of loves shotes keene,
however well he might That, koude he nevere so wel of lovyng preche,
It made his hewe a-day ful ofte greene.
It was so destined, befell, sorrow So shop it that hym fil that day a teene
In love, for which in wo to bedde he wente,
twist and turn (in his bed) And made er it was day ful many a wente.

The swalowe Proigne with a sorowful lay
lamentation Whan morwen com gan make hire waymentyng
transformed Whi she forshapen was; and evere lay
Pandare abedde, half in a slomberyng,
Til she so neigh hym made hire cheteryng
How Tereus gan forth hire suster take,
That with the noyse of hire he gan awake,

call (his servants), prepare And gan to calle, and dresse hym up to ryse,
Remembryng hym his erand was to doone
task From Troilus, and ek his grete emprise;
(see n.) And caste and knew in good plit was the moone
make a journey To doon viage, and took his way ful soone
Unto his neces palays ther biside.
Now Janus, god of entree, thow hym gyde!

Whan he was come unto his neces place,
'Wher is my lady?' to hire folk quod he;
pass And they hym tolde and he forth in gan pace

58 Like any self-respecting *cavaliere sirvente*, Pandarus, despite his years, must suffer the pains of unrequited love, though his **maistresse** (see 98), whom we never see, seems to be a bit of a joke.

64–70 The story of the rape and mutilation of Philomena (transformed into a nightingale) by Tereus, the husband of her sister Procne (transformed into a swallow), is told in Ovid, *Metamorphoses* VI.412–674 (and by Gower, below). It is not, at this point, the happiest allusion that Chaucer could have made.

74 'And made his astrological forecast and knew the moon was in a good position'.

77 Janus was god of thresholds (cf. FrankT 1252n).

78–84 This scene is a famous allusion to a presumably common practice in aristocratic households in Chaucer's time. Criseyde, though ostensibly alone and vulnerable in Troy, seems to live in some style. She is portrayed as higher in rank than Boccaccio's Criseida, so that as a *domina* she can be an appropriate object for Troilus's affections.

seated And fond two othere ladys sete and she
Withinne a paved parlour and they thre
story Herden a mayden reden hem the geste
during their pleasure Of the siege of Thebes while hem leste.

(God be with you) Quod Pandarus, 'Madame, God yow see,
With al youre fayre book and al the compaignie!'
'Ey, uncle myn, welcome iwis,' quod she,
quickly And up she roos and by the hond in hye
thrice She took hym faste, and seyde, 'This nyght thrie –
I hope it bodes well, dreamed To goode mot it turne – of yow I mette.'
And with that word she doun on benche hym sette.

get on 'Ye, nece, yee shal faren wel the bet,
If God wol, al this yeere,' quod Pandarus;
hindered 'But I am sory that I have yow let
To herken of youre book ye preysen thus.
For Goddes love, what seith it? telle it us!
learn Is it of love? O, som good ye me leere!'
'Uncle,' quod she, 'youre maistresse is nat here.'

With that thei gonnen laughe, and tho she seyde,
'This romaunce is of Thebes that we rede,
And we han herd how that kyng Layus deyde
all those doings Thorugh Edippus his sone, and al that dede,
(see n.) And here we stynten at thise lettres rede –
How the bisshop, as the book kan telle,
Amphiorax, fil thorugh the grounde to helle.'

Quod Pandarus, 'Al this knowe I myselve
And al th'assege of Thebes and the care,
For her-of ben ther maked bookes twelve.
leave off But lat be this and telle me how that ye fare:
Get rid of your widow's wimple Do wey youre barbe and shew youre face bare;
Do wey youre book, rys up and lat us daunce
And lat us don to May som observaunce.'

Oh! (= ey, as in 87 above) 'I! God forbede!' quod she. 'Be ye madde?
Is that a widewes lif, so God yow save?
you absolutely terrify me By God, ye maken me ryght soore adradde!
Ye ben so wylde it semeth as ye rave.
It would be much more fitting for me It satte me wel bet ay in a cave

85–595 The conversation between Pandarus and Criseyde that follows is the high point of Chaucer's dramatic art – all but 35 lines are in direct speech – in the revelation of character and the carrying forward of the action without direct narratorial intervention.

86 With al youre fayre book. The preservation of MS **fayre** keeps a certain mild sarcasm in Pandarus's tone, as if suggestive that ladies might find better occupation than *books*.

97 Is it of love? Pandarus, with his delicate mission in mind, tries this as an opening gambit. The siege of Thebes (which begins with the story of Oedipus) is unfortunately about as unpromising an opening as could be imagined, as Criseyde, in the relish with which she describes the latest episode (103–5), seems mischievously to realize.

103 lettres rede: rubricated letters (in red) used for a chapter heading.

108 bookes twelve. Pandarus, thwarted in his first move, is reluctant to let the moment pass without embroidering it with his one bit of information on the subject (apt to the *Thebaid* of Statius, but not to the French version that a fourteenth-century Criseyde would have been listening to). See II.824n.

117–18 Criseyde exaggerates – she doesn't *really* think this – for effect and for fun, and to mock Pandarus's evident earnestness to stir up her attention.

pray To bidde and rede on holy seyntes lyves;
Lat maydens gon to daunce, and yonge wyves.'

'As evere thrive I,' quod this Pandarus,
make you happy 'Yet koude I telle a thyng to doon yow pleye.'
'Now, uncle deere, quod she, 'telle it us
For Goddes love: is than th'assege aweye?
I am of Grekes so fered that I deye.'
'Nay, nay,' quod he, 'as evere mote I thryve,
five such (pieces of news) It is a thing wel bet than swyche fyve.'

Yea 'Ye, holy God,' quod she, 'what thyng is that?
What, bet than swiche fyve? I! Nay, ywys!
work out For al this world ne kan I reden what
It sholde ben – som jape I trowe is this,
unless And but youreselven telle us what it is
too feeble to work it out My wit is for t'arede it al to leene.
do not know As help me God, I not nat what ye meene.'

As I am your guarantor (take it from me) 'And I youre borugh, ne nevere shal, for me,
This thyng be told to yow, as mote I thryve!'
'And whi so, uncle myn? Whi so?' quod she.
forthwith 'By God,' quod he, 'that wol I telle as blyve!
For proudder womman is ther noon on lyve,
If And ye it wiste, in al the town of Troye.
I jape nought, as evere have I joye!'

Tho gan she wondren moore than biforne
A thousand-fold, and down hire eyghen caste,
For nevere sith the tyme that she was borne
To knowe thyng desired she so faste;
sigh And with a syk she seyde hym atte laste,
'Now, uncle myn, I nyl yow nought displese,
cause you discomfort Nor axen more that may do yow disese.'

So after this with many wordes glade
And frendly tales and with merie chiere
began to go into Of this and that they pleide and gonnen wade
unfamiliar In many an unkouth, gladde and depe matere,
met together As frendes doon whan thei ben mette yfere,
was doing Tyl she gan axen hym how Ector ferde,
scourge of the Greeks That was the townes wal and Grekes yerde.

'Ful wel, I thonk it God,' quod Pandarus,
'Save in his arme he hath a litel wownde,
And ek his fresshe brother Troilus,
The wise, worthi Ector the secounde,
is pleased to abound In whom that alle vertu list habounde,
nobility of nature As alle trouthe and alle gentilesse,
generosity Wisdom, honour, fredom and worthinesse.'

141–7 Though naturally eager to hear it, Criseyde is determined not to beg for the news, whose general purport she must have a shrewd idea of by now.

uncle, I am very pleased to hear
'In good feith, em,' quod she, 'that liketh me
Thei faren wel: God save hem bothe two!
source of satisfaction
For trewelich I holde it gret deynte
A kynges sone in armes wel to do
And ben of goode condiciouns therto,
For gret power and moral vertu here
seen, one, together
Is selde yseyn in o persone yfeere.'

'In good faith, that is soth,' quod Pandarus.
'But by my trouthe the kyng hath sones tweye –
That is to mene, Ector and Troilus –
That certeynly, though that I sholde deye,
Thei ben as voide of vices, dar I seye,
As any men that lyven undre the sonne:
are capable of
Hire myght is wyde i-knowe, and what they konne.

'Of Ector nedeth it namore for to telle:
In al this world ther nys a bettre knyght
source
Than he, that is of worthynesse welle,
And he wel moore vertu hath than myght:
This knoweth many a wise and worthi wight.
value, acknowledge
The same pris of Troilus I seye:
God help me so, I knowe nat swiche tweye.'

'By God,' quod she, 'of Ector that is sooth.
Of Troilus the same thyng trowe I,
without doubt
For dredeles men tellen that he doth
In armes day by day so worthily
And bereth hym here at hom so gentily
praise
To everi wight that alle pris hath he
(see n.)
Of hem that me were levest preysed be.'

'Ye sey right sooth, ywys,' quod Pandarus;
'For yesterday who-so hadde with hym ben
He myghte han wondred upon Troilus;
bees
For nevere yet so thikke a swarm of been
flew, because of him did flee
Ne fleigh as Grekes for hym gonne fleen,
And thorugh the feld in everi wightes eere
Ther nas no cry but "Troilus is there!"

'Now here, now ther, he hunted hem so faste
Ther nas but Grekes blood and Troilus.
Now hem he hurte and hem al down he caste;
Everywhere
Ay wher he wente it was arayed thus:
He was hire deth, and sheld and lif for us,
as for that day
That as that day ther dorste non withstonde
Whil that he held his blody swerd in honde.

169 **In good faith** (cf. 162). The earnestness of their agreement on these banalities suggests that each knows that the other knows that he/she is really thinking of something else.

189 'Of them that people (*me*, 'men') would most like to be praised by'.

'Therto he is the frendlieste man
in my whole life Of gret estat that evere I saugh my lyve;
(see n.) And wher hym lest, best felawshipe kan
worthy of deserving To swich as hym thynketh able for to thryve.'
with all haste And with that word tho Pandarus as blyve
hence He took his leve, and seyde, 'I wol gon henne.'
'Nay, blame have I, myn uncle,' quod she thenne.

'What aileth yow to be thus wery soone
particularly, Is that how it is? And namelich of wommen? Wol ye so?
have occasion Nay, sitteth down; by God, I have to doone
business With yow to speke of wisdom er ye go.'
And everi wight that was aboute hem tho,
That herde that, gan fer awey to stonde
dealt with all they had in mind to Whil they two hadde al that hem liste in honde.

discussion Whan that hire tale al brought was to an ende
Of hire estat and of hire governaunce,
left Quod Pandarus, 'Now is it tyme I wende.
But yet, I say, ariseth, lat us daunce,
to the devil And cast youre widewes habit to mischaunce!
What list yow thus youreself to disfigure
befallen, piece of good luck Sith yow is tid thus faire an aventure?'

I'm glad you thought of that 'A, wel bithought! For love of God,' quod she,
get to know 'Shal I nat witen what ye meene of this?'
requires time 'No, this thing axeth leyser,' tho quod he,
'And eke me wolde muche greve, iwis,
If I it tolde and ye it toke amys.
hold still Yet were it bet my tonge for to stille
Than seye a soth that were ayeyns youre wille.

'For, nece, by the goddesse Mynerve
And Jupiter that maketh the thondre rynge
And by the blisful Venus that I serve,
Ye ben the womman in this world lyvynge –
(see n.), knowledge Withouten paramours, to my wyttynge –
That I best love and lothest am to greve,
know, believe And that ye weten wel youreself, I leve.'

many thanks 'Iwis, myn uncle,' quod she, 'grant mercy!
relied upon always up to now Youre frendshipe have I founden evere yit.
indebted I am to no man holden, trewely,
repaid So muche as yow and have so litel quyt;
as far as lies in my power And with the grace of God, emforth my wit,
By any fault in me As in my gylt I shall yow nevere offende,
make amends And if I have er this I wol amende.

206 'And where it pleases him, knows how to show the greatest friendliness'.

208–10 Pandarus gambles that Criseyde will not let him go without reminding him of the great piece of news he is supposed to have brought; Criseyde gets the better of him, in this game of wits, by detaining him, but on another pretext (a discussion of business affairs, where the irony of Pandarus's position, as presumably her interim guardian, is sharply in mind). He finally has to admit defeat, and bring it up himself (224).

236 'Not to speak of sexual love (or, not having a lover?)'.

'But for the love of God I yow biseche,
trust As ye ben he that I love moost and triste,
Give over, strange and formal Lat be to me youre fremde manere speche
And sey to me, youre nece, what yow liste.'
And with that word hire uncle anoon hire kiste,
And seyde, 'Gladly, leve nece dere!
Tak it for good that I shal sey yow here.'

With that she gan hire eighen down to caste
a little And Pandarus to coghe gan a lite,
in the last analysis And seyde, 'Nece, alwey, lo, to the laste,
How so it be that som men hem delite
With subtyl art hire tales for to endite,
Yet for al that in hire entencioun
Hire tale is al for som conclusioun.

'And sithe th'ende is every tales strengthe
proper And this matere is so bihovely,
(see n.) What sholde I poynte or drawen it on lengthe
To yow, that ben my frend so feythfully?'
And with that word he gan right inwardly
Byholden hire and loken on hire face,
(see n.) And seyde, 'On swich a mirour goode grace!'

Than thought he thus: 'If I my tale endite
(see n.) Aught harde or make a proces any whyle,
pleasure She shal no savour have therin but lite
wilfully And trowe I wolde hire in my wil bigyle,
(see n.) For tendre wittes wenen al be wyle
Ther as thei kan nought pleynly understonde;
(see n.) Forthi hire wit to serven wol I fonde' –

earnest And loked on hire in a bysi wyse
And she was war that he byheld hire so,
you stare at me so intently! And seyde, 'Lord! so faste ye m'avise!
Saw, say Sey ye me nevere er now? What sey ye, no?'
will do better 'Yis, yys,' quod he, 'and bet wol er I go!
was just now thinking how you But be my trouthe, I thoughte now if ye
Be fortunat, for now men shal it se.

piece of good fortune 'For to every wight som goodly aventure
destined Som tyme is shape if he it kan receyven,
notice But if he wol take of it no cure
ignore Whan that it commeth but wilfully it weyven,
chance Lo, neyther cas ne fortune hym deceyven,
But ryght his verray slouthe and wrecchednesse;
And swich a wight is for to blame, I gesse.

262 'Why should I go into details or drag it out at length?'
266 'May good fortune befall such a face (beauty's mirror)'.
268–9 'If I tell my story in any way difficult to comprehend or at any time make a long discourse of it'.
271 'For innocent minds think that everything is a trick'.
273 'Therefore I will try to suit what I have to say to her understanding'.

fair niece 'Good aventure, O beele nece, have ye
easily, if you know how to Ful lightly founden and ye konne it take,
And for the love of God, and ek of me,
lest the chance slip away Cache it anon, lest aventure slake!
discourse What sholde I lenger proces of it make?
Give Yif me youre hond, for in this world is noon –
in such a happy situation If that yow list – a wight so wel bygon.

'And sith I speke of good entencioun,
As I to yow have told wel here-byforn,
And love as wel youre honour and renoun
As creature in al this world yborn,
By alle tho othes that I have yow sworn –
If, think And ye be wrooth therfore or wene I lye,
again Ne shal I nevere sen yow eft with eye.

frightened 'Beth naught agast, ne quaketh naught! Wherto?
Ne chaungeth naught for feere so youre hewe!
truly, is all over For hardely the werst of this is do;
And though my tale as now be to yow newe
Yet trist alwey ye shal me fynde trewe,
unsuitable And were it thyng that me thoughte unsittynge
To yow wolde I no swiche tales brynge.'

'Now, good em, for Goddes love I preye,'
get a move on Quod she, 'come of and telle me what it is!
For both I am agast what ye wol seye
And ek me longeth it to wite, ywis;
For whethir it be wel or be amys
Say on, lat me nat in this feere dwelle.'
'So wol I doon; now herkeneth, I shall telle:

'Now, nece myn, the kynges deere sone,
The goode, wise, worthi, fresshe and free,
wont Which alwey for to don wel is his wone,
The noble Troilus, so loveth the
unless, destruction That but ye helpe it wol his bane be.
Lo, here is al – what sholde I moore sey?
Doth what yow lest to make hym lyve or dey.

die 'But if ye late hym deyen, I wol sterve –
Have here my trouthe, nece, I nyl nat lyen –
Even if I had to Al sholde I with this knyf my throte kerve.'
With that the teris breste out of his eighen,
And seyde, 'If that ye don us bothe dyen
made a fine catch! Thus gilteles, than have ye fisshed fayre!
(see n.) What mende ye though that we booth appaire?

'Allas, he which that is my lord so deere,
That trewe man, that noble gentil knyght,
That naught desireth but youre frendly cheere,

329 'How do you gain by it if we both should perish?'

I se hym dyen ther he goth upryght
And hasteth hym with al his fulle myght
For to ben slayn, if his fortune assente.
Allas, that God yow swich a beaute sente!

'If it be so that ye so cruel be
it pleases you to care nothing That of his deth yow listeth nought to recche,
That is so trewe and worthi, as ye se,
Namoore than of a japer or a wrecche –
If ye be swich, youre beaute may nat strecche
To make amendes of so cruel a dede;
Careful consideration Avysement is good byfore the nede.

(see n.) 'Wo worth the faire gemme vertulees!
has no healing power Wo worth that herbe also that dooth no boote!
Wo worth that beaute that is routheles!
treads everyone Wo worth that wight that tret ech undir foote!
(the whole being of beauty) And ye, that ben of beaute crop and roote,
If with that If therwithal in yow ther be no routhe,
Than is it harm ye lyven, by my trouthe!

piece of trickery 'And also think wel that this is no gaude,
For me were levere thow and I and he
pimp (pander) Were hanged, than I sholde ben his baude,
As heigh as men myghte on us alle ysee!
I am thyn em; the shame were to me,
As wel as the, if that I sholde assente
abetting, should injure Thorugh myn abet that he thyn honour shente.

'Now understond, for I yow nought requere
promise To bynde yow to hym thorugh no byheste
be nicer to him But only that ye make hym bettre chiere
(show him) more kind attention Than ye han doon er this, and moore feste,
So that his lif be saved atte leeste.
This is the whole matter, fully This al and som and pleynly oure entente:
God help me so, I nevere other mente!

not unreasonable 'Lo, this requeste is naught but skylle, ywys,
reasonable fear Ne doute of resoun, pardee, is ther noon.
Let me suppose as a hypothesis I sette the worste, that ye dreden this:
would be surprised to see him Men wolde wondren sen hym come or goon.
In reply to that Ther-ayeins answere I thus anoon
congenital idiot That every wight, but he be fool of kynde,
affection between friends Wol deme it love of frendshipe in his mynde.

think 'What, who wol demen, though he se a man
To temple go, that he th'ymages eteth?
Thenk ek how wel and wisely that he kan
Governe hymself that he nothyng foryeteth,
praise That where he cometh he pris and thank hym geteth;
And ek therto he shal come here so selde,
What great matter would it be What fors were it though al the town byhelde?

344 'Woe befall the fair gem that lacks the power intrinsic to gems!'

affection between friends 'Swych love of frendes regneth al this town:
(see n.) And wre yow in that mantel evere moo,
As God may surely be And God so wys be my savacioun,
your best course As I have seyd, youre beste is to do soo.
assuage But alwey, goode nece, to stynte his woo,
public aloofness, sweetened So lat youre daunger sucred ben a lite
blame That of his deth ye be naught for to wite.'

going on in this way Criseyde, which that herde hym in this wise,
feel for (try to figure out) Thoughte, 'I shal felen what he meneth, ywis.'
suggest 'Now, em,' quod she, 'what wolde ye devise?
advice What is youre rede I sholde don of this?'
'That is wel seyd,' quod he. 'Certein, best is
in return That ye hym love ayeyn for his lovynge,
reasonable payment of reward As love for love is skilful guerdonynge.

age 'Thenk ek how elde wasteth every houre
In eche of yow a partie of beautee,
And therfore er that age the devoure
for when you are old Go love, for old, ther wol no wight of the.
lesson Lat this proverbe a loore unto yow be:
The realization comes too late "To late ywar, quod Beaute, whan it paste";
conquers women's primness And Elde daunteth Daunger at the laste.

(see n.) 'The kynges fool is wont to crien loude
behaves haughtily Whan that hym thinketh a womman bereth hire heighe,
"So longe mote ye lyve, and alle proude,
Til crowes feet be growe under youre eighe,
peer And sende yow than a myrour in to prye
in the morning In which that ye may se youre face a-morwe!"
I would not wish you Nece, I bidde wisshe yow namore sorwe.'

With this he stynte and caste adown the hede
burst into tears And she began to breste a-wepe anoon,
And seyde, 'Allas, for wo! Why nere I deede?
For of this world the feyth is al agoon.
strangers Allas, what sholden straunge to me doon
thought to be When he that for my beste frend I wende
Advises, forbid Ret me to love, and sholde it me defende?

'Allas! I wolde han trusted douteles
misfortune That if that I thorugh my disaventure
Hadde loved outher hym or Achilles,
creature of man's kind Ector, or any mannes creature,
restraint (in condemning) Ye nolde han had no mercy ne mesure
reproach On me, but alwey had me in repreve.
believe This false worlde, allas, who may it leve?

'What, is this al the joye and al the feste?
advice, piece of good fortune Is this youre reed? Is this my blisful cas?

380 'And conceal yourself in that cloak (of being just good friends) evermore'.

398 Proverbial (Whiting B155).

400 **kynges fool**: fool who has licence to say what everyone knows.

fulfilment, promise Is this the verray mede of youre byheeste?
elaborate build-up Is al this paynted proces seyd, allas,
purpose, Pallas Athene (= Minerva) Right for this fyn? O lady myn, Pallas!
frightening, make provision Thow in this dredful cas for me purveye,
For so astoned am I that I deye.'

Wyth that she gan ful sorwfully to syke.
'A, may it be no bet?' quod Pandarus;
week 'By God, I shal namore come here this wyke,
And (I swear so) before God And God aforn, that am mystrusted thus!
set little store by I se ful wel that ye sette lite of us
Or of oure deth! Allas, I woful wrecche!
nothing to worry about Might he yet lyve, of me is nought to recche.

(see n.) 'O cruel god, O dispitous Marte,
O Furies thre of helle, on yow I crye!
So lat me nevere out of this hous departe
If that I mente harm or any vilenye!
But sith I se my lord mot nedes dye
make my confession And I with hym, here I me shryve and seye
That wikkedly ye don us bothe deye.

'But sith it liketh yow that I be dede,
By Neptunus, that god is of the see,
Fro this forth shal I nevere eten brede
Til I myn owen herte blood may see,
For certeyn I wol deye as soone as he.'
started out And up he sterte and on his wey he raughte,
(see n.) Til she agayn hym by the lappe kaughte.

was dead Criseyde, which that wel neigh starf for feere,
Being as she was So as she was the ferfulleste wighte
That myghte be, and herde ek with hire ere
And saugh the sorwful ernest of the knyght
nothing wrong And in his preier ek saugh noon unryght,
And for the harm that myghte ek fallen moore
have pity and be fearful She gan to rewe and dredde hire wonder soore,

Misfortunes And thoughte thus: 'Unhappes fallen thikke
in such kinds of way Alday for love, and in swych manere cas
in (actions) against themselves As men ben cruel in hemself and wikke;
And if this man sle here hymself, allas,
not be very nice for me In my presence, it wol be no solas.
What men wolde of hit deme I kan nat seye:
cunningly to play (my cards) It nedeth me ful sleighly for to pleie.'

435 dispitous Marte: 'malicious Mars' (planetary deity of misfortune).

448 'Till she in response caught him by a fold (in the sleeve) of his garment'.

451–4 The tumble of **and**-clauses seems to represent the turmoil of Criseyde's mind, as she turns over and over in her mind the decision she is going to make and works out how it is both for the best and unavoidable.

456–73 The relationship between soliloquy and speech is hard to establish. Is **A, Lord!** what Criseyde **sayde thrie**, and does she then resume her internal meditation until she speaks in 473?

thrice And with a sorowful sik she sayde thrie,
What a sad fate has befallen me! 'A, Lord! What me is tid a sory chaunce!
position in life, jeopardy For myn estat lith now in a jupartie
And ek myn emes lif is in balaunce;
guidance But natheles with Goddes governaunce
I shal so doon, myn honour shal I kepe
And ek his lif' – and stynte for to wepe.

is best to be chosen 'Of harmes two, the lesse is for to chese:
I would rather be pleasant to him Yet have I levere maken hym good chere
Honourably, lose In honour than myn emes lyf to lese. –
Ye seyn, ye nothyng elles me requere?'
indeed (= ywis) 'No, wis,' quod he, 'myn owen nece dere.'
do my utmost 'Now wel,' quod she, 'and I wol doon my peyne;
(see n.) I shal myn herte ayeins my lust constreyne –

'But that I nyl nat holden hym in honde,
Ne love a man ne kan I naught ne may
in all else, try Ayeins my wyl, but elles wol I fonde,
Saving my honour Myn honour sauf, plesen hym fro day to day.
Therto nolde I nat ones han seyd nay
was afraid, my imaginings But that I dredde, as in my fantasye;
if the cause should cease But cesse cause, ay cesseth maladie.

'And here I make a protestacioun
further That in this proces if ye depper go
That certeynly, for no salvacioun
Of yow, though that ye sterven bothe two,
in one day Though al the world on o day be my fo,
Ne shal I nevere of hym han other routhe.'
'I graunte wel,' quod Pandare, 'by my trowthe.

'But may I truste wel therto,' quod he,
promised 'That of this thyng that ye han hight me here
Ye wole it holden trewely unto me?'
'Ye, doutelees,' quod she, 'myn uncle deere.'
'Ne that I shal han cause in this matere,'
Quod he, 'to pleyne or after yow to preche?'
'Why, no, parde; what nedeth moore speche?'

Tho fellen they in other tales glade,
Tyl at the laste, 'O good em,' quod she tho,
(i.e. God's) 'For his love which that us bothe made
knew Tel me how first ye wisten of his wo.
Woot noon of it but ye?' He seyde, 'No.'
'Kan he wel speke of love?' quod she; 'I preye
so that, prepare myself Tel me, for I the bet me shal purveye.'

Tho Pandarus a litel gan to smyle,
And seyde, 'By my trouthe I shal yow telle.

476–7 'I shall allow compassion to constrain my own wishes, except that I will not deceive him with false hopes'.

This other day, naught gon ful longe while,
In-with the paleis gardyn, by a welle,
Gan he and I wel half a day to dwelle,
plan Right for to speken of an ordinaunce
get the better of How we the Grekes myghten disavaunce.

jump up 'Soon after that bigonne we to lepe
spears And casten with oure dartes to and fro,
Tyl at the laste he seyde he wolde slepe
grass And on the gres adoun he leyde hym tho,
stroll And I therafter gan romen to and fro,
walked Til that I herde as that I welk alone
How he bigan ful wofully to grone.

'Tho gan I stalke hym softely byhynde,
certainly And sikirly the sooth for to seyne,
As I kan clepe ayein now to my mynde,
Right thus to Love he gan hym for to pleyne:
He seyde, "Lord, have routhe upon my peyne,
Although Al have I ben rebell in myn entente;
Now, *mea culpa*, lord, I me repente!

according as you dispose '"O god, that at thi disposicioun
(see n.) Ledest the fyn by juste purveiaunce
humble Of every wight, my lowe confessioun
graciously Accepte in gree, and sende me swich penaunce
but against despair As liketh the, but from disesperaunce,
spirit alienate That may my goost departe awey fro the,
Thow be my sheld, for thi benignite.

'"For certes, lord, so soore hath she me wounded,
That stood in blak, with lokyng of hire eyen,
plunged That to myn hertes botme it is ysounded,
Thorugh which I woot that I moot nedes deyen.
reveal (my love) This is the werste – I dar me nat bywreyen,
red-hot coals And wel the hotter ben the gledes rede,
When men cover them That men hem wrien with asshen pale and dede."

smote his brow and hung his head 'Wyth that he smot his hede adown anon
mutter And gan to motre, I noot what, trewely.
quietly And I with that gan stille awey to goon
acted as though And leet therof as nothing wist had I
And com ayein anon and stood hym by,
And seyde, "Awake, ye slepen al to longe!
causes you to pine with longing It semeth nat that love doth yow longe,

507–53 Some have suggested that Pandarus is recounting an episode we have not been told of; but it seems clear that he has attached a familiar story of the overheard lover's complaint (rather like Chaucer's own *Book of the Duchess*) to Troilus, knowing that it is the very thing to appeal to a disposition nurtured on romances of love.

525 ***mea culpa***: mine is the blame, a formula from the confessional, and an example, like the next stanza, and the brow-beating (540), of the use of Christian terms of penitence in the language of love, a practice to be thought of more as daringly witty than as either a barbed criticism of love or a surreptitious endorsement.

527 'Controllest the destined end by just providence'.

530–1 **disesperaunce**: despair, or loss of hope, was the sin against the Holy Spirit, and the denial and loss of God's grace.

534 **stood in blak**. A reference to Criseyde's attire when Troilus first saw her in the temple (I.177).

"'That slepen so that no man may yow wake.
saw, lethargic Who sey evere or this so dul a man?"
may you lot have your heads ache "Ye, frende," quod he, "do ye youre hedes ake
For love, and lat me lyven as I kan."
But though that he for wo was pale and wan,
put on Yet made he tho as fresshe a countenaunce
As though he sholde have led the newe daunce.

'This passed forth til now this other day
It fel that I com romyng al allone
Into his chaumbre and fond how that he lay
Upon his bed; but man so soore grone
Ne herde I nevere, and what that was his mone
Ne wist I nought, for as I was comyng
Al sodeynly he lefte his complaynyng.

'Of which I took somwat suspecioun
And ner I com and fond he wepte soore,
As God may surely be And God so wys be my savacioun
As nevere of thyng hadde I no routhe moore,
ingenuity, instruction For neither with engyn ne with no loore
Unnethes myghte I fro the deth hym kepe,
That yet fele I myn herte for hym wepe.

'And God woot, nevere sith that I was born
Was I so besy no man for to preche
Ne nevere was to wight so depe isworn
Before, physician Or he me told who myghte ben his leche.
But now to yow rehercen al his speche
repeat Or all his woful wordes for to sowne
unless you want to see me swoon Ne bid me naught, but ye wol se me swowne.

nothing else 'But for to save his lif and elles nought
And to noon harm of yow thus am I dryven,
And for the love of God that us hath wrought
Swich cheer hym dooth that he and I may lyven!
plainly, confessed Now have I plat to yow myn herte shryven,
my purpose is honest And sith ye woot that myn entent is cleene,
Take heede therof, for I non yvel meene.

success, may you have 'And right good thrift, I prey to God, have ye
such a one That han swich oon ykaught withouten net!
And if you are as wise And be ye wis as ye be faire to see,
Wel in the rynge than is the rubie set.
Ther were nevere two so wel ymet
entirely Whan ye ben his al hool as he is youre:
Ther myghty God yet graunte us see that houre!'

'Nay, therof spak I nought, ha, ha!' quod she;
spoil everything 'As helpe me God, ye shenden every deel!'

549 **do ye youre hedes ake**. Pandarus represents Troilus as holding to his former pretence of being fancy-free and scornful of love, as described in Book I.

554–71 This is the episode described at length in Book I.

'O, mercy, dere nece,' anon quod he,
Whatever 'What-so I spak, I mente naught but wel,
By Mars, the god that helmed is of steel!
Now beth naught wroth, my blood, my nece dere.'
'Now wel,' quod she, 'foryeven be it here!'

With this he took his leve and home he wente,
very pleased with everything And, Lord, so he was glad and wel bygon!
stayed Criseyde aros, no lenger she ne stente,
But streght into hire closet wente anon
And set hire doun as stylle as any ston
turn in her mind And every word gan up and down to wynde
That he had seyd, as it com hire to mynde,

And wax somdel astoned in hire thoughte
Right for the newe cas, but whan that she
Thought about it fully, found Was ful avysed, tho fond she right noughte
Of peril why she ought afered be:
it's quite possible For man may love, of possibilite,
break in pieces A womman so his herte may to-breste
unless she wanted And she naught love ayein but if hire leste.

But as she sat allone and thoughte thus,
The outcry arose at a skirmish Ascry aros at scarmuch al withoute,
And men criden in the strete, 'Se, Troilus
army Hath right now put to flighte the Grekes route!'
household attendants With that gan al hire meigne for to shoute,
'A, go we se! Caste up the yates wyde!
For thorwgh this strete he moot to paleys ride,

'For other wey is to the yate noon
Of Dardanus, there opyn is the cheyne.'
With that com he and al his folk anoon
At a slow pace, in two columns An esy pas rydyng, in routes tweyne,
day of destined good fortune Right as his happy day was, sooth to seyne –
prevented For which, men seyn, may nought destourbed be
That shal bityden of necessitee.

This Troilus sat on his baye steede
Al armed save his hede ful richely;
And wownded was his hors, and gan to blede,
at a walking pace On which he rood a pas ful softely.
But swich a knyghtly sighte trewely
As was on hym was nought, withouten faille,
To loke on Mars that god is of bataille.

So lik a man of armes and a knyght
to look upon He was to seen, fulfilled of heigh prowesse,

621–3 One of several reflections on the inevitability of destiny that Chaucer introduces from the *Consolation of Philosophy* of the fifth-century Christian-Roman philosopher Boethius (V, prose 6, 162–8) – without mentioning Boethius's further argument, that 'Fortune' and 'Destiny' are only names men give to the operations of a divine providence that allows them complete free will but that they choose wilfully not to understand (see also III.617n).

For bothe he hadde a body and a myght
that deed (of prowess), courage To don that thing as wel as hardynesse,
all got up in his armour And ek to seen hym in his gere hym dresse,
vigorous So fressh, so yong, so weldy semed he,
It was an heven upon hym for to see.

His helm to-hewen was in twenty places,
That by a tyssew heng his bak byhynde;
His sheeld to-dasshed was with swerdes and maces,
In which men myghte many an arwe fynde
(see n.) That thirled hadde horn and nerf and rynde;
And ay the peple cryde, 'Here cometh oure joye,
And, next his brother, holder up of Troye!'

For which he wex a litel reed for shame
When he the peple upon hym herde cryen,
That to byholde it was a noble game
How sobrelich he caste down his eyen.
Criseyda gan al his chere aspien
And leet so softe it in hire herte synken
That to hireself she seyde, 'Who yaf me drynken?'

became For of hire owen thought she wex al reed,
Remembryng hire right thus, 'Lo, this is he
Which that myn uncle swerith he moot be deed
But I on hym have mercy and pitee.'
for very shame And with that thought for pure ashamed she
Gan in hire hed to pulle, and that as faste,
While he and alle the peple forby paste,

And gan to caste and rollen up and down
Withinne hire thought his excellent prowesse
station in life And his estat and also his renown,
wisdom His wit, his shap and ek his gentilesse;
was because But moost hire favour was for his distresse
Was al for hire, and thought it was a routhe
To sleen swich oon if that he mente trouthe.

spiteful-minded people Now myghte som envious jangle thus:
'This was a sodeyn love! how myght it be
quickly That she so lightly loved Troilus
Right for the firste syghte, ye, parde?'
may he never thrive Now who seith so, ne mote he nevere y-the!
has to have a beginning For every thyng a gynnyng hath it nede
doubt Er al be wrought, withowten any drede.

For I sey nought that she so sodeynly
Yaf hym hire love, but that she gan enclyne

642 'That had pierced horn and sinew and skin (of the shield)'.
651 Criseyde's words may recall the episode in which Tristan and Isolde fall in love after drinking the love-potion. She half-consciously distances the movement of desire within herself as something that comes upon her magically, from outside, regardless of her will.
666–79 As has often been remarked, the narrator's intervention here on behalf of Criseyde acts to stir up doubts as much as to dispel them. But Chaucer may have felt that Criseyde's reputation for fickleness needed to be explicitly addressed.

To like hym first, and I have told yow whi;
suffering And after that, his manhod and his pyne
Made love withinne hire herte for to myne,
For which by proces and by good servyse
obtained He gat hire love, and in no sodeyn wyse.

And also blisful Venus, wel arrayed,
Sat in hire seventhe hous of hevene tho,
(see n.) Disposed wel and with aspectes payed
poor innocent To helpe sely Troilus of his woo.
And soth to seyne, she nas nat al a foo
To Troilus in his nativitee:
the better God woot that wel the sonner spedde he.

for a while Now lat us stynte of Troilus a throwe,
That rideth forth, and lat us torne faste
Unto Criseyde, that heng hire hed ful lowe
Ther as she sat allone, and gan to caste
What she would finally decide Where-on she wolde apoynte hire atte laste,
If it so were hire em ne wolde cesse
For Troilus upon hire for to presse.

And Lord! so she gan in hire thought argue
In this matere of which I have yow tolde,
And what to doone best were and what eschuwe –
(see n.) That plited she ful ofte in many folde.
Now was hire herte warm, now was it colde,
And what she thoughte somwhat shal I write,
my author (source for my story) As to myn auctour listeth for t'endite.

Troilus's She thoughte wel that Troilus persone
She knew by syghte and ek his gentilesse,
although, not appropriate And thus she seyde, 'Al were it nat to doone
To graunte hym love, yit for his worthynesse
It were honour with pleye and with gladnesse
Honourably In honestee with swich a lord to deele,
well-being For myn estat and also for his heele.

'Ek wel woot I my kynges sone is he,
And sith he hath to se me swich delite,
utterly and openly If I wolde outreliche his sighte flee
Perhaps Peraunter he myghte have me in dispite,
plight Thorugh whicche I myghte stonde in worse plite.
to bring hatred on myself Now were I wis me hate to purchace,
Withouten nede, ther I may stonde in grace?

677 The medieval siege engineer dug tunnels (mined) under the walls of a castle, shored up the tunnel roofs with timbers, then set light to the timbers and retired hastily before the tunnels collapsed – and with them, it was hoped, the fortifications. It works better as a metaphor than it did in reality.

680–6 Troilus's cause was assisted by Venus, who favoured him in the horoscope of his nativity (684–5), and was also that day in a favourable position (**Disposed wel**) in the seventh **hous** or division of the celestial sphere, with other signs and bodies likewise propitious (**aspectes payed**). Chaucer throws the colouring of judicial astrology over what has already been said (621–3) about the influence of destiny.

697 'That (was something) she turned this way and that'.

moderation 'In every thyng, I woot, ther lith mesure;
forbid For though a man forbede dronkenesse,
requires He naught forbet that every creature
Be drynkeles for alwey, as I gesse.
Ek sith I woot for me is his destresse,
I ne aughte naught for that thing hym despise,
Sith it is so he meneth in good wyse.

'And eke I knowe of longe tyme agon
qualities, foolish His thewes goode and that he is nat nyce;
Nor a boaster N'avantour, seith men, certein is he noon –
To wis is he to doon so gret a vice;
since, never show him such favour Ne als I nyl hym nevere so cherice
That he may make avaunt by juste cause,
(see n.) He shal me nevere bynde in swiche a clause.

let us suppose a certain situation 'Now sette a caas: the hardest is, ywys,
Men myghten demen that he loveth me.
What dishonour were it unto me, this?
stop him doing that May ich hym lette of that? Why, nay, parde!
I knowe also, and alday heere and se,
quite without their permission Men loven wommen al biside hire leve,
(see n.) And whan hem leste namore, lat hem byleve!

'I thenk ek how he able is for to have
worthiest Of al this noble town the thriftieste
provided that To ben his love, so she hire honour save,
For out and out he is the worthieste,
Save only Ector, which that is the beste –
at my disposal And yet his lif al lith now in my cure.
good fortune But swich is love and ek myn aventure.

'Ne me to love a wonder is it nought,
For wel woot I myself, so God me spede –
Al wolde I that noon wiste of this thought –
the very fairest, without doubt I am oon the faireste, out of drede,
And goodlieste, who that taketh hede,
And so men seyn, in al the town of Troie.
What wonder is though he of me have joye?

an independent woman 'I am myn owene womman, wel at ese –
as befits my station in life I thank it God – as after myn estate,
untethered in a pleasant pasture Right yong, and stonde unteyd in lusty leese,
Withouten jalousie or swich debate:
Shal noon housbond seyn to me "Chek-mate!"
For either they ben ful of jalousie
Or maisterfull or loven novelrie.

728 'in terms of such a stipulation (i.e. as to be entitled to boast)'.
735 'And when they've stopped wanting to do that, let them leave off'.
754 **housbond**. Fashionable codes of love tended to exclude husbands, since the power relations of marriage were regarded as incompatible with the idealized relations of lovers (this is the reason for Arveragus's unusual pact with his wife in FrankT V.751, 764). But there were many medieval stories of fashionable courtship ending conventionally in happy marriage, and Criseyde's remark here is not representative of a fixed and universal 'system' of 'courtly love'.

purpose 'What shal I doon? To what fyn lyve I thus?
in a situation such as pleases me Shal I nat love in cas if that me leste?
(see n.) What, pardieux! I am naught religious.
And though that I myn herte sette at reste
Upon this knyght, that is the worthieste,
And kepe alwey myn honour and my name,
By all that's proper By alle right it may do me no shame.'

But right as when the sonne shyneth bright
In March, that chaungeth ofte tyme his face,
And that a cloude is put with wynd to flight,
overspreads Which oversprat the sonne as for a space,
A cloudy thought gan thorugh hire soule pace
That overspradde hire brighte thoughtes alle
So that for feere almost she gan to falle.

since That thought was this: 'Allas! syn I am free,
Sholde I now love and put in jupartie
enslave My sikernesse and thrallen libertee?
Allas, how dorst I thenken that folie?
May I naught wel in other folk aspie
fearful Hire dredfull joye, hire constreinte and hire peyne?
opportunity (occasion) Ther loveth noon that she nath wey to pleyne.

'For love is yet the moste stormy lyf,
Right of hymself, that evere was bigonne,
For evere som mystrust or nice strif
Ther is in love, som cloude is overe that sonne.
Therto we wrecched wommen nothing konne
Whan us is wo but wepe and sitte and thinke:
(see n.) Oure wrecche is this, oure owen wo to drynke.

eager 'Also thise wikked tonges ben so preste
To speke us harm; ek men ben so untrewe
as soon as, their desire That right anon as cessed is hire leste
So cesseth love, and forth to love a newe.
may regret But harm ydoon is doon, who-so it rewe:
torture themselves at first For though thise men for love hem first to-rende,
(see n.) Ful sharp bygynnyng breketh ofte at ende.

'How ofte tyme hath it yknowen be
done The tresoun that to wommen hath ben do!
end To what fyn is swich love I kan nat see
what becomes of it Or wher bycometh it whan that it is ago.
Ther is no wight that woot, I trowe so,
trips over it (it's not really there) Where it bycometh. Lo, no wight on it sporneth;
at first That erst was nothing into nought it torneth.

'How bisy, if I love, ek most I be
gossip, imagine things To plesen hem that jangle of love and dremen,

759 'What, by God! I am not in any way a member of a religious order' (e.g. a nun).
784 'Our wretchedness is this, to endure woes of our own making'.
791 'An eager beginning often leads to a separation in the end'.

talk nicely to them And coye hem, that they seye noon harm of me!
it seems to them For though ther be no cause, yet hem semen
please Al be for harm that folk hire frendes quemen;
And who may stoppen every wikked tonge
Or sown of belles whil that thei ben ronge?' 805

And after that hire thought gan for to clere,
And seide, 'He which that nothing undertaketh
whether he like it or not Nothyng n'acheveth, be hym looth or deere.'
And with another thought hire herte quaketh,
Than slepeth hope and after drede awaketh, 810
Now hoot, now cold. But thus, bitwixen tweye,
rises She rist hire up and wente hire for to pleye.

Adown the steyre anon-right tho she wente
Into the gardyn with hire neces thre,
took many a turn (stroll) And up and down ther made many a wente – 815
Flexippe, she, Tharbe and Antigone –
To pleyen that it joye was to see;
company And other of hire wommen, a gret route,
Hire foloweden in the gardyn al aboute.

(see n.) This yerd was large, and rayled alle th'aleyes, 820
And shadewed wel with blosmy bowes grene,
(see n.) And benched newe, and sonded alle the weyes,
In which she walketh arm in arm bitwene,
bright Til at the laste Antigone the shene
Gan on a Troian song to singen cleere 825
That it an heven was hire vois to here.

She seyde, 'O Love, to whom I have and shal
subject Ben humble subgit, trewe in myn entente
I give As I best kan, to yow, lord, yeve ich al
as tribute For everemo myn hertes lust to rente; 830
For nevere yet thi grace no wight sente
So blisful cause as me my lif to lede
security, without fear In alle joie and seurte out of drede.

bestowed (planted) 'Ye, blisful god, han me so wel byset
In love, iwys, that al that bereth lif 835
Ymagynen ne kouthe how to be bet;
For, lord, withouten jalousie or strif,
someone, diligent I love oon which that moost is ententif
To serven wel, unweri or unfeyned,
injurious intention stained That evere was, and leest with harm desteyned, 840

813–931 The garden-scene and Antigone's song are new in Chaucer, with hardly a hint in Boccaccio. Both serve to answer, point by point, the objections to engaging in a love-affair that Criseyde raised in her soliloquy.

820 'The enclosed garden was large, and the paths fenced with low rails'.

822 'And furnished with new turf-topped benches, and all the paths sanded'.

824 Antigone. The name was familiar from the story of Thebes, to which Criseyde and her ladies were earlier listening, and in assigning it to Love's votaress Chaucer is adding to the store of allusions (e.g. II.100, V.937, 1486) to the dark history of destruction and tragedy that lies ominously behind his story (see Patterson, *Chaucer and the Subject of History*, pp. 47–164).

He being the one, source (fountain) 'As he that is the welle of worthynesse,
foundation, excellence Of trouthe grownd, mirour of goodlihede,
wisdom, rock of security Of wit Apollo, stoon of sikernesse,
beginner and source of pleasure Of vertu roote, of lust fynder and hede,
slain in me Thorugh which is alle sorwe fro me dede.
Iwis, I love hym best, so doth he me:
May he fare well Now good thrift have he wher-so that he be!

'Whom shulde I thanken but yow, god of Love,
I begin to bathe Of al this blisse in which to bathe I gynne?
And thanked be ye, lord, for that I love!
This is the righte lif that I am inne,
banish To flemen alle manere vice and synne:
devote myself This dooth me so to vertue for t'entende
That day by day I in my wille amende.

'And who-so seith that for to love is vice
a form of enslavement Or thraldom, though he feele in it destresse,
He outher is envyous or right nyce
unable, wickedness Or is unmyghty for his shrewednesse
To loven; for swich manere folk, I gesse,
Defamen Love as nothing of hym knowe –
never tried it for themselves Thei speken but thei benten nevere his bowe!

of its very nature 'What is the sonne wers of kynde right
Though that a man for fieblesse of his eyen
because it is so bright May nought endure on it to see for bright?
complain about it Or love the wers though wrecches on it crien?
happiness is worthwhile, endure No wel is worth that may no sorwe dryen.
glass And forthi who that hath an hed of verre,
war Fro caste of stones war hym in the werre!

'But I with al myn herte and al my myghte,
As I have seyd, wol love unto my laste
My deere herte and al myn owen knyghte,
In which myn herte growen is so faste,
And his in me, that it shal evere laste.
Al dredde I first to love hym to bigynne,
Now woot I wel ther is no peril inne.'

ceased And of hir song right with that word she stente,
And therwithal, 'Now nece,' quod Cryseyde,
expressing such admirable sentiments 'Who made this song now with so good entente?'
Antygone answerde anoon and seyde,
'Madame, ywys, the goodlieste mayde
Of gret estat in al the town of Troye,
And that leads And let hire lif in moste honour and joye.'

'Forsothe, so it semeth by hire songe,'
Quod tho Criseyde and gan therwith to sike,

851–4 The idea that love promoted the growth of virtue in the lover is perhaps the fundamental identifying characteristic, if there is one, of the medieval cult of idealized sexual love ('courtly love').

867–8 An earlier version of 'People in glass houses…'

And seyde, 'Lord, is ther swych blisse amonge
(see n.) Thise loveres as they kan faire endite?'
Yes, indeed, fair(-haired) 'Ye, wis,' quod fresshe Antigone the white,
have (been) or are (now) alive 'For alle the folk that han or ben on lyve
Ne konne wel the blisse of love discryve.

'But wene ye that every wrecche woot
The parfit blisse of love? Why, nay, iwys!
(see n.) They wenen all be love if oon be hoot.
Get away (forget it!) Do wey, do wey, they woot nothyng of this!
ask of Men moste axe at seyntes if it is
At all Aught faire in hevene – why? for they kan telle –
And axen fendes is it foule in helle.'

Criseyde unto that purpos naught answerde,
But seyde, 'Ywys, it wol be nyght as faste.'
But every word which that she of hire herde
imprint She gan to prenten in hire herte faste
to frighten And ay gan love lasse hire for t'agaste
Than it dide erst, and synken in hire herte,
That she wex somwhat able to converte.

The dayes honour and the hevenes eye,
The nyghtes foo – al this clepe I the sonne –
turn Gan westren faste and downward for to wrye,
As he that hadde his dayes cours yronne,
dun-coloured And white thynges wexen dymme and donne
For lakke of lyght, and sterres for t'apere,
together That she and alle hire folk in went yfeere.

So whan it liked hire to go to reste
withdrawn And voided weren thei that voiden oughte,
She seyde that to slepen wel hire leste:
Hire wommen soon unto hire bed hire broughte.
hushed Whan al was hust than lay she stille and thoughte
Of al this thing – the manere and the wise
you know already Reherce it nedeth nought, for ye ben wise.

A nyghtyngale upon a cedre grene
Under the chambre wal ther-as she ley
in the face of, bright Ful loude song ayein the moone shene,
Perhaps in its bird's fashion Peraunter in his briddes wise a lay
Of love, that made hire herte fressh and gay.
That herkned she so longe in good entente
deep, overcame Til at the laste the dede slepe hire hente.

slept, she dreamed And as she slep, anon-right tho hire mette
How that an egle, fethered whit as bone,

886 'As these lovers can describe so beautifully in their writing?'
892 'They think it's all love, even if someone is just aflame with passion'.
904–5 For the self-conscious signalling of the figure of *circumlocutio*, cf. FrankT V.1017–18.
925–31 The dream beautifully embodies both Criseyde's fear that love is a certain source of pain (see 771–805 above) and her readiness, encouraged by Antigone, to believe that it will not be so.

Under hire brest his longe clawes sette
And out hire herte he rente, and that anone,
caused And dide his herte into hire brest to gone –
felt frightened, felt pain Of which she nought agroos ne nothyng smerte –
flew And forth he fleigh, with herte left for herte.

{Exchanges of letters follow, but Criseyde, despite Pandarus's urging, is unwilling to allow matters to proceed further. In order for Troilus to present his suit in person, Pandarus organizes a dinner-party at the house of Deiphebus, Troilus's brother, at which Helen will also be present, the pretext being that Criseyde is under attack from people in Troy and needs confirmation of the support of the Trojan nobility, including Troilus. Troilus will be at Deiphebus's house, but ostensibly sick in bed ('sik in ernest', says Troilus, II.1529) in a separate room, so that Pandarus will be able to arrange a private meeting. This first meeting goes well: Criseyde kisses Troilus and grants that he may be her servant in love. This involves constant thought and devotion on his part but only occasional brief meetings, because of the need (enjoined by the code of love and to some extent by their particular circumstances) for secrecy. Criseyde is happy (Troilus is to her 'a wal / Of stiel, and sheld from every displesaunce', III.479–80), Troilus somewhat less so, Chaucer apologetic for not describing every word and look that passed between them, Pandarus determined as always to push the business on.}

Book III

But now to the main point But to the grete effect: than sey I thus,
That stondyng in concord and in quiete,
Thise ilke two, Criseyde and Troilus,
As I have told, and in this tyme swete –
Save only often myghte they nought mete
leisure, speak fully Ne leiser have hire speches to fulfelle –
That it bifel right as I shal yow telle

That Pandarus, that evere dide his myght
purpose Right for the fyn that I shal speke of here,
As for to bryngen to his hows som nyght
His faire nece and Troilus yfere,
Where Wher as at leiser al this heighe matere
might be fully concluded Touchyng here love were at the fulle up-bounde,
Hadde out of doute a tyme to it founde.

For he with gret deliberacioun
Hadde every thyng that her-to myght availle
Planned Forncast and put in execucioun,
left nothing undone, hard work And neither left for cost ne for travaille.
If it pleased them to come, lack Come if hem list, hem sholde nothyng faille;
And for to ben in ought aspied there,
That wiste he wel an impossible were.

(see n.) Dredeles, it clere was in the wynde
chattery magpie and spoil-sport Of every pie and every lette-game;
Now al is wel, for al the world is blynde
wild and tame (i.e. everyone) In this matere, bothe fremed and tame.
This tymbur is al redy up to frame;

526 'Without doubt, it was downwind and safe from discovery'.
528–32 These lines could be given to Pandarus or they could be regarded as the narrator's enthusiastic participation in Pandarus's plans.

Us lakketh nought but that we witen wolde
A certeyn houre in which she comen sholde.

preparation
And Troilus, that al this purveiaunce,
Knew at the fulle and waited on it ay,
elaborate arrangements
Hadde hereupon eke made gret ordinance,
worked out his excuse, preparations
And found his cause and therto his aray,
If that he were missed nyght or day
During the time that, business
Ther-while he was aboute this servyse,
That he was gon to don his sacrifise,

must, keep vigil
And moste at swich a temple allone wake,
Answered of Apollo for to be,
laurel (sacred to Apollo)
And first to sen the holy laurer quake
Er that Apollo spak out of the tree
To telle hym next whan Grekes sholde flee –
let no one interfere with his plans
And forthy lette hym no man, God forbede,
But prey Apollo helpen in this nede.

Now is ther litel more for to doone,
But Pandare up and, shortly for to seyne,
Right sone upon the chaungynge of the moone,
Whan lightles is the world a nyght or tweyne
the sky seemed to prepare itself
And that the wolken shop hym for to reyne,
in the morning
He streght o morwe unto his nece wente –
final goal of his intended action
Ye han wel herd the fyn of his entente.

Whan he was come, he gan anon to pleye
make fun of himself
As he was wont, and of hymself to jape,
And finaly he swor and gan hire seye
By this and that she sholde hym nought escape,
to keep chasing
Ne lenger don hym after hire to cape;
But certeynly she moste, by hire leve,
Come soupen in his hous with hym at eve.

At which she lough and gan hire faste excuse,
And seyde, 'It reyneth, lo, how sholde I gon?'
don't stand debating the matter
'Lat be,' quod he, 'ne stant nought thus to muse.
This moot be don! Ye shal be ther anon.'
fell into agreement
So at the laste her-of they fille aton,
Or elles, softe he swor hire in hire ere,
He nolde nevere comen ther she were.

whisper
Soone after this she to hym gan to rowne
And axed hym if Troilus were there.
He swor hire nay, for he was out of towne,
I put to you the supposition
And seyde, 'Nece, I pose that he were –
need
Yow thurste nevere han the more fere,
For rather than men myghte hym ther aspie
Me were levere a thousand-fold to dye.'

Nought list myn auctour fully to declare
What that she thoughte whan that he seyde so,
gone That Troilus was out of towne yfare,
As if he seyde therof soth or no;
without further ado But that withowten await with hym to go
She graunted hym, sith he hire that bisoughte,
And as his nece obeyed as hire oughte.

But natheles yet gan she hym biseche,
was not a cause of apprehension Although with hym to gon it was no fere,
goose-like (silly) For to ben war of goosissh poeples speche,
That dremen thynges whiche as nevere were,
And wel avyse hym whom he broughte there;
most (must?) trust in you And seyde hym, 'Em, syn I moste on yow triste,
Loke al be wel and do now as yow liste.'

(see n.) He swor hire 'yes', by stokkes and by stones
And by the goddes that in hevene dwelle,
Or elles were hym levere, soule and bones,
(god of the underworld) With Pluto kyng as depe ben in helle
(see n.) As Tantalus – what sholde I more telle?
Whan al was wel he roos and took his leve
And she to soper com whan it was eve

a certain number With a certein of hire owen men
And with hire faire nece Antigone
And other of hire wommen nyne or ten.
But who was glad now, who, as trowe ye,
But Troilus, that stood and myght it se
tiny room or closet Thorughout a litel wyndow in a stewe,
shut up, in hiding Ther he bishet syn mydnyght was in mewe,

Unknown to Unwist of every wight but of Pandare?
But to the point: now whan that she was come,
friendly behaviour With alle joie and alle frendes fare
taken Hire em anon in armes hath hire nome,
And after to the soper, alle and some,
Whan tyme was ful softe they hem sette.
(see n.) God woot ther was no deynte for to fette!

And after soper gonnen they to rise,
At ese wel with herte fresshe and glade,
And wel was hym that koude best devyse
To please her To liken hire or that hire laughen made:
(see n.) He song, she pleyde, he tolde tale of Wade,
But at the laste, as every thyng hath ende,
She took hire leve and nedes wolde wende.

575–81 Criseyde's motives are inaccessible to Chaucer – but she also makes them inaccessible to herself, so that she does not have to acknowledge to herself what she is deciding to do. Her duty as a niece (581) comes in very conveniently.

589 i.e. by pagan idols made of wood (tree-stumps) and stone.

593 Tantalus is parched with thirst and tormented for ever in hell with the sight of water he cannot reach.

609 'there was no delicacy that had to be looked for (i.e. was lacking)'.

614 **Wade** is an otherwise virtually unknown hero of Germanic legend: the reference here is famously tantalizing. **He … she … he** are impersonal ('one sang, one played…') and do not necessarily refer to Pandarus and Criseyde.

of the decrees of destiny But O Fortune, executrice of wyerdes,
O influences of thise hevenes hye!
shepherds Soth is that under God ye ben oure hierdes,
hidden Though to us bestes ben the causez wrie.
hasten This mene I now, for she gan homward hye,
entirely without her permission But execut was al bisyde hire leve
remain The goddes wil, for which she moste bleve.

The bente moone with hire hornes pale,
Saturne, and Jove, in Cancro joyned were,
come down That swych a reyn from heven gan avale
That every maner womman that was there
Hadde of that smoky reyn a verray feere;
then laughed At which Pandare tho lough and seyde thenne,
'Now were it tyme a lady to gon henne!

'But, goode nece, if I myghte evere plese
Yow any thyng, than prey ich yow,' quod he,
'To don myn herte as now so gret an ese
As for to dwelle here al this nyght with me,
Because For-whi this is youre owen hous, parde.
as a joke For by my trouthe – I sey it nought a-game –
leave To wende as now it were to me a shame.'

knew the best thing to do Criseyde, which that koude as muche good
As half a world, took hede of his preiere,
rained And syn it ron and al was on a flod,
(see n.) She thoughte, 'As good chep may I dwellen here
And graunte it gladly with a frendes chere,
complain And have a thonk, as grucche and thanne abide;
cannot easily happen For hom to gon it may nought wel bitide.'

dear 'I wol,' quod she, 'myn uncle lief and deere,
is reasonable Syn that yow list it skile is to be so:
I am right glad with yow to dwellen here;
I seyde but a-game I wolde go.'
many thanks 'Iwys, graunt mercy, nece,' quod he tho,
'Were it a game or no, soth for to telle,
Now am I glad, syn that yow list to dwelle.'

Thus al is wel; but tho bigan aright
The newe joie and al the feste agayn.
if he could decently have done so But Pandarus, if goodly hadde he myght,
hurried her off gladly He wolde han hyed hire to bedde fayn,
And seyde, 'Lord, this is an huge rayn!

617–20 In the Boethian hierarchy of causes (see *Consolation* IV, prose 6, 42–196; V, metre 1, 18–23), human beings perceive their lives as governed by planetary influence and Fortune; these, though, are only the instrumentation of the power of fate or destiny, which in turn is the enactment of divine providence (you hope).

624–5 The conjunction of Saturn and Jupiter with the moon in the zodiacal sign of Cancer was extremely rare: it occurred in May 1385 for the first time in 600 years, while Chaucer was in the midst of his poem, and was an event to which Chaucer and his knowledgeable astrological circle would look forward with keen interest. As one of the **influences** mentioned above, it was assigned a historical role in relation both to the Flood and to the Crucifixion. The invoking of such a majestic wheeling of the heavens as the cause of a rainstorm that obliges a lady to spend the night at her uncle's house (did they predict it? see 551, 562) seems comically overdone.

641 **As good chep**: 'as good a bargain' (i.e. I might as well).

This were a weder for to slepen inne –
And that I rede us soone to bygynne.

have you sleep ‘And nece, woot ye wher I wol yow leye,
lie far apart For that we shul nat liggen far asonder,
And for ye neither shullen, dar I seye,
Heren noyse of reyne nor of thonder?
By God, right in my litel closet yonder.
And I wol in that outer hous allone
Be wardein of youre wommen everichone.

‘And in this myddel chambre that ye se
Shal youre wommen slepen wel and softe,
And there I seyde shal youreselven be,
And if ye liggen wel to-nyght, com ofte,
And careth nought what weder is alofte.
(He calls for wine) The wyn anon, and whan so that yow leste,
So go we slepe: I trowe it be the beste.’

Ther nys no more, but hereafter soone,
wine taken before retiring, screen The voide dronke and travers drawe anon,
Gan every wight that hadde nought to done
More in the place out of the chaumbre gon.
violently, rained And evere-mo so sterneliche it ron
And blew therwith so wondirliche loude
That wel-neigh no man heren other koude.

Tho Pandarus, hire em, right as hym oughte,
With wommen swiche as were hire most aboute,
Ful glad unto hire beddes syde hire broughte
bow down And took his leve and gan ful lowe loute,
And seyde, ‘Here at this closet dore withoute,
Directly opposite (the door) Right overe-thwart, youre wommen liggen alle,
That whom yow list of hem ye may here calle.’

So whan that she was in the closet leyde
as arranged And alle hire wommen forth by ordinaunce
Abedde weren, ther as I have seyde,
no further occasion, traipse about There was no more to skippen nor to traunce,
bidden, with trouble to follow But boden go to bedde with meschaunce
stirring If any wight was steryng anywhere
prevented And lat hem slepen that abedde were.

every bit But Pandarus, that wel koude ech a deel
The old game of love Th’olde daunce and every point therinne,
Whan that he sey that alle thyng was wel,
He thought he wolde upon his werk bigynne,
And gan the stuwe doore al softe unpynne,

663–8 The geography of the sleeping-quarters seems to be as follows: the main hall is divided by a **travers** or screen (674) into an **outer hous** (where Pandarus claims he will sleep, but doesn’t) and a **myddel chambre** (where Criseyde’s women will sleep), off which opens a **litel closet** where Criseyde will be, presumably in a bed concealed by hangings. The **stewe** where Troilus has been hiding has access to the **closet** by a **trappe** (741).

delay
And stille as stoon withouten lenger lette
By Troilus adown right he hym sette.

And shortly to the point right for to gon,
from beginning to end
Of al this werk he tolde hym word and ende,
And seyde, 'Make the redy right anon
For thow shalt into hevene blisse wende.'
'Now, blisful Venus, thow me grace sende!'
Quod Troilus, 'for nevere yet no nede
a half-part
Hadde ich er now, ne halvendel the drede.'

Quod Pandarus, 'Ne drede the nevere a deel,
For it shal be right as thow wolt desire;
So thryve I, this nyght shal I make it weel
(see n.)
Or casten al the gruwel in the fire.'
'Yet, blisful Venus, this nyght thow me enspire,'
as surely as
Quod Troilus, 'as wys as I the serve,
And evere bet and bet shal til I sterve.

'And if ich hadde, O Venus ful of myrthe,
(see n.)
Aspectes badde of Mars or of Saturne,
Or thow combust or let were in my birthe,
Jupiter, turn aside
Thy fader prey al thilke harm disturne
may become happy again
Of grace, and that I glad ayein may turne,
woodlands
For love of hym thow lovedest in the shawe –
Adonis, boar, slain
I meene Adoun, that with the boor was slawe.

Europa
'O Jove ek, for the love of faire Europe,
bull, abducted
The which in forme of bole awey thow fette,
cloak
Now help! O Mars, thow with thi blody cope,
Venus, don't hinder me
For love of Cipris, thow me nought ne lette!
Daphne, enclosed
O Phebus, thynk whan Dane hireselven shette
became a laurel-tree
Under the bark, and laurer wax for drede –
Yet for hire love, O help now at this nede!

Herse
'Mercurie, for the love of Hierse eke,
Aglauros
For which Pallas was with Aglawros wroth,
Now helpe! And ek Diane, I the biseke
undertaking, displeasing
That this viage be nought to the looth!
before any clothes
O fatal sustren which, er any cloth
Were made for me, spun
Me shapen was, my destine me sponne,
So helpeth to this werk that is bygonne!'

Quod Pandarus, 'Thow wrecched mouses herte,
Artow agast so that she wol the bite?
Why, don this furred cloke upon thy sherte
take the blame
And folwe me, for I wol have the wite.

711 **gruwel**: gruel (everything we've been cooking up).
715–35 Troilus displays a considerable knowledge of classical lore in his invocations, which Pandarus thinks quite inappropriate to the occasion.
716–17 'Bad influences of Mars or Saturn' (planets of notoriously bad influence).
717 **combust**: 'rendered powerless by the sun'. **let**: 'prevented from exerting good influence'.
733 **fatal sustren**: the Fates, or Parcae.

wait But bide, and lat me gon biforn a lite.'
trap-door (in the wall) And with that word he gan undon a trappe,
holding the fold of his garment And Troilus he brought in by the lappe.

roar The sterne wynd so loude gan to route
That no wight oother noise myghte heere,
And they that layen at the dore withoute
Ful sikerly they slepten alle yfere;
And Pandarus with a ful sobre cheere
without anyone stopping him Goth to the dore anon, withouten lette,
Ther as they laye, and softely it shette.

back (across the room) And as he com ayeynward pryvely,
His nece awook and axed, 'Who goth there?'
'My dere nece,' quod he, 'it am I.
Ne wondreth nought, ne have of it no fere.'
And ner he com and seyde hire in hire ere,
'No word, for love of God, I yow biseche!
Lat no wight risen and heren of oure speche.'

'What, which wey be ye comen, benedicite?'
Quod she, 'and how thus unwist of hem alle?'
'Here at this secre trappe-dore,' quod he.
Quod tho Criseyde, 'Lat me som wight calle!'
Oh! (= ey), happen 'I! God forbede that it sholde falle,'
Quod Pandarus, 'that ye swich folye wrought!
They myghte demen thyng they nevere er thought.

'It is nought good a slepyng hound to wake
make conjectures Ne yeve a wight a cause for to devyne:
Youre wommen slepen alle, I undertake,
(see n.) So that for hem the hous men myghte myne,
they will And slepen wollen til the sonne shyne.
And whan my tale brought is to an ende,
Unnoticed Unwist right as I com so wol I wende.

'Now, nece myn, ye shul wel understonde,'
Quod he, 'so as ye wommen demen alle,
(see n.) That for to holde in love a man in honde
beloved And hym hire lief and deere herte calle
hood over his cap (i.e. deceive him) And maken hym an howve above a calle –
I meene, as love another in this meene while –
deception She doth hireself a shame and hym a gyle.

'Now, wherby that I telle yow al this:
Ye woot youreself as wel as any wight
How that youre love al fully graunted is
To Troilus, the worthieste knyght,
(And the worthiest) one Oon of this world, and therto trouthe yplight
due to him (his fault) That, but it were on hym alonge, ye nolde
Hym nevere falsen while ye lyven sholde.

767 'As far as they are concerned, the house might be undermined (as in a siege)'.

773 'to hold off a man, in matters of love, with fair promises'.

stands ‘Now stant it thus, that sith I fro yow wente
plainly This Troilus, right platly for to seyn,
Is thorugh a goter, by a pryve wente,
Into my chaumbre come in al this reyn,
Unwist of every manere wight, certeyn,
as surely as Save of myself, as wisly have I joye,
owe to And by the feith I shal Priam of Troie.

‘And he is come in swich peyne and distresse
That but he be al fully wood by this
He sodeynly mot falle into wodenesse,
But if God helpe, and cause whi this is:
He seith hym told is of a frend of his
(see n.) How that ye sholden loven oon that hatte Horaste;
For sorwe of which this nyght shal ben his laste.’

Criseyde, which that al this wonder herde,
grow cold Gan sodeynly aboute hire herte colde
And with a sik she sorwfully answerde,
believed ‘Allas! I wende, who-so tales tolde,
My deere herte wolde me nought holde
So lightly fals! Allas, conceytes wronge,
What harm they don! for now lyve I to longe.

‘Horaste! Allas, and falsen Troilus?
I knowe hym nowt, God helpe me so!’ quod she.
‘Allas, what wikked spirit tolde hym thus?
if Now certes, em, tomorwe and I hym se,
I shal therof as ful excusen me
As evere dide womman, if hym like.’
And with that word she gan ful soore sike.

happiness ‘O God,’ quod she, ‘so worldly selynesse,
Which clerkes callen fals felicitee,
mixed together I-medled is with many a bitternesse!
Full of anxiety Ful angwissous than is, God woot,’ quod she,
‘Condicioun of veyn prosperitee,
not unmixed For either joies comen nought yfeere,
Or elles no wight hath hem alwey here.

brittle ‘O brotel wele of mannes joie unstable!
With what wight so thow be, or how thow pleye,
mutable Either he woot that thow, joie, art muable,
Or woot it nought – it mot ben oon of tweye.
Now if he woot it nought, how may he seye
That he hath verray joie and selynesse
That is of ignoraunce ay in derknesse?

787 Troilus is said, it seems, to have climbed over the roof along the eaves-trough (**goter**) and made his way into Pandarus's bedroom (where Criseyde is, but cannot see Troilus because of the bed-hangings) by a secret passage (**wente**). This is not true, of course.
797 ‘you are said to love someone called Orestes’.
813–36 Criseyde is so shocked by the story of Troilus's jealousy (which is of course again quite untrue) that she becomes for a while a Boethian philosopher, meditating and concluding, in the appropriate philosophical language, on the mutability of worldly happiness (*Consolation* II, prose 4).

'Now if he woot that joie is transitorie,
Seeing that As every joye of worldly thyng mot flee,
Than every tyme he that hath in memorie,
losing The drede of lesyng maketh hym that he
May in no perfit selynesse be,
sets only a small value And if to lese his joie he sette a myte
Than semeth it that joie is worth ful lite.

conclude 'Wherfore I wol diffyne in this matere
That trewely, for aught I kan espie,
true happiness Ther is no verray weele in this world heere.
But O thow wikked serpent, jalousie,
misbelieving Thow mysbyleved and envyous folie
distrustful Why hastow Troilus made to me untriste
did him wrong That nevere yet agylt hym that I wiste?'

Quod Pandarus, 'Thus fallen is this cas –'
'Why! Uncle myn,' quod she, 'who tolde hym this?
Why doth my deere herte thus, allas?'
'Ye woot, ye, nece myn,' quod he, 'what is.
I hope al shal be wel that is amys,
put an end to For ye may quenche al this if that yow leste –
And doth right so, for I holde it the beste.'

'So shal I do to-morwe, ywys,' quod she,
(so I swear) before God 'And God toforn, so that it shal suffise.'
would be a fine thing 'To-morwe? Allas, that were a faire!' quod he;
'Nay, nay, it may nat stonden in this wise,
For, nece myn, thus writen clerkes wise
brought in by delaying That peril is with drecchyng in ydrawe;
delays, hawthorn-berry Nay, swiche abodes ben nought worth an hawe.

'Nece, al thyng hath tyme, I dar avowe;
For whan a chaumbre afire is or an halle
rescue Wel more nede is it sodeynly rescowe
Than to disputen and axe amonges alle
How the candele in the strawe is falle.
while all that is going on A, benedicite! For al among that fare
(see n.) The harm is don, and fare-wel feldefare!

don't take offence at this 'And nece myn – ne take it naught a-grief –
allow him to remain If that ye suffre hym al nyght in this wo,
never really loved him God help me so, ye hadde hym nevere lief!
That dar I seyn, now ther is but we two.
But wel I woot that ye wol nat do so;
Ye ben to wys to doon so gret folie
To putte his lif al nyght in jupertie.'

'Hadde I hym nevere lief? by God, I weene
Ye hadde nevere thyng so lief!' quod she.

861 fare-wel feldefare: 'good-bye, thrush' (the bird has flown, it's too late).

upon my word 'Now by my thrift,' quod he, 'that shal be seene!
(see n.) For syn ye make this ensaumple of me,
If ich al nyght wolde hym in sorwe se,
For al the tresour in the town of Troie,
pray to I bidde God I nevere mote have joie.

'Now loke thanne, if ye that ben his love
Shul putte his lif al night in jupertie
For thyng of nought, now by that God above
Naught oonly this delay comth of folie
But of malice, if that I shal naught lie.
plainly if What! platly and ye suffre hym in destresse,
Ye neyther bounte don ne gentilesse.'

one thing Quod tho Criseyde, 'Wol ye don o thyng
stop, distress And ye therwith shal stynte al his disese?
blue Have heere and bereth hym this blewe ryng
For ther is nothyng myghte hym bettre plese,
Save I myself, ne more his herte apese,
And sey my deere herte that his sorwe
Is causeles; that shal be sene to-morwe.'

(see n.) 'A ryng?' quod he, 'Ye haselwodes shaken!
gem of magical power Ye, nece myn, that ryng moste han a stoon
That myghte dede men alyve maken,
And swich a ryng trowe I that ye have non.
Discrecioun out of youre hed is gon:
That fele I now,' quod he, 'and that is routhe.
curse O tyme ilost, wel maistow corsen slouthe!

'Woot ye not wel that noble and heigh corage
nor stops grieving Ne sorweth nought, ne stynteth ek, for lite?
But if a fool were in a jalous rage,
a farthing-coin I nolde setten at his sorwe a myte
bestow, specious and pleasing But feffe hym with a fewe wordes white
Anothir day whan that I myghte hym fynde;
But this thyng stant al in another kynde.

This man 'This is so gentil and so tendre of herte
avenge That with his deth he wol his sorwes wreke;
however badly he is hurt For trusteth wel, how sore that hym smerte,
He wol to yow no jalous wordes speke.
And forthi, nece, er that his herte breke,
So speke youreself to hym of this matere,
steer (back to its normal course) For with a word ye may his herte stere.

'Now have I told what peril he is inne,
And his comynge unwist is to every wight,
Ne, parde, harm may ther be non, ne synne:
I wol myself be with yow al this nyght.

872 ensaumple of me: 'comparison with me' (as to how much I love him).

890 'My! You hazel-bushes shake!' (what an earth-shattering suggestion!).

Ye knowe ek how it is youre owen knyght
And that bi right ye moste upon hym triste,
ready And I al prest to fecche hym whan yow liste.'

happening This accident so pitous was to here
at first sight And ek so like a sooth at prime face,
And Troilus hire knyght to hir so deere,
His prive comyng, and the siker place,
That though that she did hym as thanne a grace,
Considered alle thynges as they stoode,
No wonder is, syn she did al for goode.

As surely as Criseyde answerde, 'As wisly God at reste
My soule brynge as me is for hym wo!
And em, iwis, fayn wolde I don the beste
If that ich hadde grace for to do so;
But whether that ye dwelle or for hym go,
a more composed mental state I am, til God me bettre mynde sende,
At dulcarnoun, right at my wittes ende.'

Quod Pandarus, 'Yee, nece, wol ye here?
Dulcarnoun called is "flemyng of wrecches":
learn It semeth hard for wrecches wol nought lere,
faults of will For verray slouthe or other wilfull tecches –
vetches (beans) This is seyd by hem that beth nought worth two fecches;
But ye ben wis, and that we han on honde
nor reasonable to oppose Nis neither hard, ne skilful to withstonde.'

Then 'Than, em,' quod she, 'doth her-of as yow liste.
But er he come I wil first up arise,
And, for love of God, syn al my triste
Is on yow two, and ye ben bothe wise,
So werketh now in so discret a wise
That I may have honour and he plesaunce:
For I am here al in youre governaunce.'

'That is wel seyd,' quod he, 'my nece deere,
And may good prosperity attend Ther good thrift on that wise gentil herte!
stay in bed, receive But liggeth stille and taketh hym right here –
move It nedeth nought no ferther for hym sterte –
And ech of yow ese otheres sorwes smerte,
give thee praise For love of God! And Venus, I the herye;
For soone hope I we shul ben alle merye.'

knees This Troilus ful soone on knees hym sette
Ful sobrely right be hyre beddes hede
And in his beste wyse his lady grette.
But Lord, so she wex sodeynliche rede!

918–24 A glimpse of the working of Criseyde's inner consciousness, with the tumble of *and*-phrases conveying the turmoil of her will; cf. II.451n.

931–3 **At dulcarnoun**: completely perplexed, as if faced with the most difficult proposition in Euclid (the 47th, called 'dulcarnon' in Arabic). Pandarus picks up the nickname of another brain-splitting theorem, the 4th, called **flemyng of wrecches** ('banishment of wretches', i.e. it drives away the miserable wretches who cannot demonstrate the proof) and applies it skilfully to refer to Criseyde's superior understanding.

strike off
Ne though men sholde smyten of hire hede
She koude nought a word aright out brynge
So sodeynly for his sodeyn comynge.

was so sensitive
But Pandarus, that so wel koude feele
In everythyng, to pleye anon bigan,
And seyde, 'Nece, se how this lord kan knele!
Now, for youre trouthe, se this gentil man!'
cushion
And with that word he for a quysshen ran,
And seyde, 'Kneleth now while that yow leste,
And may God
There God youre hertes brynge soone at reste!'

since she
Kan I naught seyn, for she bad hym nought rise,
If sorwe it putte out of hire remembraunce
in the manner
Or elles that she took it in the wise
as part of the honour he owed to her
Of dewete as for his observaunce,
But wel fynde I she dede hym this plesaunce,
That she hym kiste, although she siked sore,
And bad hym sitte adown withouten more.

(see n.)
Quod Pandarus, 'Now wol ye wel bigynne,
Now doth hym sitte, goode nece deere,
within the bed-curtains
Upon youre beddes syde al ther withinne,
That eche of yow the bet may oother heere.'
withdrew, fire
And with that word he drow hym to the feere,
composed
And took a light and fond his contenaunce
As for to looke upon an old romaunce.

truly
Criseyde, that was Troilus lady right,
clear of blame
And clere stood on a grounde of sikernesse,
Al thoughte she hire servant and hire knyght
suspect
Ne sholde of right non untrouthe in hire gesse,
Yet natheles, considered his distresse
the cause of
And that love is in cause of swich folie,
Thus to hym spak she of his jalousie:

it was because of
'Lo, herte myn, as wolde the excellence
against
Of love, ayeins the which that no man may
properly
Ne oughte ek goodly make resistence,
perceived and saw
And ek bycause I felte wel and say
Youre grete trouthe and servise every day,
And that youre herte al myn was, soth to seyne –
This drof me for to rewe upon youre peyne.

'And youre goodnesse have I founden alwey yit,
Of which, my deere herte and al my knyght,
understanding to do so
I thonke it yow, as fer as I have wit,
Al kan I nought as muche as it were right;

964 **quysshen**. The fetching of the cushion is comical, and is often thought to be comically reductive, but Pandarus's intention is to remind Criseyde of the inappropriate posture in which she allows **this lord** to remain.

974 'Now if you want to get off to a good start'.

979 Pandarus puts on an appropriately absorbed and pensive look, but it is not clear that he actually picks up a book.

to the extent of my knowledge And I, emforth my connyng and my might,
however much pain it causes me Have and ay shal, how sore that me smerte,
Ben to yow trewe and hool with al myn herte,

doubtless, when put to the test 'And dredeles that shal be founde at preve.
But, herte myn, what al this is to seyne
provided that you don't get upset Shal wel be told, so that ye nought yow greve
Though I to yow right on youreself compleyne,
For therwith mene I fynaly the peyne
holds That halt youre herte and myn in hevynesse
put an end to Fully to slen and every wrong redresse.

my own 'My goode myn, noot I for-why ne how
wyvern (snake) That jalousie, allas, that wikked wyvere,
crept Thus causeles is cropen into yow,
deliver you from The harm of which I wolde fayn delyvere.
all of him (jealousy), a sliver Allas, that he, al hool or of hym slyvere,
refuge, worthy Shuld han his refut in so digne a place –
May Jove, root out Ther Jove hym sone out of youre herte arace!

originator 'But O, thow Jove, O auctour of nature,
godhead Is this an honour to thi deyte
That folk ungiltif suffren hire injure
quite free And who that giltif is al quyt goth he?
permissible O were it lefull for to pleyn on the,
allows to exist That undeserved suffrest jalousie,
Of that I wolde upon the pleyne and crie!

are now accustomed 'Ek al my wo is this, that folk now usen
To seyn right thus, "Ye, jalousie is love!"
And wolde a busshel venym al excusen
a single, shoved into it For that o greyn of love is on it shove.
But that woot heighe God that sit above,
more like, anger If it be likere love, or hate, or grame,
according to, its (proper) name And after that it oughte bere his name.

'But certeyn is, som manere jalousie
Is excusable more than som, iwys;
some inkling (of this cause) As whan cause is and som swich fantasie
regard for duty With piete so wel repressed is
That it unnethe doth or seyth amys
in a well-behaved way endures But goodly drynketh up al his distresse –
And that excuse I, for the gentilesse;

'And som so ful of furie is and despit
That it sourmounteth his repressioun.
plight But herte myn, ye be nat in that plit,
That thonke I God; for which youre passioun
I wol nought calle it but illusioun
anxious care Of habundaunce of love and besy cure,
That doth youre herte this disese endure.

'Of which I am right sory but nought wrothe;
for the sake of my duty But for my devoir and youre hertes reste,
trial by ordeal or oath Wher-so yow list, by ordal or by othe,
sortilege (magical divination) By sort or in what wise so yow leste,
have it brought to the proof For love of God, lat preve it for the beste,
And if that I be giltif do me deye!
Allas, what myght I more don or seye?'

With that a fewe brighte teris newe
Owt of hire eighen fille, and thus she seyde,
'Now God, thow woost, in thought ne dede untrewe
To Troilus was nevere yet Criseyde.'
With that here heed down in the bed she leyde,
covered, sighed And with the sheete it wreigh and sighte soore
And held hire pees: nought o word spak she more.

But now help God to quenchen al this sorwe!
So hope I that he shal, for he best may.
seen For I have seyn of a ful misty morwe
Folowen ful ofte a myrie someris day,
And after wynter foloweth grene May;
Men sen alday and reden ek in stories
fierce conflicts That after sharpe shoures ben victories.

This Troilus, whan he hire wordes herde,
Don't spend time thinking about it (see n.) Have ye no care, hym liste nought to slepe,
For it thought hym no strokes of a yerde
To heere or seen Criseyde, his lady, wepe;
But wel he felt aboute his herte crepe,
escaped from For everi tere which that Criseyde asterte,
The crampe of deth to streyne hym by the herte.

And in his mynde he gan the tyme acorse
and the time too that bad That he com there and that that he was born;
For now is wikke torned into worse
And al that labour he hath don byforn
was as good as lost He wende it lost, he thought he nas but lorn.
guile 'O Pandarus,' thoughte he, 'allas, thi wile
alas the day! Serveth of nought, so weylaway the while!'

And therwithal he heng adown the hede
And fil on knees and sorwfully he sighte.
What myghte he seyn? He felte he nas but dede,
lighten For wroth was she that sholde his sorwes lighte.
But natheles, whan that he speken myghte,
business Than seyde he thus, 'God woot that of this game,
Whan al is wist, than am I nought to blame.'

1058–9 As throughout the following scene of love's fulfilment, the narrator takes an unexpected role as an enthusiastic participant in the promotion of the happy event; his zeal is bound to make us feel a little uneasy.

1067 'Being beaten with a stick was nothing compared with it'.

constricted Therwith the sorwe so his herte shette
That from his eyen fil ther nought a tere,
withdrew into itself And every spirit his vigour in knette,
So they astoned or oppressed were.
The felyng of his sorwe or of his fere,
Or of aught elles, fled were out of towne,
in a swoon And down he fel al sodeynly a-swowne.

This was no litel sorwe for to se;
hushed But al was hust and Pandare up as faste:
'O nece, pes, or we be lost!' quod he,
'Beth naught agast!' But certeyn, at the laste,
For this or that, he into bed hym caste,
And seyde, 'O thef, is this a mannes herte?'
tore off his clothes And of he rente al to his bare sherte,

And seyde, 'Nece, but ye helpe us now,
Allas, youre owen Troilus is lorn!'
'Iwis, so wolde I, and I wiste how,
Ful fayn,' quod she. 'Allas, that I was born!'
'Yee, nece, wol ye pullen out the thorn
That stiketh in his herte?' quod Pandare.
(see n.) 'Sey "Al foryeve," and stynte is al this fare!'

'Ye, that to me,' quod she, 'ful levere were
Than al the good the sonne aboute gooth.'
And therwithal she swor hym in his ere,
'Iwys, my dere herte, I am nought wroth,
Have here my trouthe!' – and many another othe.
'Now speke to me, for it am I, Criseyde!'
come out of his swoon But al for nought: yit myght he nought abreyde.

pulse (wrists), palms Therwith his pous and paumes of his hondes
rub They gan to frote, and wete his temples tweyne;
And to deliveren hym fro bittre bondes
She ofte hym kiste; and shortly for to seyne,
call back to life Hym to revoken she did al hire peyne;
And at the laste he gan his breth to drawe
swoon, awaken And of his swough sone after that adawe,

And gan bet mynde and reson to hym take;
abashed But wonder soore he was abayst, iwis,
And with a sike, whan he gan bet awake,
He seyde, 'O mercy, God, what thyng is this?
Why do ye with youreselven thus amys?'
Quod tho Criseyde, 'Is this a mannes game?
What, Troilus, wol ye do thus for shame?'

1088–92 The 'spirits' are those that operate most of the body's vital processes; their power withdrawn, the body goes into a coma. Troilus's swoon (see Mann, 'Troilus's Swoon') is not an indication of his feebleness as a lover but of the deep growth within him of those impulses of loving respect and trust which Criseyde has berated him for apparently lacking. Having fallen in with Pandarus's doubtful strategies, he now finds himself in an impossibly difficult position; so he faints.

1106 'Say "All is forgiven", and an end is put to all this fuss'.

And therwithal hire arm over hym she leyde
kissed And al foryaf and ofte tyme hym keste.
He thonked hire and to hire spak and seyde
As fil to purpos for his herte reste,
And she to that answerde hym as hire leste,
cheer him up And with hire goodly wordes hym disporte
She gan, and ofte his sorwes to comforte.

Quod Pandarus, 'For aught I kan aspien,
This light, nor I, ne serven here of nought.
Light is nought good for sike folkes yen!
But for the love of God, syn ye ben brought
In thus good plit, lat now no hevy thought
Ben hangyng in the hertes of yow tweye' –
fireplace And bar the candel to the chymeneye.

no particular need (for oaths) Soone after this, though it no nede were,
pleased to devise Whan she swiche othes as hire leste devyse
(there was) then no cause of fear Hadde of hym take, hire thoughte tho no fere,
Ne cause ek non to bidde hym thennes rise.
Yet lasse thyng than othes may suffise
In many a cas, for every wyght, I gesse,
That loveth wel, meneth but gentilesse.

for information But in effect she wolde wite anon
Of what man and ek wheer and also why
He jalous was, syn ther was cause non;
(see n.) And ek the sygne that he took it by,
She badde hym that to telle hire bisily,
put it to him Or elles certeyn she bar hym on honde
test That this was don of malice hire to fonde.

Withouten more, shortly for to seyne,
lady's command Hym most obeye unto his lady heste,
had to pretend And for the lasse harm he moste feyne.
He seyde hire, whan she was at swiche a feste,
(on Horaste) She myght on hym han loked at the leste –
(see n.) Noot I nought what, al deere ynough a rysshe,
fish for reasons As he that nedes most a cause fisshe.

even if And she answerde, 'Swete, al were it so,
What harm was that, syn I non yvel mene?
For, by that God that bought us bothe two,
In alle thyng is myn entente cleene.
Swiche argumentes ne ben naught worth a beene.
Wol ye the childissh jalous contrefete?
Now were it worthi that ye were ybete.'

1152 'And also the piece of evidence that had convinced him'.
1161 'I don't know what, not worth paying the cost of a rush-light for' (i.e. worthless).
1165 The reference to Christ's redemption of man slips out naturally in this conventional adjuration. Chaucer attends to the 'historicalness' of the story, but it is impossible for him to avoid anachronism of this kind if he is to represent his characters meaningfully, that is, within the context of a coherent medieval world-view.
1169 **ye were ybete**. The scribe of one MS adds in the margin, 'Ye, with a fether'. He got the point.

Tho Troilus gan sorwfully to sike –
Lest she be wroth, hym thoughte his herte deyde –
(that make me) sick And seyde, 'Allas, upon my sorwes sike
Have mercy, swete herte myn, Criseyde!
And if that in tho wordes that I seyde
Be any wrong, I wol no more trespace.
Doth what yow list: I am al in youre grace.'

(see n.) And she answerde, 'Of gilt misericorde!
That is to seyn, that I foryeve al this;
And evere more on this nyght yow recorde,
And beth wel war ye do namore amys.'
'Nay, dere herte myn,' quod he, 'iwys!'
caused you pain 'And now,' quod she, 'that I have don yow smerte
Foryeve it me, myn owene swete herte.'

suddenly overcome This Troilus, with blisse of that supprised
being one who Putte al in Goddes hand, as he that mente
on a sudden brainwave Nothing but wel and, sodeynly avysed,
clasped He hire in armes faste to hym hente.
in a very happy state of mind And Pandarus with a ful good entente
Leyde hym to slepe and seyde, 'If ye be wise,
Swouneth nought now, lest more folk arise!'

What myghte or may the sely larke seye
sparrow-hawk Whan that the sperhauk hath hym in his foot?
I kan namore; but of thise ilke tweye –
sugar, soot (i.e. bitter) To whom this tale sucre be or soot –
Though that I tarie a yer, somtyme I moot
After myn auctour tellen hire gladnesse
As wel as I have told hire hevynesse.

Criseyde, which that felte hire thus itake,
As writen clerkes in hire bokes olde,
aspen's Right as an aspes leef she gan to quake
Whan she hym felte hire in his armes folde.
wholly recovered But Troilus, al hool of cares colde,
(i.e. the planets) Gan thanken tho the bryghte goddes sevene:
Thus sondry peynes bryngen folk in hevene.

This Troilus in armes gan hire streyne,
And seyde, 'O swete, as evere mot I gon,
Now be ye kaught, now is ther but we tweyne!
remedy Now yeldeth yow, for other bote is ther non!'
To that Criseyde answerde thus anon,
'Ne hadde I er now, my swete herte deere,
yielded Ben yolde, iwys, I were now nought heere.'

1177 '(A confession) of guilt (calls for) mercy'.
1188–90 Pandarus is not said to leave the room; but perhaps a kind of decorum is preserved by the enclosure of the bed in its hangings.
1210–11 Criseyde's self-possessed reply makes it clear that she wishes it to be understood that she has not been coerced into consent, and that the narrator's sparrowhawks and larks (1191–2) and Troilus's talk of 'surrender' are old-fashioned male wishful thinking on their part. Whether she was actually coerced or not is a different question.

O sooth is seyd that heled for to be
As of a fevre or other gret siknesse
Men moste drynke, as men may ofte se,
Ful bittre drynke; and for to han gladnesse
endure Men drynken ofte peyne and gret distresse –
series of events I mene it here, as for this aventure,
its happy outcome That thorugh a peyne hath founden al his cure.

And now swetnesse semeth more swete,
To the degree that, experienced That bitternesse assaied was byforn;
float For out of wo in blisse now they flete –
Non swich they felten syn they were born.
than that both should be destroyed Now is this bet than bothe two be lorn?
For love of God, take every womman heede
To werken thus if it comth to the neede.

released, trouble Criseyde, al quyt from every drede and tene,
As she that juste cause hadde hym to triste,
Made hym swich feste it joye was to seene,
honourable intention Whan she his trouthe and clene entente wiste;
tendril And as aboute a tree with many a twiste
encircles and wreathes Bytrent and writhe the swote wodebynde,
Gan ech of hem in armes other wynde.

suddenly startled And as the newe abaysed nyghtyngale,
That stynteth first whan she bygynneth to synge
shepherd speak Whan that she hereth any herde tale
Or in the hegges any wyght stirynge,
And after siker doth hire vois out rynge,
Right so Criseyde, whan hire drede stente,
Opned hire herte and tolde hym hire entente.

And right as he that seth his deth yshapen
according to everything that And dyen mot in ought that he may gesse
rescue enables him to escape And sodeynly rescous doth hym escapen
And from his deth is brought in sykernesse,
For al this world in swych present gladnesse
Was Troilus, and hath his lady swete.
With worse hap God lat us nevere mete!

slender Hire armes smale, hire streghte bak and softe
Hire sydes longe, flesshly, smothe and white
(see n.) He gan to stroke, and good thrift bad ful ofte
Hire snowissh throte, hire brestes rounde and lite.
Thus in this hevene he gan hym to delite
And therwithal a thousand tyme hire kiste,
That what to don for joie unnethe he wiste.

Than seyde he thus: 'O Love, O Charite!
Venus Thi moder ek, Citheria the swete,

1249 **good thrift bad**: 'wished health and happiness to' (greeted warmly).

worshipped After thiself next heried be she –
benevolent Venus mene I, the wel-willy planete –
Hymen (god of marriage) And next that, Imeneus, I the grete,
so beholden For nevere man was to yow goddes holde
As I, which ye han brought fro cares colde.

'Benigne Love, thow holy bond of thynges,
wishes for grace Whoso wol grace and list the nought honouren,
disappear in a flash Lo, his desire wol fle withouten wynges;
if you would not, goodness, help For noldestow of bownte hem socouren
That serven best and most alwey labouren,
Yet were al lost, that dar I wel seyn, certes,
unless, surpassed But if thi grace passed oure desertes.

'And for thow me, that leest koude disserve
Of hem that noumbred ben unto thi grace,
Hast holpen, ther I likly was to sterve,
And me bistowed in so heigh a place
pass beyond That thilke boundes may no blisse pace,
I am speechless (with gratitude) I kan namore; but laude and reverence
Be to thy bounte and thyn excellence!'

And therwithal Criseyde anon he kiste,
dis-ease Of which certein she felte no disese,
And thus seyde he: 'Now wolde God I wiste,
Myn herte swete, how I yow myght plese!
What man,' quod he, 'was evere thus at ese
As I, on which the faireste and the beste
saw That evere I say deyneth hire herte reste?

surpasses justice 'Here may men seen that mercy passeth right:
Th'experience of that is felt in me,
That am unworthi to so swete a wight.
But herte myn, of youre benignite,
So thynk that though that I unworthi be
needs Yet mot I nede amenden in som wyse
Right thorugh the vertue of youre heigh servyse.

'And for the love of God, my lady deere,
Syn God hath wrought me for I shall yow serve –
steersman As thus I mene: he wol ye be my steere,
make To do me lyve, if that yow liste, or sterve –
So techeth me how that I may disserve
Youre thonk, so that I thorugh myn ignoraunce
Ne do no thing that yow be displesaunce.

'For certes, fresshe wommanliche wif,
This dar I seye, that trouth and diligence,

1261–7 This lofty invocation is imitated from the address to the Virgin Mary in Dante, *Paradiso* 33.14–18. The blurring of the Christian into the profane (e.g. 1267, cf. 1282), of the God of creation into the god of love (1254), is characteristic of these epithalamion-like stanzas.

1286–8 Troilus refers to the central belief of the ideal code of love (II.851n).

That shal ye fynden in me al my lif,
go against your forbidding N'I wol nat, certein, breken youre defence;
And if I do, present or in absence,
may I be slain in the act For love of God, lat sle me with the dede
If that it like unto youre wommanhede.'

heart's desire 'Iwys,' quod she, 'myn owen hertes list
My ground of ese and al myn herte deere,
Gramercy, for on that is al my trist!
turn aside But lat us falle awey fro this matere,
For it suffiseth, this that seyd is heere,
regret And at o word, withouten repentaunce,
Welcome, my knyght, my pees, my suffisaunce!'

or of the very least of their joys Of hire delit or joies oon the leeste
Were impossible to my wit to seye;
But juggeth ye that han ben at the feste
Of swich gladnesse, if that hem liste pleye!
I kan namore, but thus thise ilke tweye
That nyght, bitwixen drede and sikernesse,
Felten in love the grete worthynesse.

O blisful nyght, of hem so longe isoughte,
How blithe unto hem bothe two thow weere!
Why had I not such a one Why nad I swich oon with my soule ybought,
Ye, or the leeste joie that was theere?
woman's coldness towards men Awey, thow foule daunger and thow feere,
And lat hem in this hevene blisse dwelle
That is so heigh that al ne kan I telle!

But sooth is, though I kan nat tellen al,
As kan myn auctour of his excellence,
and (I swear so) before God Yet have I seyd, and God toforn, and shal
meaning In every thyng, al holly his sentence;
in the reverence of Love And if that ich, at Loves reverence
added in Have eny word in-eched for the beste,
(see n.) Doth therwithal right as youreselven leste.

For myne wordes, heere and every parte,
I speke hem alle under correccioun
truly sensitive understanding Of yow that felyng han in loves arte,
And putte it al in youre discrecioun
To encresse or maken dymynucioun
Of my langage, and that I yow biseche.
point, former But now to purpos of my rather speche.

Thise ilke two, that ben in armes laft,
to part from each other So loth to hem asonder gon it were,

1306 Is it possible to detect an inclination on Criseyde's part to call a halt to Troilus's prayers and protestations?

1319–20 As usual, the hyperbolically inappropriate intervention of the narrator (who seems to act for Pandarus, while that character is off-stage, as love's business-manager) serves as much to critique as to heighten the ecstasies of the occasion.

1330 i.e. disregard those bits if you don't like them.

thought it was like being torn apart
That ech from other wenden ben birafte,
Or elles – lo, this was hir mooste feere –
That al this thyng but nyce dremes were;
For which ful ofte ech of hem seyde, 'O swete,
Embrace, do I dream it
Clippe ich yow thus or elles I it meete?'

lovingly, look
And Lord! so he gan goodly on hire se
turned away
That nevere his look ne bleynte from hire face,
And seyde, 'O deere herte, may it be
That it be soth that ye ben in this place?'
'Yee, herte myn, God thank I of his grace,'
Quod tho Criseyde, and therwithal hym kiste,
That where his spirit was for joie he nyste.

This Troilus ful ofte hire eyen two
bright
Gan for to kisse, and seyde, 'O eyen clere,
It weren ye that wroughte me swich wo,
Ye humble nettes of my lady deere!
in the expression (of your eyes)
Though ther be mercy writen in youre cheere,
God woot, the text ful hard is, soth, to fynde!
How koude ye withouten bond me bynde?'

Therwith he gan hire faste in armes take
And wel an hundred tymes gan he syke –
Naught swich sorwfull sikes as men make
For wo, or elles when that folk ben sike,
are pleasing
But esy sykes, swiche as ben to like,
That shewed his affeccioun withinne:
cease
Of swich sikes koude he nought blynne.

Soone after this they spake of sondry thynges
came to mind as being relevant to
As fel to purpos of this aventure,
And pleyinge entrechaungeden hire rynges,
writing (inscriptions on the rings)
Of whiche I kan nought tellen no scripture;
But wel I woot a broche, gold and asure,
In which a rubye set was lik an herte,
pinned
Criseyde hym yaf, and stak it on his sherte.

Lord, trowe ye a coveytous or a wrecche,
holds it in
That blameth love and halt of it despite,
pence, rake in and scrape together
That of tho pens that he kan mokre and cretche
given
Was evere yit y-yeven hym swich delite
in one single detail, in some way
As is in love, in o poynt, in som plite?
Nay, douteles, for also God me save,
So perfit joie may no nygard have.

how they lie
They wol seyn 'Yis,' but Lord, so they lye,
anxious
Tho besy wrecches, ful of wo and drede!
madness
Thei callen love a woodnesse or folie,
befall, tell
But it shall falle hem as I shal yow rede:
lose everything (wine?)
They shal forgon the white and ek the rede
may God give them
And lyve in wo, ther God yeve hem meschaunce,
And every lovere in his trouthe avaunce!

Would to God As wolde God tho wrecches that dispise
ears Servise of love hadde erys also longe
Midas (see WBP 951) As hadde Mida, ful of coveytise,
And therto dronken hadde as hoot and stronge
wrongful desires As Crassus didde for his affectis wronge,
in the wrong To techen hem that they ben in the vice
*(*they *are 'tho wrecches')* And loveres nought, although they holde hem nyce.

Thise ilke two of whom that I yow seye,
Whan that hire hertes wel assured were,
Tho gonne they to speken and to pleye
And ek rehercen how and whan and where
got to know each other Thei knewe hem first, and every wo or feere
That passed was; but al swich hevynesse –
I thank it God – was torned to gladnesse.

they happened And evere-mo when that hem fel to speke
Of anythyng of swich a tyme agoon,
should be broken off With kissyng al that tale sholde breke
And fallen in a newe joye anoon;
together And diden al hire myght, syn they were oon,
For to recoveren blisse and ben at eise,
past unhappiness, counterbalance And passed wo with joie contrepeise.

It is not reasonable Resoun wol nought that I speke of slepe,
For it acordeth nought to my matere.
heed God woot, they took of that ful litel kepe!
But lest this nyght that was to hem so deere
Ne sholde in veyn escape in no manere,
employed, activity It was byset in joie and bisynesse
has to do with Of al that souneth into gentilesse.

public But whan the cok, comune astrologer,
Gan on his brest to bete and after crowe,
the morning star (Venus) And Lucyfer, the dayes messanger,
Gan for to rise and out hire bemes throwe,
recognize And estward roos (to hym that koude it knowe)
immediately upon that *Fortuna Major* – that anoon Criseyde
With herte soor to Troilus thus seyde:

trust 'Myn hertes lif, my trist, al my plesaunce,
That I was born, allas, what me is wo
That day of us moot make disseveraunce!
For tyme it is to ryse and hennes go
Or ellis I am lost for evere mo!
hover O nyght, allas, why nyltow over us hove
As longe as whan Almena lay by Jove?

1390 Crassus was slain by having molten gold poured into his mouth because of his greed.

1420 ***Fortuna Major*** is the name of a sign in geomancy, a magical art of divination, that was used to refer to a particular group of stars. Chaucer fetches his reference from Dante (*Purgatorio* 19.4–5), and seems pleased to draw attention to the unusualness of his allusion.

1422–1533 The lovers' lament at the approach of dawn (the *aube*) is a tradition of European love-poetry from Ovid (*Amores* 1.13) to Donne ('Busy old fool, unruly Sun!…').

1428 **Almena**: Alcmena, mother of Hercules, for whom Jove extended the night.

'O blake nyght, as folk in bokes rede,
That shapen art by God this world to hide
garment At certeyn tymes wyth thi derke wede,
That under that men myghte in reste abide,
Wel oughten bestes pleyne and folk the chide
how till we break That there as day wyth labour wolde us breste
deignest not to grant us That thow thus fleest and deynest us nought reste.

too briskly 'Thow doost, allas, to shortly thyn office,
hasty, May God, nature Thow rakle nyght! Ther God, maker of kynde,
Thee, unnatural The for thyn haste and thyn unkynde vice
So faste ay to oure hemysperie bynde
turn That nevere more under the ground thow wynde!
For now, for thow so hiest out of Troie,
Have I forgon thus hastili my joie!'

This Troilus, that with tho wordes felte,
piteous As thoughte hym tho, for pietous distresse
The blody teris from his herte melte,
As he that nevere yet swich hevynesse
Experienced, following upon Assayed hadde, out of so gret gladnesse,
Gan therwithal Criseyde, his lady deere,
In armes streyne, and seyde in this manere:

exposer 'O cruel day, accusour of the joie
hidden That nyght and love han stole and faste iwryen,
Acorsed be thi comyng into Troye
chink For every bore hath oon of thi bryghte yen!
why does it please you Envyous day, what list the so to spien?
do you seek out What hastow lost? Why sekestow this place?
May God Ther God thi light so quenche, for his grace!

how, offended 'Allas, what have thise loveris the agylt,
Cruel Dispitous day? Thyn be the peyne of helle!
For many a lovere hastow slayn, and wilt:
staring (poring) Thy pourynge in wol nowher lat hem dwelle.
Why do you offer What profrestow thi light here for to selle?
(i.e. who require good light) Go selle it hem that smale selys grave –
We wol the nought, us nedeth no day have.'

And ek the sonne, Titan, gan he chide,
And seyde, 'O fool, wel may men the dispise
(see n.) That hast the dawyng al nyght by thi syde
from thee And suffrest hire so soone up fro the rise
annoy For to disese loveris in this wyse.
thy Morning-Dawn (Aurora) What, holde youre bed ther, thow, and ek thi Morwe!
pray I bidde God so yeve yow bothe sorwe!'

sighed Therwith ful soore he syghte and thus he seyde:
'My lady right and of my wele or wo

1466 **the dawyng**: dawn (Aurora, whose lover Tithonus here merges with Titan).

source The welle and roote, O goodly myn, Criseyde,
And shal I rise, allas, and shal I so?
must break in two Now fele I that myn herte moot a-two,
For how sholde I my lif an houre save
Syn that with yow is al the lif ich have?

I do not know how 'What shal I don? For, certes, I not how
Ne whan, allas, I shal the tyme see
situation, again That in this plit I may ben eft with yow;
And of my lif, God woot how that shal be,
holds me in its grip Syn that desire right now so biteth me
That I am ded anon but I retourne.
How sholde I longe, allas, fro yow sojourne?

'But natheles, myn owen lady bright,
absolutely Were it so that I wiste outrely
That I, youre humble servant and youre knyght,
Were in youre herte iset so fermely
As ye in myn – the which thyng trewely
two such worlds as this Me levere were than thise worldes tweyne –
Yet sholde I bet enduren al my peyne.'

To that Criseyde answerde right anon,
And with a sik she seyde, 'O herte deere,
is advanced The game, ywys, so ferforth now is gon
sphere That first shal Phebus fallen fro his speere
companion And everich egle ben the dowves feere
rock And everich roche out of his place sterte
Er Troilus oute of Criseydes herte.

'Ye ben so depe in-with myn herte grave
That though I wolde it torne out of my thought,
As sure as As wisly verray God my soule save,
Even if I were made to die by torture To dyen in the peyne, I koude nought.
And for the love of God that us hath wrought
Lat in youre brayn non other fantasie
So crepe that it cause me to dye!

'And that ye me wolde han as faste in mynde
As I have yow, that wolde I yow biseche;
that I would find that to be true And if I wiste sothly that to fynde,
in a single detail, add to God myght nought a poynt my joies eche.
But herte myn, withouten more speche,
Beth to me trewe, or ellis were it routhe,
For I am thyn, by God and by my trouthe!

therefore 'Beth glad, forthy, and lyve in sikernesse!
to others Thus seyde I nevere er this ne shal to mo;
And if to yow it were a gret gladnesse
come back again To torne ayeyn soone after that ye go,
As fayn wolde I as ye it were so,
As surely as As wisly God myn herte brynge to reste!'
And hym in armes tok and ofte keste.

Agayns his wil, sith it mot nedes be,
clothed This Troilus up ros and faste hym cledde
And in his armes took his lady free
An hondred tyme and on his wey hym spedde,
And with swich wordes as his herte bledde
He seyde, 'Farewel, my dere herte swete:
May God, sound (in health) Ther God us graunte sownde and soone to mete!'

To which no word for sorwe she answerde,
affect So soore gan his partyng hire distreyne;
And Troilus unto his paleys ferde
As wo-bygon as she was, soth to seyne.
wrung (tortured) So harde hym wrong of sharp desire the peyne
For to ben eft there he was in plesaunce
That it may nevere out of his remembraunce.

royal Retorned to his real paleys soone,
He softe into his bed gan for to slynke,
To slepe longe as he was wont to doone.
close his eyes But al for nought: he may wel ligge and wynke,
But slep ne may ther in his herte synke,
burned Thynkyng how she for whom desir hym brende
A thousand-fold was worth more than he wende.

turn over (in his memory) And in his thought gan up and down to wynde
every look on her face Hire wordes alle and every countenaunce
And fermely impressen in his mynde
The leeste point that to him was plesaunce;
And verraylich of thilke remembraunce
burnt, desire to increase Desire al newe hym brende, and lust to brede
(i.e. yet he went on remembering) Gan more than erst, and yet took he non hede.

Criseyde also, right in the same wyse,
shut (treasure up) Of Troilus gan in hire herte shette
eager desire His worthynesse, his lust, his dedes wise,
His gentilesse, and how she with hym mette,
Thonkyng Love he so wel hire bisette,
Desiryng eft to han hire herte deere
situation as, make him welcome In swich a plite she dorste make hym cheere.

who in the morning Pandare o-morwe which that comen was
Unto his nece and gan hire faire grete,
Seyde, 'Al this nyght so reyned it, allas,
That al my drede is that ye, nece swete,
leisure Han litel laiser had to slepe and mete.
Al nyght,' quod he, 'hath reyn so do me wake
That som of us, I trowe, hire hedes ake.'

1555 It is still not entirely clear where Pandarus has been all night.
1561 **hedes ake**. The *double entendre* could hardly be missed, and Criseyde's half-serious accusation and half-pretended shame, and readiness to be intimate again with her uncle, all likewise speak of a close and familiar understanding.

And ner he com and seyde, 'How stant it now
How are you doing? This mury morwe? Nece, how kan ye fare?'
Criseyde answerde, 'Nevere the bet for yow,
Fox that ye ben! God yeve youre herte kare!
business God help me so, ye caused al this fare.
innocent-sounding Trowe I,' quod she, 'for al youre wordes white,
O, who-so seeth yow, knoweth yow ful lite.'

cover With that she gan hire face for to wrye
With the shete and wax for shame al reede,
peer And Pandarus gan under for to prie,
And seyde, 'Nece, if that I shal be dede,
Have here a swerd and smyteth of myn hede!'
With that his arm al sodeynly he thriste
Under hire nekke and at the laste hire kyste.

is not important to talk about I passe al that which chargeth nought to seye.
in just the same way What! God foryaf his deth, and she al so
Foryaf, and with here uncle gan for to pleye,
there was no reason to do otherwise For other cause was ther noon but so.
to the point But of this thing right to the effect to go:
Whan tyme was, hom til here hous she wente,
fully achieved his objective And Pandarus hath fully his entente.

{The lovers continue happily in their secret love-affair for three years.}

{Book IV begins with the request of Calchas, Criseyde's father, that his daughter be returned to him in exchange for the captured Antenor. The arrangement is ratified at the Trojan parliament, at which Troilus is present but obliged to remain silent. He is cast into despair, returns home to lament his fate, and is not much comforted by Pandarus's airy consolations, nor impressed by his casual plan to abduct Criseyde by force. His fate, as he tells us at length in a Boethian soliloquy, is predetermined and inescapable. But he meets again with Criseyde, who has heard the news of the exchange and is distracted with grief, and, after he has tentatively suggested they might steal away together, they tearfully agree to her plan that she shall seek to return to Troy after ten days. The exchange with Antenor is made at the beginning of Book V, and Criseyde is handed over to the Greek Diomede, who begins his subtle and accustomed campaign of seduction. Troilus is left to grieve and yearn and hope while the ten days pass.}

Book V

But for to tellen forth of Diomede:
befell It fel that after, on the tenthe day
went Syn that Criseyde out of the citee yede,
This Diomede, as fressh as braunche in May,
Come to the tente ther as Calkis lay
to have business And feyned hym with Calkas han to doone –
But what he mente I shal yow tellen soone.

Criseyde, at shorte wordes for to telle,
Welcomed hym and down hym by hire sette –
easy And he was ethe ynough to maken dwelle!

1577 **God foryaf his deth**. This comparison of Criseyde's forgiveness to Christ's forgiveness of those who crucified him (Luke 23:34) may suggest that the narrator's enthusiasm has finally tipped the scales of his sanity, but Christian terms and ideas are often employed in the medieval language of love (in a manner that a modern reader might think improper), and this comparison was commonplace.

delay
spiced cakes, brought together

And after this, withouten longe lette,
The spices and the wyne men forth hem fette,
And forth they speke of this and that yfeere,
As frendes don, of which som shal ye heere.

fell to talking

He gan first fallen of the werre in speche
Bitwixen hem and the folk of Troie town,
And of th'assege he gan hire ek biseche
To tellen hym what was hire opynyoun;
Fro that demaunde he so descendeth down
To axen hire if that hire straunge thoughte
manners
The Grekis gise and werkes that they wroughte,

And whi hire fader tarieth so longe
To wedden hire unto som worthy wight.
Criseyde, that was in hire peynes stronge
For love of Troilus, hire owen knyght,
understanding
As ferforth as she konnyng hadde or myght
Answerde hym so; but as of his entente,
It semed nat she wiste what he mente.

But natheles, this ilke Diomede
Grew more sure of himself
Gan in hymself assure, and thus he seyde:
'If ich aright have taken of yow hede,
Me thynketh thus, O lady myn Criseyde,
That syn I first hond on youre bridel leyde,
Whan ye out come of Troie by the morwe,
Ne koude I nevere sen yow but in sorwe.

'Kan I nat seyn what may the cause be
Except that, may be
But if for love of som Troian it were,
distress
The which right sore wolde athynken me
That ye for any wight that dwelleth there
Sholden spille a quarter of a tere
Or pitously youreselven so bigile –
For dredeles, it is nought worth the while.

as one might say, one and all

'The folk of Troie, as who seyth, alle and some
In prisoun ben, as ye youreselven se,
Nor thennes shal nat oon on-lyve come
For al the gold atwixen sonne and se.
Trusteth wel and understondeth me
Ther shal nat oon to mercy gon on-lyve,
Al were he lord of worldes twies fyve!

vengeance, abducting

'Swich wreche on hem for fecchynge of Eleyne
Ther shal ben take er that we hennes wende
gods of the lower world and of death
That Manes, which that goddes ben of peyne,
destroy
Shal ben agast that Grekes wol hem shende,
And men shul drede unto the worldes ende
From hennesforth to ravysshen any queene,
So cruel shal oure wreche on hem be seene.

mislead, ambiguities ‘And but if Calkas lede us with ambages –
That is to seyn, with double wordes slye,
Swiche as men clepen a word with two visages –
Ye shal wel knowen that I naught ne lye
And al this thyng right sen it with youre eye,
And that anon, ye nyl nat trowe how sone:
what will certainly happen Now taketh hede, for it is for to doone.

‘What, wene ye youre wise fader wolde
Han yeven Antenor for yow anon
If he ne wiste that the cite sholde
Destroied ben? Whi, nay, so mote I gon!
He knew ful wel ther shal nat scapen oon
That Troian is; and for the grete feere
He dorste nat ye dwelte lenger there.

‘What wol ye more, lufsom lady deere?
Lat Troie and Troian fro youre herte pace!
Drif out that bittre hope and make good cheere
summon back And clepe ayeyn the beaute of youre face
That ye with salte teris so deface,
For Troie is brought in swich a jupartie
That it to save is now no remedie.

‘And thenketh wel ye shal in Grekis fynde
lover A moore parfit love, er it be nyght,
Than any Troian is, and more kynde,
And bet to serven yow wol don his myght.
And if ye vouche-sauf, my lady bright,
I wol ben he to serven yow myselve,
Yee, levere than be lord of Greces twelve!’

And with that word he gan to waxen rede
trembled And in his speche a litel wight he quoke
a little bit And caste asyde a litel wight his hede
shook himself as if from a reverie And stynte a while; and afterward he woke,
with an air of seriousness And sobreliche on hire he threw his loke,
And seyde, ‘I am, al be it yow no joie,
As gentil man as any wight in Troie.

‘For if my fader Tideus,’ he seyde,
‘Ilyved hadde, ich hadde ben er this
Calydon and Argos Of Calydoyne and Arge a kyng, Criseyde.
And so hope I that I shal yet, iwis.
But he was slayn – allas, the more harm is! –
Unfortunately, all too soon Unhappily at Thebes al to rathe,
Polynices, to the great harm of Polymyte and many a man to scathe.

‘But herte myn, syn that I am youre man –
you are And ben the first of whom I seche grace –

939 **herte myn**. Diomede’s confidence in the progress of his campaign is accurately measured in his increasingly intimate forms of address.

(your man vowed) to serve To serve yow as hertely as I kan
And evere shal whil I to lyve have space,
Provided that So, er that I departe out of this place,
Ye wol me graunte that I may to-morwe
At bettre leyser telle yow my sorwe.' 945

What sholde I telle his wordes that he seyde?
most He spak inough for o day at the meeste.
It's well shown in the event It preveth wel: he spak so that Criseyde
Graunted on the morwe, at his requeste,
For to speken with hym at the leeste – 950
(see n.) So that he nolde speke of swich matere.
And thus to hym she seyde, as ye mowe here,

As she that hadde hire herte on Troilus
root out So faste that ther may it non arace,
as to a stranger And strangely she spak, and seyde thus: 955
'O Diomede, I love that ilke place
Ther I was born; and Joves for his grace
Delyvere it soone of al that doth it care!
grant God, for thy myght, so leve it wel to fare!

'That Grekis wolde hire wrath on Troie wreke 960
If that they myght I knowe it wel, iwis;
But it shal naught byfallen as ye speke,
I swear in the sight of God And God toforn! And forther overe this,
full of good counsel I woot my fader wys and redy is,
And that he me hath bought, as ye me tolde, 965
beholden So deere, I am the more unto hym holde.

'That Grekis ben of heigh condicioun
I woot ek wel; but certeyn, men shal fynde
As worthi folk withinne Troie town,
As konnyng and as parfit and as kynde 970
Orkneys, India (ends of the earth) As ben bitwixen Orkades and Inde;
And that ye koude wel yowre lady serve,
I trowe ek wel, hire thank for to deserve.

'But as to speke of love, ywis,' she seyde,
'I hadde a lord, to whom I wedded was, 975
The whos myn herte al was, til that he deyde;
And other love, as help me now Pallas,
Ther in myn herte nys ne nevere was.
family And that ye ben of noble and heigh kynrede,
I have wel herd it tellen, out of drede. 980

951 'So long as he would not speak of such matters (as he had just been broaching)'.

956–7 Since she cannot speak of Troilus, Criseyde speaks of her love for Troy, paying her private respect to love's memory in a way that will not compromise her present situation.

960–73 Criseyde takes up Diomede's points one by one.

974–80 Criseyde seems to transfer her love for Troilus to her dead husband, burying the two, so to speak, in the same grave, so as to leave options open for the future. The acknowledgement of Diomede's breeding follows interestingly.

causes ‘And that doth me to han so grete a wonder
treat with such disrespect That ye wol scornen any womman so.
Ek, God woot, love and I ben fer ysonder!
I am disposed bet, so mot I go,
Unto my deth to pleynen and maken wo.
What I shal after don I kan nat seye;
engage in talk of love But trewelich, as yet me list nat pleye.

‘Myn herte is now in tribulacioun,
And ye in armes bisy day by day.
Herafter, whan ye wonnen han the town,
Perhaps Peraunter then, so it happen may,
what I never saw before That whan I se that nevere er I say
Than wol I werke that I nevere wroughte.
This word to yow ynough suffisen oughte.

‘To-morwe ek wol I speken with yow fayn,
So that ye touchen naught of this matere.
And whan yow list ye may come here ayayn;
And er ye gon thus muche I sey yow here:
bright hair As help me Pallas with hire heres clere,
If that I sholde of any Greke han routhe,
It sholde be youreselven, by my trouthe!

‘I say nat therfore that I wol yow love,
Nor am I saying N’I say nat nay; but in conclusioun,
I mene wel, by God that sit above!’
And therwithal she caste hire eyen down,
And gan to sike, and seyde, ‘O Troie town,
pray Yet bidde I God in quiete and in reste
make my heart break I may yow sen, or do myn herte breste.’

in the event But in effect, and shortly for to seye,
This Diomede al fresshly new ayeyn
Gan pressen on and faste hire mercy preye;
And after this, the sothe for to seyn,
Hire glove he took, of which he was ful feyn;
had become evening And finaly, whan it was woxen eve
And al was wel, he roos and tok his leve.

The brighte Venus folwede and ay taughte
The wey ther brode Phebus down alighte,
(see n.) And Cynthea hire chare-hors overe-raughte
To whirle out of the Leoun, if she myghte,
And Signifer his candels sheweth brighte

986 What I shal after don. Criseyde makes it clear that her inclination to spend the rest of her life in lamentation will not last for ever.

990 The winning of the town is now an accepted fact in Criseyde’s calculation of the matter.

1006 Troie town. Troilus is now incorporated, even in the private thoughts that Criseyde allows herself, into the stones of Troy.

1016–20 Venus, the evening star, shows the way for **Phebus**, the sun (**brode**, enlarged in appearance as it sets), to sink to the horizon, while **Cynthea**, the moon, hastens to pass out of the sign of Leo (Criseyde had promised to return before the moon left Leo, IV.1590–6), and **Signifer**, the sign-bearer, or Zodiac, shows forth his **candels** or stars.

1018 ‘reached over (to urge on) her chariot-horses’.

Whan that Criseyde unto hire bedde wente
Inwith hire fadres faire brighte tente,

Turning over Retornyng in hire soule ay up and down
The wordes of this sodeyn Diomede,
His grete estat, and perel of the town,
And that she was allone and hadde nede
Of frendes help – and thus bygan to brede
The cause whi, the sothe for to telle,
That she took fully purpos for to dwelle.

truthfully The morwen come and, gostly for to speke,
This Diomede is come unto Criseyde;
interrupt (with impatience) And shortly, lest that ye my tale breke,
So wel he for hymselven spak and seyde
made to subside That alle hire sikes soore adown he leyde;
And finaly, the sothe for to seyne,
relieved, the main part He refte hire of the grete of alle hire peyne.

And after this the storie telleth us
That she hym yaf the faire baye stede
The which he ones wan of Troilus;
And ek a broche – and that was litel nede –
That was Troilus's That Troilus was, she yaf this Diomede,
And ek the bet from sorwe hym to releve
(see n.) She made hym were a pencel of hire sleve.

I fynde ek in the stories elleswhere,
Whan thorugh the body hurt was Diomede
Of Troilus, tho wepte she many a teere
Whan that she saugh hise wyde wowndes blede,
And that she took to kepen hym good hede,
painful And for to helen hym of his sorwes smerte,
I don't know Men seyn – I not – that she yaf hym hire herte.

But trewely the storie telleth us
Ther made nevere womman moore wo
Than she whan that she falsed Troilus.
She seyde, 'Allas, for now is clene ago
My name of trouthe in love for everemo!
For I have falsed oon the gentileste
That evere was, and oon the worthieste!

'Allas, of me, unto the worldes ende,
Shal neyther ben ywriten nor ysonge
destroy No good word, for thise bokes wol me shende.
O, rolled shal I ben on many a tonge!

1023–7 The tumble of paratactic clauses (cf. II.451n) conveys something of the overwhelming accumulation of circumstances that Criseyde feels herself faced with, as well as the strategic indeterminacies by which she comes to the conclusion that her decision is inevitable.

1038 **faire baye stede**. Chaucer forgets to explain how Diomede had earlier given this horse to Criseyde.

1043 'She made him wear her sleeve as a pennon (on his lance)'.

Thorughout the world my belle shal be ronge;
And wommen moost wol haten me of alle.
befall Allas, that swich a cas me sholde falle!

as the fault is in me 'Thei wol seyen, in as muche as in me is,
I have hem don dishonour, weylaway!
Al be I nat the first that dide amys,
What helpeth that to don my blame awey?
But syn I se ther is no bettre way
And that to late is now for me to rewe,
at any rate To Diomede algate I wol be trewe.

'But, Troilus, syn I no bettre may,
part And syn that thus departen ye and I,
Yet prey I God, so yeve yow right good day,
As for the gentileste, trewely,
saw That evere I say, to serven feythfully,
And best kan ay his lady honour kepe.'
burst And with that word she brast anon to wepe.

'And certes yow ne haten shal I nevere,
And frendes love, that shal ye han of me,
even if I should live forever And my good word, al sholde I lyven evere.
And trewely I wolde sory be
For to seen yow in adversitee;
And gilteles, I woot wel, I yow leve.
But al shal passe; and thus take I my leve.'

as an interval until But trewely how longe it was bytwene
That she forsok hym for this Diomede,
Ther is non auctour telleth it, I wene.
Take every man now to his bokes heede,
specified period of time He shal no terme fynden, out of drede;
woo For though that he bigan to wowe hire soone,
Er he hire wan yet was ther more to doone.

Ne me ne list this sely womman chyde
Forther than the storye wol devyse.
Hire name, allas, is punysshed so wide
That for hire gilt it oughte ynough suffise.
And if I myghte excuse hire any wise,
For she so sory was for hire untrouthe,
Iwis, I wolde excuse hire yet for routhe.

{Criseyde does not again appear in person, though we read, with Troilus, her letter of glutinous self-exculpation. Troilus, after racking himself with hope, finally sadly acknowledges, when he sees on Diomede's armour the brooch

1062 my belle shal be ronge: a proverbial expression, alluding to the way gossip noises abroad a scandalous story. It may have inspired Henryson's cruel sequel, *The Testament of Cresseid*, where Criseyde, already a by-word for fickleness and inconstancy in the pre-Chaucerian story of Troy, is punished with leprosy (lepers had to carry a bell to announce their presence).

1085 and thus take I my leve. Criseyde's exit, like her whole performance in these stanzas, is stagey, self-performing, unwinning. What she has lost, through her accommodation with Diomede, understandable as it is in the circumstances, is already evident.

1093–9 The narrator, attendant as ever to *sentement*, attempts to cloud Criseyde's responsibility for her actions in a haze of extenuation, though he succeeds only in making her behaviour seem worse – even he can find no excuse.

that he gave to Criseyde, that all is lost: 'Thorugh which I se that clene out of youre mynde / Ye han me cast – and I ne kan ne may, / For al this world, withinne myn herte fynde / To unloven yow a quarter of a day!' V.1695–8). Pandarus, whose strategies are for fair weather only, has long been reduced to bewildered and cynical irrelevance.}

Gret was the sorwe and pleynte of Troilus,
But forth hire cours Fortune ay gan to holde.
Criseyde loveth the sone of Tideus,
And Troilus moot wepe in cares colde.
Swich is this world, who-so it kan byholde:
In ech estat is litel hertes reste.
grant God leve us for to take it for the beste.

In many cruel bataille, out of drede,
Of Troilus, this ilke noble knyght,
As men may in thise olde bokes rede,
Was seen his knyghthod and his grete myght;
And dredeles, his ire, day and nyght,
paid for Ful cruwely the Grekis ay aboughte;
And alwey moost this Diomede he soughte.

And ofte tyme I fynde that they mette
With blody strokes and with wordes grete,
sharpened Assayinge how hire speres weren whette;
passion of rage And, God it woot, with many a cruel hete
Gan Troilus upon his helm to bete!
But natheles Fortune it naught ne wolde
Of oothers hond that eyther deyen sholde.

undertaken And if I hadde ytaken for to write
The armes of this ilke worthi man,
Than wolde ich of his batailles endite;
But for that I to writen first bigan
Of his love, I have seyde as I kan –
His worthi dedes, who-so list hem heere,
Rede Dares, he kan telle hem alle ifeere –

Bysechyng every lady bright of hewe
And every gentil womman, what she be,
That al be that Criseyde was untrewe
That for that gilt she be nat wroth with me.
Ye may hire giltes in other bokes se;
And gladlier I wol write, yif yow leste,
Penelopes trouthe and good Alceste.

1771 **Dares**: Dares Phrygius, supposedly the original Trojan author of a Latin prose history of Troy very popular in the Middle Ages.

1772–1869 There are many contradictions and cross-currents in this remarkable 'Epilogue', and it has been much discussed. It is hard not to see it as some kind of 'palinode', in which Chaucer, forced to find a meaningful frame for his story of love's joy and loss, can in the end only reject its implied values and lock it into the grid of Christian transcendence.

1778 Penelope was the faithful wife of Odysseus, and Alceste of Admetus. The latter is the heroine of the Prologue to *The Legend of Good Women*, Chaucer's next poem, which he seems to be anticipating. His pretence there that he is called to task and has to do penance for writing ill of women is a charge he addresses here by disclaiming responsibility and attempting to ingratiate himself with women by claiming, rather disingenuously in the circumstances, that it is men who are the real villains.

in relation to men N'I sey nat this al oonly for thise men,
betrayed But moost for wommen that bitraised be
Thorugh false folk – God yeve hem sorwe, amen! –
That with hire grete wit and subtilite
moves Bytraise yow. And this commeveth me
To speke, and in effect yow alle I preye,
Beth war of men and herkneth what I seye.

Go, litel boke, go, litel myn tragedye,
And may God Ther God thi makere yet, er that he dye,
compose So sende myght to make in som comedye!
no writing of poetry But litel book, no makyng thow n'envie,
But humble yourself, poetry But subgit be to alle poyesye,
pass And kis the steppes where as thow seest pace
Statius Virgile, Ovide, Omer, Lucan, and Stace.

And for ther is so gret diversite
In Englissh and in writyng of oure tonge,
So prey I to God that non myswrite the,
Ne the mysmetre for defaute of tonge;
read, or else recited And red wherso thow be, or elles songe,
understood That thow be understonde, God I biseche!
earlier But yet to purpos of my rather speche.

The wrath, as I bigan yow for to seye,
Of Troilus the Grekis boughten deere,
For thousandes his hondes maden deye,
As he that was withouten any peere
Save Ector, in his tyme, as I kan heere.
except that it was God's will But weilawey – save only Goddes wille –
In scornful wrath, slew Despitously hym slough the fierse Achille.

And whan that he was slayn in this manere,
light (not heavy with earth) spirit His lighte goost ful blisfully is went
hollow inner concavity Up to the holughnesse of the eighthe spere,
(see n.) In convers letyng everich element;
quite open to his inspection And ther he saugh with ful avysement
wandering (i.e. the planets) The erratik sterres, herkenyng armonye
(the music of the spheres) With sownes ful of hevenyssh melodie.

intently, contemplate And down from thennes faste he gan avyse
This litel spot of erthe that with the se
Embraced is, and fully gan despise

1786–92 The closing address to the **litel boke** is a 'modesty-topos' of great antiquity, and as such enables Chaucer to set his work, with extraordinary audacity, beside that of the great classical writers (two of them, Homer and Lucan, no more than names to him). He imagines them passing in dignified procession, with his book following eagerly and kissing their footprints (**steppes**).

1788 This **comedye** has often been thought to be the earliest premonition of the *Canterbury Tales*.

1793–6 Chaucer imagines scribes miscopying or mistaking the metre because of the deficiency of their own dialect (**for defaute of tonge**). His fears were to be fully realized: the secret of his metre, particularly his use of sounded final *e*, was lost during the fifteenth century and not rediscovered until the eighteenth.

1807–27 It is Arcite who ascends to the eighth (*ottava*) sphere in Boccaccio's epic of Theseus, the *Teseida*. Chaucer does not use the passage in his reworking of the *Teseida* in the Knight's Tale (written before *Troilus*), and therefore has it available to provide an apotheosis of sorts for Troilus. The **eighthe spere** (most MSS read *seventhe*, but an early mistake with roman numerals would account for that) is that of the fixed stars (see *PF* 59n).

1810 'Leaving on the reverse (convex) side every planetary sphere'.

This wrecched world, and held al vanite
In respect of, full To respect of the pleyn felicite
That is in hevene above; and at the laste,
Ther he was slayn his lokyng down he caste,

laughed And in hymself he lough right at the wo
Of hem that wepten for his deth so faste,
And dampned al oure werk that foloweth so
desire for earthly pleasure The blynde lust, the which that may nat laste,
And sholden al oure herte on heven caste,
And forth he wente, shortly for to telle,
assigned Ther as Mercurye sorted hym to dwelle.

end Swich fyn hath, lo, this Troilus for love!
Swich fyn hath al his grete worthynesse,
royal Swich fyn hath his estat real above,
Swich fyn his lust, swich fyn hath his noblesse,
brittleness Swych fyn hath false worldes brotelnesse.
And thus bigan his lovyng of Criseyde,
As I have told, and in this wise he deyde.

O yonge, fresshe folkes, he or she,
In which that love up groweth with youre age,
Return to (your real) home (heaven) Repeyreth hom fro worldly vanyte,
And of youre herte up casteth the visage
To thilke God that after his ymage
fair (i.e. a temporary amusement) Yow made, and thynketh al nys but a faire
This world that passeth soone as floures faire.

And loveth hym the which that right for love
cross, redeem Upon a crois, oure soules for to beye,
died First starf, and roos, and sit in hevene above;
For he nyl falsen no wight, dar I seye,
wholly That wol his herte al holly on hym leye.
And syn he best to love is, and most meke,
counterfeit What nedeth feynede loves for to seke?

pagans' Lo here, of payens corsed olde rites!
Lo here, what alle hire goddes may availle!
Lo here, thise wrecched worldes appetites!
end result and reward for effort Lo here, the fyn and guerdoun for travaille
rascally crew Of Jove, Appollo, of Mars, of swich rascaille!
the way the old poets wrote Lo here, the forme of olde clerkis speche
In poetrie, if ye hire bokes seche.

O moral Gower, this book I directe
To the, and to the, philosophical Strode,

1828–32 The insistent repetition, here and in 1849–55, is uncharacteristically strained and uninflected, as if Chaucer were borrowing a rhetorical voice to conceal his unease. These two passages were very popular with and much imitated by fifteenth-century admirers such as Lydgate.

1835–48 The exhortation to love Christ (who at least can be relied upon) and the condemnation of paganism make the preceding narrative into an exemplum of *blynde lust*, which seems a misrepresentation of the poem's own high seriousness.

1856–7 Chaucer dedicates his poem, not to any court figure, but to two London friends: John Gower, the poet, and Ralph Strode, the Oxford logician and London lawyer. The request that they correct his work is a conventional 'modesty-topos'.

To vouchen-sauf, ther nede is, to correcte,
Of youre benignites and zeles goode.
died on the cross And to that sothfast Crist, that starf on rode,
With al myn herte of mercy evere I preye,
And to the Lord right thus I speke and seye:

Thow oon, and two, and thre, eterne on lyve,
That regnest ay in thre, and two, and oon,
(see n.) Uncircumscript, and al maist circumscrive,
Us from visible and invisible foon
Defende, and to thy mercye, everichon,
So make us, Jesus, for thi mercy, digne,
For love of Mayde and Moder thyn benigne.
Amen.

The Canterbury Tales

The *Canterbury Tales*, written between 1387 and 1400, are a new and highly experimental venture in organizing a framework narrative for a series of tales. Chaucer imagines a group of pilgrims gathering at the Tabard Inn in Southwark (on the south bank of the Thames across from London) to begin their journey to the shrine of St Thomas Becket at Canterbury. They agree to tell tales on the journey to pass the time more agreeably; there is to be a competition for the best tale, and a prize. There had been framework narratives for linked series of tales before: *A Thousand and One Nights*, Boccaccio's *Decameron* (which influenced Chaucer profoundly), Chaucer's own *Legend of Good Women* (a string of tales of virtuous women told by Chaucer as a 'penance' for speaking ill of women in *Troilus and Criseyde*). But their design is predictable, and there is rarely any variety in the mode of narration. The plan for the *Canterbury Tales* has the advantage that it allowed for the introduction, because of the social variety of the pilgrims, of all kinds of stories, including stories of low life (attributed to the *cherles*) that might have seemed beneath the attention of a great and fairly famous poet; it also allowed for a degree of dramatic interchange between the pilgrims, and an apparently spontaneous development of the framework narrative – interruptions, arguments, feuds, comments, a completely new character (the Canon's Yeoman); finally, it gave Chaucer the freedom to move behind the scenes, to shed the responsibility for being an *auctor* (a maker of authoritative pronouncements) that he had always found burdensome. It enabled him to make of the *Canterbury Tales* a vast laboratory of narrative experiment, in which any form or genre or type of tale could be tried out – romances, comic tales, *fabliaux*, religious tales, saints' lives, exemplary stories, anecdotes of contemporary life, a beast-fable, a *pourquoi*, a minstrel-parody, a fairy-tale. Though a design was put in place, with a prospective ending, it does not press upon the constituent tales, which are innovative in many ways. The freedom to experiment with narrative that Chaucer sought and found in this way was not of course an end in itself. What it gave Chaucer was a means to explore in many ways and at many levels of seriousness the issues that preoccupied the society of which he was part: questions to do with sexual exploitation, the negotiations within the marriage contract, the 'voicing' of women, the nature of authority and the necessity of obedience, the extent to which human beings control their lives or consent to the manner in which they are controlled, the operation of institutions, including the church, as self-serving and self-perpetuating organs of greed and privilege, the existence of 'the holy' as a transforming agency. Of the 120 tales allowed for in the Host's two-way four-tale plan, Chaucer completed only 20, with a further three left unfinished (including *Sir Thopas*, the first of the two tales attributed to 'Chaucer the pilgrim') and one from a new character who turns up on the road. It seems likely that he had nearly completed an original one-way one-tale plan (to conclude with the arrival at Canterbury, which is anticipated in the last scene of the pilgrimage in the Parson's Prologue) but decided to postpone impending closure by introducing a new and impossibly grandiose scheme. The original plan for the ending was superseded, and the work left inevitably unfinished, which perhaps contributes to the sense of an 'ultimate' open-endedness.

The *Canterbury Tales* survive in 82 manuscripts, of which 55 are complete or near-complete and seven frag-

1863–5 The prayer to the Trinity begins with echoes of Dante, *Paradiso* 14.28–30.

1865 'Uncircumscribed and yet able to circumscribe all things'.

mentary, while the remainder contain excerpts. The number of manuscripts is extraordinarily large, though only the relic of the much larger number that once existed. Caxton printed the *Tales* in 1478 and again in 1485, and the work has remained continuously in print ever since. Chaucer did not complete the *Tales* nor organize the fragmentary groupings of tales into a fixed order. Scribes and modern editors have done their best to arrange the tale-groupings in a sensible order, but there is no ordering of the tales authorized by Chaucer. As to the text, two manuscripts stand out, both copied in the first decade of the fifteenth century by the same scribe. One is the Hengwrt MS in the National Library of Wales in Aberystwyth (MS Peniarth 392D), which has the tales in an 'unordered' state, with many omissions and lacunae, but with a very good text; the other is the Ellesmere MS in the Huntington Library in San Marino, California (MS EL 26.C.9), copied somewhat later when there had been more time to digest the information contained in Chaucer's 'foul papers'. Ellesmere has the tales in the order that has come to be widely accepted, and is complete, but the text is slightly inferior to that contained in Hengwrt. The following texts are based on Hengwrt (Hg), with omissions supplied and corrections introduced from Ellesmere (El) or from the corpus of variants in Manly and Rickert (see below). In both Hg and El the *Tales* survive in a series of unconnected fragments. In the following selections, the line-numbering of the fragments in the *Riverside* Chaucer is kept.

There is a full edition of the *Canterbury Tales*, with variants from all manuscripts, in J.M. Manly and E.M. Rickert (eds), *The Text of the Canterbury Tales, studied on the basis of all known manuscripts* (Chicago, 1940). For general critical studies of the *Tales*, see D. Howard, *The Idea of the Canterbury Tales* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1976); H. Cooper, *The Structure of the Canterbury Tales* (London, 1983); D. Pearsall, *The Canterbury Tales* (London, 1985, repr. 1993).

The General Prologue

Chaucer's rash and adventurous first move is to offer to introduce the *dramatis personae* of the *Canterbury Tales* to us in a consecutive series of portraits. It looks a recipe for monotony, but Chaucer plucks triumph from seemingly certain disaster by observing no apparently predictable order, by varying the angle of approach, by concentrating in different portraits on different kinds of detail, by beginning and ending the portraits in different ways. He speaks of the pilgrims with an immediacy and spontaneity that suggests he has just met them, throwing in apparently arbitrary and meaningless detail, like the Cook's *mormal* (386), and frank confession of ignorance, as of the Merchant's name (284), as guarantees of 'authenticity'. He varies the 'voice' of the narrator, so that at times he is the naive 'cub-reporter', overwhelmed by this brave new world of clever and self-confident people like the Monk or starry-eyed at the elegance of the Prioress, while at other times he is a smug know-all, making superior-sounding jokes about the Clerk's poverty (297–8). Sometimes the voice is transparent and unironic, as in the description of the Parson. Above all, Chaucer detaches the pilgrims from their traditional moorings in the moralizing of estates satire (on this see J. Mann, *Chaucer and Medieval Estates Satire* (Cambridge, 1973)) and floats each one free as if on a raft of their own devising. All are superbly good at whatever they do: they write their own recommendations as well as their CV. They are *characters*.

April, sweet
Whan that Averill with his shoures soote
The droghte of March hath perced to the roote
such liquid
And bathed every veyne in swich lycour
By whose power
Of which vertu engendred is the flour;
Whan Zephirus eek with his sweete breeth
grove and field
Inspired hath in every holt and heeth
new shoots
The tendre croppes, and the yonge sonne
Hath in the Ram his half cours yronne,
birds
And smale foweles maken melodye,
eye
That slepen al the nyght with open iye

1–8 These opening lines evoke an English springtime but are also a philosophical evocation of the principle of renewal in nature: the language (**lycour**, **vertu**, **engendred**) is the semi-scientific language of medieval natural history, with the addition of classical (**Zephirus**, the west wind) and astronomical allusion.

7–8 The sun is 'young' because its year has just begun at the vernal equinox (12 March in the fourteenth century); it has completed half of its course through the zodiacal sign of Aries, the Ram (12 March–11 April), which would appear to indicate a date in early April, but the second half may be meant, since Chaucer specifies 18 April as the second day of the pilgrimage in the Introduction to the Man of Law's Tale (II.5).

hearts (So priketh hem nature in hir corages),
Thanne longen folk to goon on pilgrymages
professional pilgrims, foreign shores And palmeres for to seeken straunge strondes,
distant shrines, well known To ferne halwes, kouthe in sondry londes;
And specially from every shires ende
Of Engelond to Caunterbury they wende,
The holy blisful martir for to seke
helped, sick That hem hath holpen whan that they weere seeke.
It befell Bifel that in that sesoun on a day,
In Southwerk at the Tabard as I lay
Redy to weenden on my pilgrymage
To Caunterbury with ful devout corage,
At nyght was come into that hostelrye
Wel nyne and twenty in a compaignye
fallen by chance Of sondry folk, by aventure yfalle
In felaweshipe, and pilgrymes weere they alle,
That toward Caunterbury wolden ryde.
The chambres and the stables weeren wyde
accommodated And wel we weeren esed at the beste.
And shortly, whan the sonne was to reste,
So hadde I spoken with hem everichoon
That I was of hir felaweshipe anoon,
agreement And maade forward erly for to ryse,
where, tell To take oure wey ther as I yow devyse.
But nathelees, while I have tyme and space,
proceed Er that I ferther in this tale pace,
Me thynketh it acordant to resoun
To telle yow al the condicioun
Of eech of hem, so as it seemed me,
social rank And whiche they weere and of what degree
And eek in what array that they weere inne;
And at a knyght thanne wol I first bigynne.
A KNYGHT ther was, and that a worthy man,
That fro the tyme that he first bigan
To ryden out, he loved chivalrye,
generosity of spirit Trouthe and honour, fredom and curteisye.
war Ful worthy was he in his lordes werre,
farther And therto hadde he ryden, no man ferre,
As wel in Cristendom as hethenesse,
And evere honured for his worthynesse.
At Alisaundre he was whan it was wonne;
headed the table Ful ofte tyme he hadde the bord bigonne
national companies of knights Aboven alle nacions in Pruce;
campaigned In Lettow hadde he reysed and in Ruce,

17 **martir**: St Thomas Becket, archbishop of Canterbury, murdered on the steps of the high altar in Canterbury cathedral in 1170 at the instigation of Henry II, who resented the archbishop's intractability in matters of clerical privilege. His canonization in 1173, Henry's ostentatious repentance, and the establishment of his shrine as the major place of pilgrimage in England, bear witness to the church's determination to demonstrate that its power was not to be slighted.

43 The Knight is portrayed, somewhat nostalgically, as the representative of an idealized crusading chivalry. He has not fought for the English king in the French wars, but chiefly against Moslems on the shores of the Mediterranean (**the grete see**): in Egypt at the siege of Alexandria (1365), in southern Spain at the siege of Algeciras (1344) in Granada, on the Barbary coast at Beni Marin (**Belmarye**) and Tlemcen (**Tramyssene**), in Turkey at Ayash (**Lyeys**) and Antalya (**Satalye**) and in the service of the lord of Balat (**Palatye**). He has also fought in the campaigns in Prussia (**Pruce**), Lithuania (**Lettow**) and Russia (**Ruce**) against the Russian Orthodox Christians of the lands to the east.

No Cristen man so ofte of his degree.
In Gernade at the seege eek hadde he be
Of Algizir, and ryden in Belmarye.
At Lyeys was he and at Satalye
Whan they weere wonne, and in the grete see
military landing At many a noble arivee hadde he bee.
At mortal batailles hadde he been fiftene
And foghten for oure feyth at Tramyssene
jousting competitions In lystes thryes and ay slayn his foo.
This ilke worthy knyght hadde been also
Somtyme with the lord of Palatye
against Agayn another hethen in Turkye,
reputation And everemoore he hadde a sovereyn prys.
And thogh that he weere worthy, he was wys,
demeanour And of his poort as meke as is a mayde,
rudeness Ne nevere yet no vileynye he sayde
creature In al his lyf unto no manere wight.
true He was a verray parfit gentil knyght.
But for to tellen yow of his array,
horses Hise hors weere goode but he ne was nat gay.
Of fustian he wered a gypoun
Al bismotered with his haubergeoun,
journeying For he was laate comen from his viage
And wente for to doon his pilgrymage.
With hym ther was his sone, a yong SQUYER,
gallant knight-to-be A lovere and a lusty bachiler,
curled With lokkes crulle as they weere leyd in presse;
Of twenty yeer he was of age, I gesse.
moderate height Of his stature he was of evene lengthe
agile And wonderly delyvere and of greet strengthe.
on mounted expeditions And he hadde been somtyme in chivachye
In Flaundres, in Artoys and Picardye,
himself, time And born hym wel, as in so litel space,
lady's In hope to stonden in his lady grace.
Embroidered, meadow Embrouded was he, as it weere a meede
Al ful of fresshe floures, white and reede.
Syngynge he was or floytynge al the day:
He was as fressh as is the monthe of May.
Short was his gowne, with sleves longe and wyde.
Wel koude he sitte on hors and faire ryde.
compose He koude songes make and wel endite,
Joust Juste and eek daunce and wel portreye and write.
at night-time So hoote he loved that by nyghtertale
He slepte namoore than dooth a nyghtyngale.
eager to serve Curteys he was, lowely and servysable,
carved And carf biforn his fader at the table.
no more A YEMAN he hadde and servantz namo
At that tyme, for hym liste ryde so,

75–6 His tunic of coarse cloth was marked with the rust stains of his coat of mail.

86 Places in northern France which saw much fighting in the wars between England and France; the Squire's experience of combat is very different from his father's.

100 To carve before one's knight, still more one's father, was a great honour for a squire.

101 The Yeoman is in the service of the Knight as a forester (110) and master of the hunt.

And he was clad in coote and hood of greene.
sharp A sheef of pecok arwes, bright and keene,
properly Under his belt he bar ful thriftily
look after (Wel koude he dresse his takel yemanly:
drooped in flight His arwes drowped noght with fetheres lowe),
And in his hand he bar a myghty bowe.
close-cropped ('nut') A not-heed hadde he, with a broun visage.
Of wodecraft koude he wel al the usage.
archer's arm-guard Upon his arm he bar a gay bracer
And by his syde a swerd and a bokeler
And on that oother syde a gay daggere
Ornamented Harneysed wel and sharpe as poynt of spere,
bright A Cristofre on his brest of silver sheene.
shoulder strap An horn he bar, the bawdryk was of greene:
A forster was he, soothly, as I gesse.

Ther was also a Nonne, a PRIORESSE,
unaffected and demure That of hir smylyng was ful symple and coy;
Hir gretteste ooth was but by seinte Loy;
called And she was clepyd madame Eglentyne.
sang Ful wel she soong the servyce dyvyne,
Entuned in hir nose ful semely;
elegantly And Frenssh she spak ful faire and fetisly –
After the fashion of After the scole of Stratford at the Bowe,
For Frenssh of Parys was to hire unknowe.
mealtimes At mete wel ytaught was she withalle:
She leet no morsel from hir lyppes falle
Ne wette hir fyngres in hir sauce deepe.
take care Wel koude she carye a morsel and wel keepe
That no drope ne fille upon hir brest.
good manners, delight In curteisye was set ful muchel hir lest.
Hir over-lyppe wyped she so cleene
speck That in hir coppe ther was no ferthyng seene
grease Of grece, whan she dronken hadde hir draghte.
for her food, reached Ful semely after hir mete she raghte.
excellent deportment And sikerly she was of greet desport
bearing And ful plesaunt and amyable of port
the manners And peyned hire to countrefete chiere
dignified Of court, and been estatlich of manere
And to been holden digne of reverence.
moral sensibility But for to speken of hir conscience,

115 Cristofre: an image of St Christopher, worn as a lucky charm.
118 The Prioress is the head of a convent of nuns. There was a prosperous Benedictine nunnery at St Leonard's, near 'Stratford at the Bowe' (125). Chaucer had visited it.
120 *Seinte Loi* (Fr. *Eloi*) had a particular association with Benedictine nunneries and was perhaps further renowned for refusing to take oaths.
121 Eglentyne, 'briar rose', is not an obviously suitable name for a nun, but nunneries around London in the late fourteenth century often served to some extent as schools for rich girls, as places of retirement for ladies, and as homes for the unmarried and unmarriageable daughters of the well-off, who, having no urgent vocation, saw no cause to abandon all their courtly customs and manners for the cloister.
123 Entuned: 'intoned', an economical rather than an affected way of singing the divine office.
124–6 Stratford at the Bowe: two miles east of the city of London. The French typically spoken there was the Anglo-Norman dialect of French long spoken in England but thought of by sophisticated Londoners as provincial and *passé* in comparison with Parisian French.
127–36 The Prioress's concern for table-manners is given an added piquancy if one recalls that Chaucer's immediate source here is a passage in the *Roman de la Rose* (a widely disseminated thirteenth-century poetic allegory of love that had a profound influence on Chaucer), where an old bawd describes to a young woman how to make herself attractive to men (*RR* 13408–32).

She was so charitable and so pitous
She wolde wepe if that she sawe a mous
Caught in a trappe, if it weere deed or bledde.
Of smale houndes hadde she that she fedde
fine white bread With rosted flessh, or mylk and wastel-breed;
But soore wepte she if oon of hem weere deed
stick, painfully Or if men smoot it with a yerde smerte;
And al was conscience and tendre herte.
pleated Ful semely hir wympel pynched was,
well-formed Hir nose tretez, hir eyen greye as glas,
Hir mouth ful smal and therto softe and reed.
But sikerly she hadde a fair forheed,
hand-span It was almoost a spanne brood, I trowe,
certainly For, hardily, she was nat undergrowe.
elegant, aware Ful fetys was hir cloke, as I was war.
Of smal coral aboute hir arm she bar
string (rosary) A peyre of bedes, gauded al with greene,
And theron heeng a brooch of gold ful sheene
On which ther was first writen a crowned A
And after *Amor vincit omnia*.
Another NONNE with hire hadde she
That was hire chapeleyne, and preestes thre.
a fine one surpassing all others A MONK ther was, a fair for the maystrye,
An outrydere, that lovede venerye,
A manly man, to been an abbot able.
Ful many a deyntee hors hadde he in stable,
And whanne he rood, men myghte his brydel heere
Gyngle in a whistlynge wynd as cleere
And eek as loude as dooth the chapel belle
There as this lord is kepere of the selle.
The rule of Seint Maure or of Seint Beneyt,
strict Bycause that it was oold and somdeel streyt,
go (hang) This ilke Monk leet oolde thynges pace
the while And heeld after the newe world the space.
plucked He yaf noght of that text a pulled hen
That seith that hunterys been none holy men,
heedless of his rule Ne that a monk, whan he is recchelees,
Is likned til a fissh that is waterlees –
This is to seyn, a monk out of his cloystre.
But thilke text heeld he nat worth an oystre.
And I seyde his opynyon was good.

143–50 The Prioress's care for mice and for her little dogs is touchingly sentimental. Whether it is meant to seem excessively so, or to remind us of the absent poor who might more appropriately have exercised her 'conscience', is a matter for debate.

152–62 The Prioress is described in terms quite appropriate to a romance heroine, though the satire is gentle (her forehead should perhaps have been more discreetly covered). The coral rosary is fashionable, the brooch a touch extravagant, the motto ('Love conquers all') not necessarily ambiguous.

166 As an **outrydere**, that is, a monk licensed to travel alone on the monastery's business, looking after the administration of its estates, the Monk has many opportunities to come into contact with local landowners and enjoy their sport of hunting (**venerye**). His position as the head of a small outlying house or 'cell' (172) of his monastery gives him additional freedoms. He has acquired worldly tastes, and would like the old monastic rule of St Maurus and St Benedict (173) and St Augustine (187) to be adapted to his new lifestyle.

183–8 The comically misplaced enthusiasm for the Monk's self-serving opinion of the monastic rule is an example of the projection upon 'Chaucer the pilgrim', with all his naiveté, of views that no sensible person would share (see the famous essay by E.T. Donaldson, in *PMLA* 69 [1954], 928–36). He practically demolishes the Monk's case single-handed. But this is not the only narrative 'voice' in the General Prologue.

mad What sholde he studie and make hymselven wood
pore Upon a book in cloystre alwey to poure
work Or swynke with his handes and laboure
commands As Austyn bit? How shal the world be served?
Lat Austyn have his swynk to hym reserved!
a really enthusiastic huntsman Therfore he was a prykasour aryght:
Grehoundes he hadde as swift as fowel in flyght;
coursing Of prikyng and of huntyng for the haare
delight Was al his lust, for no cost wolde he spaare.
hemmed with fur I saugh his sleves purfiled at the hond
grey squirrel fur With grys, and that the fyneste of a lond,
And for to festne his hood under his chyn
intricately made He hadde of gold ywroght a ful curious pyn;
A love-knotte in the gretter ende ther was.
bald His heed was balled, that shoon as any glas,
And eek his face, as he hadde been enoynt.
condition He was a lord ful fat and in good poynt,
bulging His eyen steepe, and rollynge in his heed,
(see n.) That stemed as a fourneys of a leed,
Hise bootes souple, his hors in greet estaat.
Now certeynly he was a fair prelat.
He nas nat paale as is a forpyned goost:
A fat swan loved he best of any roost.
His palfrey was as broun as is a berye.
A FRERE ther was, a wantowne and a merye,
(self-)important A lymytour, a ful solempne man.
In alle the ordres foure is noon that kan
So muche of daliaunce and fair langage:
He hadde maked ful many a mariage
Of yonge wommen at his owene cost;
support Unto his ordre he was a noble post.
Ful wel biloved and famylier was hee
landowners With frankeleyns overal in his contree
And eek with worthy wommen of the town,
For he hadde power of confessioun,
As seyde hymself, moore than a curaat,
For of his ordre he was licenciaat.
Ful swetely herde he confessioun
And plesant was his absolucioun:
He was an esy man to yeve penaunce
offering Ther as he wiste to have a good pitaunce.
For unto a povre ordre for to yeve
confessed Is signe that a man is wel yshryve,
make bold to say For if he yaf, he dorste make avaunt,
He wiste that a man was repentaunt.
For many a man so hard is of his herte
he suffers painfully He may nat weepe, thogh that he soore smerte:

202 'That gleamed like a furnace-fire under a lead cauldron'.
209 The Friar is licensed to beg, as a **lymytour**, in a specific district, and also, as a **licentiaat** (220), to hear confession. He takes advantage of these freedoms to cultivate the rich people in his area and to give easy absolution to those who make generous offerings (222–4), to play the dignified arbitrator at **love-dayes** (258), days of out-of-court conciliation where the money changing hands often found its way into his, and (possibly) seducing girls and arranging safe marriages for them (212–13).
210 The four orders of friars were Dominicans, Franciscans, Carmelites and Austin friars.

Therfore instede of wepynge and preyeres
Men moote yeve silver to the povre freres.
dangling tip of his hood, stuffed His typet was ay farsed ful of knyves
And pynnes, for to yeven faire wyves.
pleasant voice And certeynly he hadde a murye noote:
fiddle Wel koude he synge and pleyen on a roote;
songs, absolutely, prize Of yeddynges he bar outrely the prys.
His nekke whit was as the flour-de-lys;
Therto he stroong was as a champioun.
He knew the tavernes wel in every town
innkeeper, barmaid And every hostiler and tappestere
Bet than a lazer or a beggestere,
For unto swich a worthy man as he
official position Acorded nat, as by his facultee,
To have with syke lazers aqueyntaunce.
be of any advantage It is nat honeste, it may noght avaunce,
poor people For to deelen with no swich poraille,
victuals (provisions) But al with riche and sellerys of vitaille.
And overal, ther as profit sholde aryse,
Curteys he was and lowely of servyse;
Ther was no man nowheer so vertuous.
He was the beste beggere of his hous,
And yaf a certeyn ferme for the graunt –
Noon of his bretheren cam ther in his haunt.
For thogh a wydwe hadde noght a sho,
So plesant was his '*In principio*'
Yet wolde he have a ferthyng er he wente:
'take', official income His purchaas was wel bettre than his rente.
lark about, puppy And rage he koude, as it weere right a whelp.
In love-dayes koude he muchel help,
For there he was nat lyk a cloystrer
With a threedbare cope, as is a povre scoler,
university teacher But he was lyk a maister or a pope.
short cloak Of double worstede was his semycope,
And rounded as a belle out of the presse.
affectation Somwhat he lypsed for his wantownesse
To make his Englyssh sweete upon his tonge,
And in his harpyng, whan that he hadde songe,
exactly Hise eyen twynkled in his heed aryght
As doon the sterres in the frosty nyght.
This worthy lymytour was cleped Huberd.
A MARCHANT was ther with a forked berd,
parti-coloured cloth In motlee, and hye on hors he sat,
Flemish Upon his heed a Flaundryssh bevere hat,
elegantly His bootes clasped faire and fetisly.

242 The leper and the poor beggar-woman were of course supposed to be the special charge of the friars, with their roving commission to bring the message of the gospels to the outcast and the parish-less.

252a–b He paid a sum of money for the exclusive privilege of begging in a certain area. The two lines, since they are not in Ellesmere and are therefore omitted in some influential modern editions, are conventionally numbered thus to avoid disruption.

254 *'In principio'*, 'in the beginning', is the opening of the book of Genesis and of the gospel of St John; it was a phrase used in solemn devotions, pronouncements and greetings.

270 The Merchant is an export/import trader, with perhaps a special interest in the wool trade (Middelburgh, on the Dutch coast, opposite Orwell in Essex, was the port of staple for wool 1384–8, that is, the only place through which English wool could officially enter Europe); he is also an international dealer in currency.

opinions Hise resons he spak ful solempnely,
Going on about Sownyng alwey th'encrees of his wynnyng.
protected above all things He woolde the see weere kept for anythyng
Bitwixen Myddelburgh and Orewelle.
Wel koude he in eschaunge sheeldes selle.
put his mind to things This worthy man ful wel his wit bisette:
Ther wiste no wight that he was in dette,
dignified So estaatly was he of his governaunce
financial dealing With his bargaynes and with his chevysaunce.
Forsoothe he was a worthy man withalle,
But sooth to seyn I noot how men hym calle.
A CLERC ther was of Oxenford also,
dedicated himself That unto logyk hadde longe ygo.
As leene was his hors as is a rake,
And he was noght right fat, I undertake,
gaunt But looked holwe and therto sobrely.
top coat Ful threedbare was his overeste courtepy,
For he hadde geten hym yet no benefice
Ne was so worldly for to have office.
he would rather For hym was levere have at his beddes heed
Twenty bookes clad in blak or reed
Of Aristotle and his philosophye
fiddle, psaltery (kind of harp) Than robes riche or fithele or gay sautrye.
although But al be that he was a philosophre,
Yet hadde he but litel gold in cofre;
get But al that he myghte of his frendes hente,
On bookes and on lernynge he it spente
And bisily gan for the soules preye
be a scholar Of hem that yaf hym wherwith to scoleye.
care Of studye took he moost cure and moost heede.
Noght oo word spak he moore than was neede
with due formality And that was spoke in forme and reverence
serious meaning And short and quyk and ful of heigh sentence.
All to do with Sownynge in moral vertu was his speche,
And gladly wolde he lerne and gladly teche.
prudent A SERGEAUNT OF LAWE, waar and wys,
That often hadde been at the Parvys,
Ther was also, ful ryche of excellence.
Discreet he was and of greet reverence –
He seemed swich, hise wordes weeren so wyse.
Justice he was ful often in assise
royal appointment, full knowledge By patente and by pleyn commissioun.
For his science and for his heigh renoun
Of fees and robes hadde he many oon.
land-buyer So greet a purchasour was nowher noon:

285 A clerk was a man of learning, whether a student or an ecclesiastic; students at Oxford were normally supposed to be preparing for the priesthood, though many did not take holy orders. Chaucer's Clerk has not been appointed to an ecclesiastical living, or **benefice** (291), nor is he worldly enough to accept secular preferment (**office**, 292). He seems to be the eternal graduate student.

297–8 Chaucer's little joke: the 'philosopher's stone' sought by alchemists was what would turn base metals into gold. One of the *Tales* (the Canon's Yeoman's Tale) is about the kind of scam that resulted.

309 A Sergeant was the highest rank of lawyer, with exclusive rights to plead in certain courts and to act as justice at the county assizes (314). His knowledge of the law makes Chaucer's Sergeant an expert in land-conveyancing, not, it appears, just for the benefit of others.

310 The **Parvys** was the porch of St Paul's cathedral, used as a meeting place for lawyers and their clients.

free from constraints on possession Al was fee symple to hym in effect;
invalidated on a technicality His purchasyng myghte nat been infect.
Nowher so bisy a man as he ther nas
And yet he seemed bisyer than he was.
(see n.) In termes hadde he caas and doomes alle
That from tyme of kyng William weere falle.
compose, draw up a legal document Therto he koude endite and make a thyng,
find a flaw in Ther koude no wight pynchen at his writyng;
fully by heart And every statut koude he pleyn by roote.
parti-coloured He rood but hoomly in a medlee coote,
belt, narrow stripes Girt with a ceynt of sylk, with barres smale;
Of his array telle I no lenger tale.
A FRANKELEYN was in his compaignye.
Whit was his berd as is the dayesye;
Of his complexcion he was sangwyn.
piece of bread Wel loved he by the morwe a sope in wyn:
wont To lyven in delyt was evere his wone,
For he was Epicurus owene sone,
pure pleasure That heeld opynyoun that pleyn delit
Was verray felicitee parfit.
An housholdere, and that a greet, was hee;
(patron saint of hospitality) Seint Julyan he was in his contree.
of the same high standard His breed, his ale, was alweys after oon;
stocked with wine A bettre envyned man was nevere noon.
Withouten bake mete was nevere his hous,
Of fressh fissh and flessh, and that so plentevous
It snewed in his hous of mete and drynke,
Of alle deyntees that men koude bithynke.
After the sondry sesons of the yeer
So chaunged he his mete and his soper.
bird-pen Ful many a fat partrych hadde he in muwe
pike, fish-pond And many a breem and many a luce in stuwe.
Wo was his cook but if his sauce weere
spicy Poynaunt and sharpe, and redy al his geere!
permanently in place Hys table dormaunt in his halle alway
Stood redy covered al the longe day.
At sessions ther was he lord and sire;
Ful ofte tyme he was knyght of the shire.
dagger, purse An anlaas and a gipser al of sylk
Heeng at his girdel, whit as morne mylk.
sheriff, county tax auditor A shirreve hadde he been, and countour.
county landowner Was nowheer swich a worthy vavasour.
An HABERDASSHERE and a CARPENTER,
weaver, carpet-maker A WEBBE, a DYERE, and a TAPYCER –
And they weere clothed alle in oo lyveree

323 'In proper legal written form he had all the cases and decisions'.

333 The 'complexion' or particular 'mix' of the four humours or bodily fluids (blood, phlegm, yellow or red bile, black bile) determined a person's 'temperament'. The Franklin is **sangwyn** because blood is dominant; he is by nature cheerful and generous.

336 **Epicurus** was a Greek philosopher who was popularly believed to advocate that pleasure was the chief goal of existence.

355–6 He presided at the local sessions as a justice of the peace, and had been often returned to parliament as one of the knights of the shire (there were also burgess-members).

363–4 Their **lyveree**, or distinctive costume, is not that of a trade-guild (they would belong to different guilds) but of a parish fraternity of a religious kind such as it was becoming prestigious (and politically more prudent) to belong to in the late fourteenth century.

Of a solempne and a greet fraternytee.
adorned Ful fressh and newe hir geere apyked was:
mounted Hir knyves weere chaped noght with bras
But al with silver, wroght ful cleene and wel,
Hir girdles and hir pouches everydel.
tradesman-citizen Wel seemed eech of hem a fair burgeys
guildhall, dais To sitten in a yeldehalle on a deys.
Everych, for the wisdom that he kan,
fit Was shaply for to been an alderman,
property, income For catel hadde they ynogh and rente,
And eek hir wyves wolde it wel assente;
And ellis certeyn weere they to blame.
It is ful fair to been yclepyd 'madame'
And goon to vigilies al bifore
And have a mantel realliche ybore.
for the occasion A COOK they hadde with hem for the nones
marrow-bones To boille the chiknes with the marybones
(spices) And poudre-marchaunt tart and galyngale.
Wel koude he knowe a draghte of London ale.
He koude rooste and seethe and broille and frye,
stews Maken mortreux and wel bake a pye.
But greet harm was it, as it thoughte me,
ulcerous sore That on his shyne a mormal hadde he.
As for thick milky chicken stew For blankmanger, that maade he with the beste.
dwelling far in the west A SHIPMAN was ther, wonyng fer by weste;
Dartmouth (in Devon) For aught I woot he was of Dertemouthe.
nag, as best he could He rood upon a rouncy, as he kouthe,
coarse cloth In a gowne of faldyng to the knee.
strap A daggere hangyng on a laas hadde he
Aboute his nekke, under his arm adown.
The hoote somer hadde maad his hewe al brown.
And certeynly he was a good felawe:
Ful many a draghte of wyn hadde he drawe
Bordeaux, merchant, slept Fro Burdeux-ward whil that the chapman sleepe.
Of nyce conscience took he no keepe:
If that he faught and hadde the hyer hond
By watre he sente hem hoom to every lond.
But of his craft to rekene wel his tydes,
currents His stremys and his daungers hym bisydes,
harbour, art of navigation His herberwe and his moone, his lodmenage,
Cartagena (in Spain) Ther was noon swich from Hulle to Cartage.
prudent in his undertakings Hardy he was and wys to undertake;
With many a tempest hadde his beerd been shake.
He knew alle the havenes, as they weere,
Fro Gootlond to the cape of Fynysteere,
inlet, Brittany And every cryke in Britaigne and in Spayne.
sailing-ship His barge yclepyd was the Mawdelayne.
With us ther was a DOCTOUR OF PHISYK,
In al this world ne was ther noon hym lyk,

377–8 They liked going at the head of the procession to church for the service on the eve of a great feast-day, and having the train of their cloak carried as if they were royalty.

387 **For** performs here a famously ambiguous function, as conjunction or preposition, which a modern editor, obliged to punctuate, must disambiguate.

408 Gotland is an island off the coast of Sweden; it was an important trading post.

To speken of phisyk and of surgerye.
For he was grounded in astronomye.
He kepte his pacient a ful greet deel
In houres by his magyk natureel.
Wel koude he fortunen the ascendent
Of hise ymages for his pacient.
He knew the cause of every maladye,
Weere it of hoot or coold or moyste or drye,
And where it engendred and of what humour;
practitioner He was a verray parfit practisour.
The cause yknowe, and of his harm the roote,
remedy Anoon he yaf the sike man his boote.
Ful redy hadde he hise apothecaryes
medicines To senden hym his drogges and his letuaryes,
For eech of hem maade oother for to wynne –
recently begun Hir frendshipe was noght newe to bigynne.
Wel knew he the oolde Esculapyus,
And Deyscorides and eek Rufus,
Olde Ypocras, Haly and Galyen,
Serapion, Razis and Avycen,
Averroys, Damascien and Constantyn,
Bernard and Gatesden and Gilbertyn.
Of his diete mesurable was hee,
For it was of no superfluytee
But of greet norissynge and digestible.
His studye was but litel on the Bible.
rich cloth of red and grey-blue In sangwyn and in pers he clad was al,
(kinds of silk) Lyned with taffata and with sendal,
moderate in spending And yet he was but esy of dispence:
He kepte that he wan in pestilence.
Since, health-giving drink For gold in phisyk is a cordial,
Therfore he loved gold in special.
A good WYF was ther of bisyde BATHE,
a pity But she was somdel deef, and that was scathe.
skill Of clooth-makynge she hadde swich an haunt
She passed hem of Ipres and of Gaunt.
In al the parysshe wyf ne was ther noon
offertory (offering made at the altar) That to the offrynge bifore hire sholde goon,
And if ther dide, certeyn so wrooth was shee
That she was out of alle charitee.
linen head-coverings, texture Hir coverchiefes ful fyne weere of grownd:
I dorste swere they weyeden ten pownd
That on a Sonday weeren upon hir heed.
Hir hosen weeren of fyn scarlet reed,

414–18 The reading of planets and stars in relation to the patient's horoscope was important in medieval medicine. The Doctor watched over (**kepte**) his patient with particular care during the hours he knew, from his astrological predictions (**magyk natureel**), to be critical. He knew how to calculate the position of the planets (417) so that his talismanic **ymages** would be of particular benefit to the patient.

420 The four 'humours' (see 333n) were different combinations of these four properties, related also to the four elements. For a succinct account of the doctrine of the elements and humours, see Klibansky (1964), pp. 3–15.

429–34 Medical authorities, from the Greek Aesculapius to the contemporary Englishman, Gilbertus Anglicus.

447–8 The area around Bath was the centre for an expanding cloth-industry, using fine Cotswold wool, in the late fourteenth century. It began to rival traditional cloth-making centres in Flanders such as Ypres and Ghent. It was not very common for a single or widowed woman to run an independent business enterprise, but it was not unusual.

tightly laced, supple Ful streyte yteyd, and shoes ful moyste and newe.
Boold was hir face and fair and reed of hewe.
She was a worthy womman al hir lyve:
Housbondes at chirche dore she hadde fyve,
Withouten oother compaignye in yowthe –
just now But therof nedeth noght to speke as nowthe.
And thries hadde she been at Jerusalem;
foreign She hadde passed many a straunge strem.
At Rome she hadde been, and at Boloyne,
In Galyce at Seint Jame, and at Coloyne:
She koude muchel of wandrynge by the weye.
(see n.) Gat-tothed was she, soothly for to seye.
easy-paced horse Upon an amblere esily she sat,
Ywympled wel, and on hir heed an hat
shield As brood as is a bokeler or a targe,
A foot-mantel aboute hir hypes large,
And on hir feet a peyre of spores sharpe.
chatter In felaweshipe wel koude she laughe and carpe.
as it happened Of remedies of love she knew, perchaunce,
the old tricks For she koude of that art the olde daunce.
A good man was ther of religioun
And was a povre PERSOUN OF A TOUN,
But riche he was of holy thoght and werk.
He was also a lerned man, a clerk,
That Cristes gospel trewely wolde preche;
His parisshens devoutly wolde he teche.
Benygne he was and wonder diligent
And in adversitee ful pacient
times And swich he was ypreved ofte sythes.
he was, excommunicate Ful looth weere hym to cursen for his tythes,
without doubt But rather wolde he yeven, out of doute,
Unto his povre parisshens aboute
Of his offrynge and eek of his substaunce;
He koude in litel thyng have suffisaunce.
Wyd was his parisshe, and houses fer asonder,
neglected But he ne lafte noght, for reyn ne thonder,
distress In siknesse nor in meschief to visite
farthest, great and small The ferreste in his parisshe, muche and lyte,
Upon his feet, and in his hond a staf.
This noble ensample to his sheep he yaf
That first he wroghte and afterward he taughte.
Out of the gospel he tho wordes caughte
metaphor And this figure he added eek therto,
That if gold ruste, what sholde iren do?
For if a preest be foul, on whom we truste,

459 The punctuation here can enliven the suggestiveness of the juxtaposition of the two lines of the couplet.

460 The binding pledge of a marriage was made at the church door, not at the communion service at the altar that sometimes followed.

465–6 Well-known places of pilgrimage: there was a miraculous image of the Virgin at Boulogne, the shrine of St James at Compostela in Galicia, in northern Spain, and the shrines of the Magi, St Ursula and the Eleven Thousand Virgins at Cologne.

468 **Gat-tothed**: with teeth set wide apart ('gate'-toothed).

478 The Parson is the holder of an ecclesiastical living, or benefice, as distinct from a vicar or a curate. One of his ideal attributes is that he does not hire such a deputy (507) and rush off to London to a comfortable job as a chantry-priest, saying masses for the souls of dead rich people (510), or as the chaplain of a religious fraternity (511).

an ignorant layman No wonder is a lewed man to ruste,
And shame it is, if a preest take keepe,
dirty A shiten shepherde and a clene sheepe.
Wel oghte a preest ensample for to yive
By his clennesse how that his sheep sholde lyve.
He sette noght his benefice to hyre
left And leet his sheep encombred in the myre
And ran to Londoun unto Seinte Poules
To seeken hym a chauntrye for soules,
retained (as a chaplain) Or with a breetherede to been withhoolde,
But dwelte at hoom and kepte wel his foolde,
So that the wolf ne maade it noght myscarye:
He was a sheepherde and noght a mercenarye.
And thogh he hooly weere and vertuous
contemptuous He was to synful men noght despitous
disdainful, haughty Ne of his speche daungerous ne digne
But in his techyng discreet and benygne.
To drawen folk to hevene with fairnesse,
By good ensample, this was his bisynesse.
if there were But it weere any persone obstynaat,
What-so he weere, of heigh or lowe estaat,
rebuke Hym wolde he snybben sharply for the nonys.
A bettre preest I trowe ther nowher noon ys.
looked for He wayted after no pompe and reverence
over-fastidious Ne maked hym a spyced conscience,
But Cristes loore and hise apostles twelve
He taughte, but first he folwed it hymselve.
With hym ther was a PLOWMAN, was his broother,
hauled, cartload That hadde ylad of donge ful many a foother;
A trewe swynkere and a good was he,
Lyvynge in pees and parfit charitee.
God loved he best with al his hoole herte
whether it pleased or pained him At alle tymes, thogh hym gamed or smerte,
And thanne his neighebore right as hymselve.
ditch and dig He wolde thresshe and therto dyke and delve,
For Cristes sake, for every povre wight,
pay Withouten hyre, if it laye in his myght.
His tythes payde he ful faire and wel,
own, possessions Bothe of his propre swynk and his catel.
sleeveless tunic, mare In a tabard he rood upon a mere.
Ther was also a REVE and a MILLERE,
A SOMONOUR and a PARDONER also,
A MAUNCIPLE and myself – ther weere namo.
fellow The MILLERE was a stout carl for the nones;
muscle Ful byg he was of brawen and eek of bones –
was very evident, everywhere That proeved wel, for overal ther he cam
(given as a prize) At wrastlynge he wolde have alwey the ram.
compactly built, a thick-set fellow He was short-shuldred, brood, a thikke knarre:
hinge Ther was no dore that he noolde heve of harre
by running at it Or breke it at a rennynge with his heed.
His beerd as any sowe or fox was reed
And therto brood, as thogh it weere a spaade.
top Upon the cope right of his nose he haade

hairs A werte, and theron stood a tuft of heerys,
ears Reede as the bristles of a sowes eerys;
nostrils Hise nosethirles blake weere and wyde.
A swerd and a bokeler baar he by his syde.
His mouth as greet was as a greet fourneys:
loud-mouth, teller of coarse tales He was a janglere, a golyardeys,
bawdiness And that was moost of synne and harlotryes.
extract three times the usual extra levy Wel koude he stelen corn and tollen thryes,
And yet he hadde a thombe of gold, pardee.
blue A whit coote and a blew hood wered hee.
make a noise with A baggepipe wel koude he blowe and sowne
And therwithal he broghte us out of towne.
A gentil MAUNCIPLE was ther of a Temple,
purchasers Of which achatours myghte take exemple
buying For to been wyse in byynge of vitaille;
on credit (tally) For wheither that he payde or took by taille,
(see n.) Algate he wayted so in his achaat
always ahead of the game That he was ay biforn and in good staat.
Now is nat that of God a ful greet grace
surpass That swich a lewed mannes wit shal pace
The wysdom of an heepe of lerned men?
Of maistres hadde he mo than thryes ten,
skilful That weeren of lawe expert and curious,
Of whiche ther weere a dozeyne in that hous
Worthy to been stywardes of rente and lond
Of any lord that is in Engelond,
own wealth To make hym lyve by his propre good
unless he were crazy In honour dettelees (but if he weere wood),
Or lyve as scarsly as hym lyst desire,
And able for to helpen al a shire
chance to happen In any caas that myghte falle or happe –
made fools of them all And yet this Maunciple sette hir aller cappe.
The REVE was a sclendre coleryk man.
His beerd was shave as neigh as ever he kan;
His heer was by his eerys ful rownd yshorn;
His top was dokked lyk a preest byforn.
Ful longe weere hise legges and ful leene,
Ylik a staf – ther was no calf yseene.
granary, grain-bin Wel koude he keepe a gerner and a bynne;
get the better of him Ther was noon auditour koude on him wynne.
Wel wiste he by the droghte and by the reyn
The yeldynge of his seed and of his greyn.
oxen, dairy-herd His lordes sheepe, his neet, his dayerye,
horses, livestock His swyn, his hors, his stoor and his pultrye

563 Alluding to the proverb, 'An honest miller hath a golden thumb' (i.e. there aren't any).

567 The Manciple is the steward and purchaser of provisions for a **Temple** or inn of court (a place in London where lawyers and law-students lived, learnt and practised).

571 'Always he was so sharply on the look-out in his purchasing'.

587 The Reeve is the foreman or chief bailiff of a large estate, with many supervisory and financial responsibilities. His office encourages him to think well of himself and guard his station jealously. He is **coleryk**, that is, dominated by the humour of choler (see 333n, 420n); such people were thought to be, amongst other things, clever and ill-tempered.

588–90 The close-shaven (therefore stubbly) beard, the hair cut in a round pudding-basin (hemispherical) shape at ear-level, and the hair above the forehead cropped short almost like a priest's tonsure, are signs of the Reeve's clerkly and social aspirations, as well as his 'close' and retentive nature.

Was hoolly in this Reves governynge,
And by his covenant yaf the rekenynge
Syn that his loord was twenty yeer of age.
catch him in arrears on his accounts Ther koude no man brynge hym in arrerage.
herdsman, servant Ther nas baillyf, ne hierde, nor oother hyne
cheating That he ne knew his sleyghte and his covyne:
afraid They weere adrad of hym as of the deeth.
dwelling His wonyng was ful faire upon an heeth;
With greene trees shadwed was his place.
He koude bettre than his lord purchace;
provided Ful riche he was astoored pryvely.
His lord wel koude he plesen subtilly,
lend, his (master's) own money To yeve and leene hym of his owene good
And have a thank and yet a coote and hood.
craft In youthe he lerned hadde a good mister:
workman He was a wel good wrighte, a carpenter.
horse This Reve sat upon a wel good stot
dappled, called That was a pomely gray and highte Scot.
grey-blue cloth A long surcote of pers upon he haade
And by his syde he baar a rusty blaade.
Of Northfolk was this Reve of which I telle,
Bawdswell (in Norfolk) Bisyde a town men clepyn Baldeswelle.
with his gown tucked up in his belt Tukked he was as is a frere aboute
And evere he rood the hyndreste of oure route.
A SOMONOUR was ther with us in that place
That hadde a fyr-reed cherubynnes face,
For sawceflewm he was, with eyen narwe,
And hoot he was and lecherous as a sparwe,
scabby, wispy With scaled browes blake and pyled berd.
Of his visage children weere aferd.
lead monoxide nor sulphur Ther nas quyk-silver, lytarge ne brymstoon,
borax, white lead Borace, ceruce, ne oille of tartre noon,
Ne oynement that wolde clense and byte,
pustules That hym myghte helpen of his whelkes whyte
Nor of the knobbes sittynge on his chekes.
Wel loved he garlek, oynons and eek lekes
And for to drynke strong wyn, reed as blood;
Thanne wolde he speke and crye as he were wood,
And whan that he wel dronken hadde the wyn
Thanne wolde he speke no word but Latyn.
A fewe termes hadde he, two or thre,
That he hadde lerned out of som decree –
No wonder is, he herde it al the day,
And eek ye knowe wel how that a jay
shout 'Walter!' Kan clepen 'Watte!' as wel as kan the pope.
But who-so koude in oother thyng hym grope,
Thanne hadde he spent al his philosophie;

623 The Summoner is a church official responsible for issuing summonses to people to attend the ecclesiastical court, where they would be arraigned for adultery, fornication and other non-criminal acts. There were many opportunities for blackmail (663–5) and accepting bribes (649–51).

624–5 The suggestion is of the fiery red faces of the cherubim, inflamed with divine love, in paintings of the angelic hierarchy. The Summoner's face is covered with pimply red blotches (**sawceflewm**) and swollen up so that his eyes look out of narrow slits.

633 It is not difficult to see a connection between the Summoner's diet and his problems with his complexion (he is suffering from a disease known as *alopicia*).

Ay '*Questio quid juris*' wolde he crye.
rascal He was a gentil harlot and a kynde;
A bettre felawe sholde men noght fynde.
He wolde suffre for a quart of wyn
A good felawe to have his concubyn
A twelf-monthe, and excusen hym at the fulle;
trick someone simple Ful pryvely a fynch eek koude he pulle.
anywhere And if he foond owher a good felawe
He wolde techen him to have noon awe
archdeacon's excommunication In swich caas of the ercedeknes curs,
But if a mannes soule were in his purs,
For in his purs he sholde ypunysshed be.
'Purs is the ercedeknes helle,' seyde he.
But wel I woot he lyed right indede:
Of cursyng oghte ech gilty man him drede,
slay, absolution For curs wol sle right as assoillyng savyth –
(see n.) And also war hym of a *Significavit*.
in his power, at his own pleasure In daunger hadde he at his owene gyse
The yonge gerles of the diocise
secrets, their only source of advice And knew hir conseil and was al hir reed.
A gerland hadde he set upon his heed,
alehouse-sign As greet as it were for an ale-stake;
round flat loaf A bokeler hadde he maad hym of a cake.
With hym ther rood a gentil PARDONER
companion Of Rouncyval, his freend and his comper,
That streight was comen fro the court of Rome.
Ful loude he soong 'Com hyder, love, to me!'
strong bass This Somonour baar to hym a styf burdoun,
Was nevere trompe of half so greet a soun.
This Pardoner hadde heer as yelow as wex,
hank But smothe it heeng as dooth a stryke of flex;
In thin strands By ounces henge his lokkes that he hadde
And therwith he his shuldres overspradde;
in straggling separate strands But thynne it lay, by colpons oon and oon.
But hood, for jolitee, wered he noon,
tucked away, pouch For it was trussed up in his walet.
in the latest fashion Hym thoughte he rood al of the newe jet;
(see n.) Dischevelee, save his cappe he rood al bare.
Swiche glarynge eyen hadde he as an hare.
A vernycle hadde he sowed upon his cappe,
His walet biforn hym in his lappe,
Chock-full Bretful of pardoun comen from Rome al hoot.

646 When really drunk (637), he parrots incessantly a common phrase from the court-room, 'The question is, what point of law (applies)?'.

659–61 Chaucer's voice here seems less elusive than usual.

662 'And also let him beware of an order for imprisonment'.

663–5 **yonge gerles**: young people (not necessarily female) who have fallen foul of the courts and whom the Summoner 'protects' (perhaps by pimping).

669 The Pardoner is licensed by the pope to carry 'indulgences', granting remission of earthly penance (such as fasts, vigils, extra prayers) to those who are truly penitent. Indulgences are a free gift from the church's treasury of merit, but the grateful penitent's offering to the church came to be thought of as part of the transaction. The Pardoner encourages this belief, and also the idea that the indulgences are pardons, that grant *forgiveness* of sin.

670 **Rouncyval** is the hospital of St Mary Rouncesval at Charing Cross in London, a cell of the house of Roncesvalles in the Pyrenees. It is the base from which the Pardoner is said to operate, and was in fact somewhat notorious in the 1380s and 1390s.

683 'With hair hanging down, save for his (skull-)cap he rode all bare-headed'.

685 A **vernycle** was a badge with an image of Christ's face made in imitation of the veil miraculously so imprinted when given by St Veronica to Christ to wipe his face on the way to Calvary.

thin and high-pitched A voys he hadde as smal as hath a goot.
No berd hadde he, ne nevere sholde have:
As smothe it was as it were late yshave –
I trowe he were a geldyng or a mare.
But of his craft, fro Berwik into Ware
Ne was ther swich another pardoner.
bag, pillow-case For in his male he hadde a pilwe-beer
Which hat he seyde was Oure Lady veyl;
piece He seyde he hadde a gobet of the seyl
That Seint Peter hadde whan that he wente
took up Upon the see, til Jesu Crist hym hente;
cross, brass alloy He hadde a cros of latoun ful of stones
And in a glas he hadde pigges bones.
But with thise relykes, whan that he foond
parson, in the country A povre person dwellyng upon lond,
Upon a day he gat hym moore moneye
Than that the persoun gat in monthes tweye;
tricks And thus with feyned flaterye and japes
dupes He made the person and the peple his apes.
But trewely to tellen at the laste,
He was in chirche a noble ecclesiaste.
Wel koude he rede a lesson and a storie,
(see n.) But alderbest he soong an offertorie;
For wel he wiste, whan that soong was songe,
smooth ('file') He moste preche and wel affyle his tonge
To wynne silver, as he ful wel koude;
Therfore he soong the muryerly and loude.
briefly Now have I told you soothly, in a clause,
Th'estaat, th'array, the nombre and eek the cause
Why that assembled was this compaignye
In Southwerk at this gentil hostelrye
(another pub) That highte the Tabard, faste by the Belle.
But now is tyme to yow for to telle
conducted ourselves How that we baren us that ilke nyght,
Whan we weere in that hostelrye alyght,
journey And after wol I telle of oure viage
And al the remenant of oure pilgrymage.
But first I pray yow of youre curteisye
attribute to, rudeness That ye n'arette it noght my vileynye
Though that I pleynly speke in this matere,
behaviour To telle yow hir wordes and hir cheere,
exactly Ne thogh I speke hir wordes proprely.
For this ye knowen al so wel as I:
Who-so shal telle a tale after a man

691 The insinuation, whether of eunuchry, effeminacy or homosexuality, or all three, is often taken as a 'fact' about the Pardoner, and much evidence adduced to support the inference, some of it dubious, such as the suggestion of a homosexual relationship with the Summoner in the supposed *double entendre* of **styf burdoun** (673). But clearly, with his glaring eyes, high-pitched voice and beardlessness, there is something odd about him.

692 Berwick, on the Scottish border, and Ware, just north of London, towns at either end of the Great North Road.

710 'But best of all he sang the anthem sung at the offering'.

725–42 The elaborate apology for retelling the pilgrims' tales exactly as they told them, even at the expense of indecorousness, is obviously tongue-in-cheek; but it is also a way of talking obliquely about a kind of 'truth to experience' that Chaucer, within the aesthetic of representation of his day, dominated by the moral demands placed upon the *auctor* to be full of 'sentence', would have found it difficult to speak about more directly.

close He moot reherce as neigh as evere he kan
be his job Everich a word, if it be in his charge,
Though he speak, broadly Al speke he never so rudeliche and large,
Or ellis he moot telle his tale untrewe
Or feyne thyng or fynde wordes newe.
He may noght spare, althogh he weere his brother;
He moot as wel seye o word as another.
plainly Crist spak hymself ful brode in holy writ –
And wel ye woot no vileynye is it.
Ek Plato seith, who-so kan hym rede,
'The wordes mote be cosyn to the dede.'
Also I pray yow to foryeve it me,
Though I have Al have I nat set folk in hir degree
Here in this tale, as that they sholde stonde:
My wit is short, ye may wel understonde.
Good cheer Greet cheere made oure Hoost us everichon
And to the souper sette he us anon.
He served us with vitaille at the beste;
it pleased us Strong was the wyn, and wel to drynke us leste.
suitable A semely man oure Hoost was withalle
master of ceremonies For to been a marchal in an halle.
prominent A large man he was with eyen stepe –
A fairer burgeys was ther noon in Chepe –
Boold of his speche and wys and wel ytaught,
And of manhode hym lakkede right naught.
Eke therto he was right a murye man,
And after souper pleyen he bigan
And spak of murthe amonges othere thynges
(Whan that we hadde maad oure rekenynges),
And seyde thus: 'Now, lordes, trewely,
Ye been to me right welcome, hertely;
For by my trouthe, if that I shal nat lye,
I seigh noght this yeer so murye a compaignye
place of lodging Atones in this herberwe as is now.
Fayn wolde I doon yow myrthe, wiste I how,
And of a myrthe I am right now bithoght
pleasure To doon yow ese, and it shal coste noght.
'Ye goon to Caunterbury – God yow spede,
grant, reward The blisful martir quyte yow youre mede!
And wel I woot, as ye goon by the weye,
tell tales Ye shapen yow to talen and to pleye,
For trewely, confort ne murthe is noon
To ryde by the weye domb as stoon;
And therfore wol I maken yow desport,
first As I seyde erst, and doon yow som confort.
And if yow liketh alle by oon assent
For to stonden at my juggement
And for to werken as I shal yow seye,

741–2 A reference to the medieval commonplace that style must be appropriate to content, for which Plato is a mere hearsay authority.

747 The Host is named as Herry Bailly in the Cook's Prologue (I.4358). There was a real innkeeper of this name in the London records for 1381–2.

754 **Chepe** (modern Cheapside) was the main shopping street and market area of London.

Tomorwe, whan ye ryden by the weye,
father's Now, by my fader soule that is deed,
Unless But ye be murye I wol yeve yow myn heed!
Holde up youre hondes, withouten moore speche.'
seek Oure conseil was nat longe for to seche;
make difficulties Us thoughte it was nat worth to make it wys
discussion And graunted hym withouten moore avys
decision And bade hym seye his voirdit as hym leste.
'Lordynges,' quod he, 'now herkneth for the beste;
But taketh it noght, I pray yow, in desdeyn.
This is the poynt, to speken short and pleyn,
That ech of yow, to shorte with oure weye,
In this viage shal tellen tales tweye –
To Caunterbury-ward, I mene it so –
And homward he shal tellen othere two,
Of aventures that whilom have bifalle.
And which of yow that bereth hym best of alle –
That is to seyn, that telleth in this cas
(see n.) Tales of best sentence and moost solas –
at the expense of all of us Shal have a souper at oure aller cost
Here in this place, sittynge by this post,
Whan that we come agayn fro Caunterbury.
And for to make yow the moore mury
I wol myself goodly with yow ryde,
Right at myn owene cost, and be youre gyde;
oppose And who-so wole my juggement withseye
Shal paye al that we spende by the weye.
agree And if ye vouchesauf that it be so,
Tel me anoon, withouten wordes mo,
prepare And I wol erly shape me therfore.'
This thyng was graunted and oure othes swore
With ful glad herte, and preyden hym also
That he wolde vouchesauf for to do so
And that he wolde been oure governour
record-keeper And of oure tales juge and reportour
And sette a souper at a certeyn prys
wish And we wol ruled been at his devys
in every respect In heigh and logh; and thus by oon assent
We been acorded to his juggement.
fetched And therupon the wyn was fet anoon;
We dronken, and to reste wente echon,
Withouten any lenger taryynge.
A-morwe, whan that day bigan to sprynge,
of us all Up roos oure Hoost and was oure aller cok
And gadred us togydres in a flok
walking pace And forth we ryden a litel moore than pas
Unto the wateryng of Seint Thomas;
And there oure Hoost bigan his hors areste
And seyde, 'Lordes, herkneth, if yow leste.
call it to your mind Ye woot youre forward and it yow recorde:

798 sentence and … solas: 'serious content and power of giving pleasure'.

826 A brook, where horses would be watered, about two miles out of London on the Old Kent Road.

If even-song and morwe-song acorde,
Lat se now who shal telle the firste tale.
As evere mote I drynke wyn or ale,
Who-so be rebel to my juggement
Shal paye for al that by the wey is spent.
(see n.) Now draweth cut, er that we ferrer twynne:
He which that hath the shorteste shal bigynne.
'Sire Knyght,' quod he, 'my mayster and my lord,
decision Now draweth cut, for that is myn acord.
Cometh neer,' quod he, 'my lady Prioresse,
And ye, sire Clerc, lat be youre shamefastnesse,
Ne studieth noght; ley hond to, every man!'
Anoon to drawen every wight bigan,
And shortly for to tellen as it was,
Were it by aventure, or sort, or cas,
The sothe is this: the cut fil to the Knyght,
Of which ful blithe and glad was every wight,
And telle he moste his tale, as was resoun,
agreement By forward and by composicioun,
As ye han herd; what nedeth wordes mo?
And whan this goode man saugh that it was so,
Being one that As he that wys was and obedient
To kepe his forward by his free assent,
He seyde, 'Syn I shal bigynne the game,
What, welcome be the cut, in Goddes name!
Now lat us ryde, and herkneth what I seye.'
And with that word we ryden forth oure weye
And he bigan with right a murye cheere
His tale anoon and seyde as ye may heere.

{The Knight's Tale follows}

The Miller's Prologue and Tale

The Miller's Prologue

The Host has his plans for the management of the tale-telling competition and, after the Knight has finished his noble and tragic philosophical romance of the love of Palamon and Arcite for Emelye, he turns to the Monk, as in some sense the next highest in the social hierarchy, for the next tale. But at this point his well-laid plans begin to come unstuck, and the spontaneous drama of the pilgrimage takes over, as the drunken and unruly Miller claims the stage. His promised tale causes immediate offence to the Reeve, who vows revenge and so provides a dramatic set-up for the next tale following. The pilgrimage begins to generate its own apparently unsupervised drama; the Host stands helplessly by. (Line-numbering from Fragment I, which continues.)

Whan that the Knyght had thus his tale ytoold,
In al the compaignie nas ther yong ne oold
That he ne seyde it was a noble storie
recall And worthy for to drawen to memorie,
specially And namely the gentils everichon.
As I may live Oure Hoost lough and swoor, 'So moot I gon,

835 'Now draw lots (sticks or straws of different lengths), before we go any further'.
844 Chance, luck and destiny may have played less part than the Host's deferential handling of things to ensure that the Knight, as the highest in rank, tells the first story, as is appropriate in the 'nature of things'.

unbuckled, bag This gooth aright! Unbokeled is the male.
Lat se now who shal telle another tale,
For trewely the game is wel bigonne.
Now telleth ye, sire Monk, if that ye konne,
set against in competition Somwhat to quite with the Knyghtes tale.'
because of being drunk The Millere, that for dronken was al pale,
with difficulty So that unnethe upon his hors he sat,
doff (as a mark of respect) He nolde avalen neither hood ne hat,
Ne abiden no man for his curteisye,
But in Pilates voys he gan to crye,
(Christ's) arms And swoor, 'By armes, and by blood and bones,
I kan a noble tale for the nones
With which I wol now quite the Knyghtes tale.'
Oure Hoost saugh that he was dronke of ale,
And seyde, 'Abyde, Robyn, leeve brother;
Som bettre man shal telle us first another.
properly Abyde, and lat us werken thriftily.'
'By Goddes soule,' quod he, 'that wol nat I,
For I wol speke or elles go my wey.'
in the devil's name Oure Hoost answerde, 'Tel on, a devele way!
Thow art a fool, thy wit is overcome.'
one and all 'Now herkneth,' quod the Millere, 'alle and some!
But first I make a protestacioun
That I am dronke – I knowe it by my soun.
say amiss And therfore if that I mysspeke or seye,
Blame it on Wite it the ale of Southwerk, I preye.
(see n.) For I wol telle a legende and a lyf
Bothe of a carpenter and of his wyf,
made a fool of the carpenter How that a clerk hath set the wrightes cappe.'
Stop your loud mouth The Reve answerde and seyde, 'Stynt thy clappe!
Lat be thy lewed dronken harlotrye.
It is a synne and eek a greet folye
injure To apeyren any man or hym diffame,
ill-fame And eek to bryngen wyves in swich fame.
Thow mayst ynow of othere thynges seyn.'
in reply This dronken Millere spak ful soone ageyn
And seyde, 'Leeve brother Osewold,
Who hath no wyf, he is no cokewold.
But I sey nat therfore that thow art oon:
Ther been ful goode wyves many oon
And evere a thousand goode ayeyns oon badde –
are mad That knowestow wel thyself, but if thou madde.
Why artow angry with my tale now?
I have a wyf, pardee, as wel as thow,
Yet nolde I, for the oxen in my plough,
Take upon me moore than ynough,
one (i.e. a cuckold) As demen of myself that I were oon;

3124 **in Pilates voys**: the loud thick voice in which Pontius Pilate delivered his bombastic speeches in the medieval plays of the Trial of Jesus (such as we know them from the fifteenth-century mystery-play cycles).

3141 **legende**: saint's life (i.e. story with a martyrdom).

3144 The Reeve, in his profession as a farm manager, would not be a friend of millers; but he had also been in his youth, as we are told in GP 614, a carpenter, and he suspects the Miller is getting at him. It may be that we are supposed to understand that they know each other of old: unusually, they address each other by name.

(see n.) I wol bileeve wel that I am noon.
An housbonde shal noght been inquisityf
secrets (pun on 'private parts') Of Goddes pryvetee nor of his wyf.
God's plenty So he may fynde Goddes foyson there,
Of the remenant nedeth noght enquere.'
What sholde I moore seyn but this Millere
He nolde his wordes for no man forbere,
But tolde his cherles tale in his manere.
I regret that I have to repeat it Me athynketh that I shal reherce it heere.
And therfore every gentil wight I preye,
Demeth noght for Goddes love that I seye
Of yvel entente, but for I moot reherse
Hir tales alle, be they bet or werse,
Or ellis falsen som of my matere.
And therfore, whoso list it noght yhere,
Turne over the leef and chese another tale;
of every sort For he shal fynde ynowe, grete and smale,
historically true, has to do with Of storial thyng that toucheth gentilesse
And eek moralitee and holynesse.
Blameth noght me if that ye chese amys.
The Millere is a cherl – ye knowe wel this;
So was the Reve and othere manye mo,
And harlotrye they tolden bothe two.
Think about it Avyseth yow, and put me out of blame;
take a joke seriously And eek men shal noght maken ernest of game.

The Miller's Tale

The Miller's Tale is a *fabliau*, that is, a tale of low sexual intrigue and trickery with a cast of characters that usually includes a petit-bourgeois husband, often old, a wife who has some degree of unfulfilled sexual appetite, and an intruder on the domestic scene who is usually a cleric or student or other religious. The latter role is 'doubled' in the brilliant double plot (of the predicted flood and the 'misdirected kiss') of the Miller's Tale. Tales such as this were popular in court and aristocratic circles (Boccaccio tells a number in the *Decameron*, with its idyllic courtly and garden setting) and are not necessarily to be thought of as lower-class entertainment. Chaucer's attribution of such tales to the 'cherles', on the basis that dirty stories are appropriate to the lower classes, may seem appropriate to a Victorian sensibility, but is in fact highly innovative. The Miller, however, is important only as a cover for Chaucer, giving him the freedom (maybe a freedom that it was necessary for him explicitly to win) to explore the rich comic potential of such stories. The Miller is soon forgotten: the voice is patrician (see 3268–70), lyrical, genially ruthless. Chaucer holds without flinching to the controlling ethos of *fabliau*: there are no things in life more important than survival and the satisfaction of appetite, and no more certain way of being assured of them than by being *smart*. *Fabliau* thus stands as the balanced opposite of 'romance', as the Miller's Tale stands juxtaposed to the Knight's Tale, which is also about the love of two men for the same woman: in *fabliau* the exhortation is not to be true, loyal, generous and courteous, but to be *clever*.

Once Whilom ther was dwellyng in Oxenford
churl, lodgers, as boarders A riche gnof, that gestes heeld to bord,
And of his craft he was a carpenter.
With hym ther was dwellynge a povre scoler,

3162–6 'I do not want to burden myself even with the thought that I might be a cuckold (even though my oxen might remind me of the horns cuckolds are supposed to wear); as long as I don't know, and as long as I get my share, where's the harm?'

3171–86 Chaucer excuses himself, in this beautifully ironical passage, for telling what we presume will be a low coarse tale by reminding us (cf. GP 725–42) of his obligation to be an accurate reporter of all that happened on the pilgrimage. He does not have a choice; but the reader does, and can turn the leaf if the prospect of scatology offends. Chaucer knows what kind of invitation this is.

the arts curriculum at university Hadde lerned art, but al his fantasie
learn Was turned for to leere astrologie,
(see n.) And koude a certeyn of conclusions
analysis To demen by interrogacions,
specific (astrologically significant) If that men axed hym, in certein houres
Whan that men sholde have droghte or ellis shoures,
Or if men axed hym what shal bifalle
Of every thyng – I may nat rekene hem alle.
courteous (gentle, 'handy') This clerk was clepyd hende Nicholas.
secret, pleasure Of derne love he koude and of solas,
cunning, secretive And therto he was sleigh and ful pryvee
And lyk a mayde meke for to see.
A chambre hadde he in that hostelrie
Allone withouten any compaignye,
daintily bedecked, sweet-smelling Ful fetisly ydight with herbes swoote,
And he hymself as sweete as is the roote
setwall (a gingery spice) Of lycorys or any cetuale.
(Ptolemy's treatise on astrology) His Almageste, and bookes grete and smale,
astrolabe, belonging to His astrelabye, longynge for his art,
(see n.) His augrym stones layen faire apart
On shelves couched at his beddes heed,
linen-chest, coarse red cloth His presse ycovered with a faldyng reed;
psaltery (kind of triangular harp) And al above ther lay a gay sautrye
On which he made a-nyghtes melodye
So swetely that al the chambre roong;
And *Angelus ad virginem* he soong,
the King's Tune (not identified) And after that he soong the 'Kynges Note' –
Ful often blissed was his murye throte.
And thus this swete clerk his tyme spente
(see n.) After his freendes fyndyng and his rente.
This carpenter hadde wedded newe a wyf
Which that he lovede moore than his lyf;
Of eighteteene yeer she was of age.
Jalous he was and heeld hire narwe in cage,
For she was wilde and yong, and he was old
likely to be And demed hymself been lyk a cokewold.
He knew nat Catoun, for his wit was rude,
instructed that one That bad man sholde wedde his similitude.
state in life Men sholde wedden after hir estaat,
For youthe and elde is often at debaat.
But sith that he was fallen in the snare,
He moste endure, as oother folk, his care.
Fair was this yonge wyf, and therwithal
weasel, delicate and slender As any wesele hir body gent and smal.
belt, with vertical stripes A ceynt she werde, barred al of sylk,
apron A barmclooth as whit as morne mylk

3193 'And knew a certain number of logical propositions'.
3210 **augrym stones**: stones with Arabic numerals (algorism) for use on an abacus.
3216 ***Angelus ad virginem***: 'The angel to the Virgin (came)', an Annunciation carol that has been thought comically to prefigure Nicholas's sudden accosting of Alison (3271–81).
3220 'According to what his friends provided and his income'.
3227 **Catoun**: Cato was the supposed author of a series of 'Distichs', short Latin verse apophthegms taught in elementary classes in grammar schools.
3233–70 Detailed descriptions of women were a common rhetorical trope of medieval poetry, usually formal and feature-by-feature. Chaucer's version of the convention is minutely observed, subtle, suggestive, comical and yet seductive ('the queen of a sailor's dreams').

loins, gore (sewn-in strip of cloth) Upon hir lendes, ful of many a goore.
(see n.) Whit was hir smok, and broyden al bifoore
around the neck-line And eek bihynde, on hir coler aboute,
Of col-blak silk, withinne and eek withoute.
ribbons, cap The tapes of hir white voluper
same colour as Were of the same sute of hir coler,
headband Hir filet brood of sylk and set ful hye,
flirtatious And sikerly she hadde a likerous iye;
closely plucked Ful smale ypulled were hir browes two
sloe And tho were bent and blake as is a sloo.
She was ful moore blisful on to see
early-ripe pear Than is the newe pere-jonette tree,
And softer than the wolle is of a wether;
And by her girdel heeng a purs of lether,
spangled with brass Tasseled with silk and perled with latoun.
In al this world, to seken up and doun,
imagine There nys no man so wys that koude thenche
popsy So gay a popelote or swich a wenche.
Ful brighter was the shynyng of hir hewe
gold coin Than in the Tour the noble yforged newe.
lively But of hir soong, it was as loude and yerne
As any swalwe sittyng on a berne.
Therto she koude skippe and make game,
As any kyde or calf folwynge his dame.
ale and honey drink, mead Hir mouth was sweete as bragot or the meeth
Or hoord of apples leyd in hey or heeth.
Skittish, high-spirited Wynsynge she was as is a joly colt,
(see n.) Loong as a mast and uprighte as a bolt.
low A brooch she baar upon hir loue coler
raised centre of a shield As brood as is the boos of a bokeler;
Hir shoes were laced on hir legges hye.
primrose, a real poppet She was a prymerole, a piggesnye,
lay For any lord to leggen in his bedde,
Or yet for any good yemen to wedde.
again Now, sire, and eft, sire, so bifel the cas
That on a day this hende Nicholas
have fun Fil with this yonge wyf to rage and pleye,
Whil that hir housbonde was at Osneye
full of tricks (As clerkes ben ful subtil and ful queynte),
(see glossary) And pryvely he caughte hire by the queynte
And seyde, 'Ywys, but if ich have my wille,
secret, sweetheart, die For derne love of thee, lemman, I spille.'
And heeld hire harde by the haunchebones
at once And seyde, 'Lemman, love me al atones
Or I wol dyen, also God me save!'
(see n.) And she sproong as a colt dooth in the trave
twisted And with hir heed she wryed faste awey.
She seyde, 'I wol nat kisse thee, by my fey!
Wy, lat be, quod ich, lat be, Nicholas,

3238 Her smock (a partly visible undergarment) was embroidered at front and back.
3256 **Tour**: the Tower of London, where the mint was.
3264 **uprighte as a bolt**: straight as an arrow for a crossbow.
3274 Osney, very close to Oxford (and now part of it), with a house of Augustinian canons where John, as we hear later (3400, 3659), was doing some carpentering.
3282 **trave**: frame for holding a restive horse to be shod.

oh help Or I wol crye "out, harrow!" and "allas!"
Do wey youre handes for youre curteisye!'
This Nicholas gan mercy for to crye
pressed his attentions so earnestly And spak so faire and profred hym so faste
That she hir love hym graunted atte laste
And swoor hir ooth by Seint Thomas of Kent
That she wolde been at his comaundement
opportunity Whan that she may hir leyser wel espie.
'Myn housbonde is so ful of jalousie
be on guard That but ye waite wel and been pryvee
I woot right wel I nam but deed,' quod she.
secretive 'Ye moste been ful derne as in this cas.'
'Nay, therof care thee noght,' quod Nicholas.
badly employed his time 'A clerk hadde lutherly biset his while
But if he koude a carpenter bigyle.'
And thus they been acorded and ysworn
watch out for To waite a tyme, as I have told biforn.
Whan Nicholas hadde doon thus everydel
patted, loins And thakked hire aboute the lendes wel,
He kiste hir sweete and taketh his sautrye
And pleyeth faste, and maketh melodye.
Thanne fil it thus, that to the parissh chirche,
Cristes owene werkes for to wirche,
holy day This goode wyf wente on an haliday.
Hir forheed shoon as bright as any day,
left So was it wasshen whan she leet hir werk.
Now was ther of that chirche a parissh clerk,
The which that was yclepid Absolon.
Curled Crul was his heer and as the gold it shoon
radiated out And strouted as a fanne large and brode;
fine hair-parting Ful streight and evene lay his joly shode.
complexion His rode was reed, hise eyen greye as goos.
(see n.) With Poules wyndow corven on his shoos,
elegantly In hoses rede he wente fetisly.
in close-fitting fashion Yclad he was ful smal and proprely
tunic, light blue Al in a kirtel of a lyght waget –
laces for tying Ful faire and thikke been the pointes set –
And therupon he hadde a gay surplys
twig As whit as is the blosme upon the rys:
young man A murye child he was, so God me save.
Wel koude he laten blood and clippe and shave
quittance (legal release of property) And maken a chartre of lond or aquitaunce.
On twenty manere koude he trippe and daunce
In the fashion After the scole of Oxenforde tho,
jig And with his legges casten to and fro
rebeck (kind of fiddle) And pleyen songes on a smal rubible;
high treble Therto he soong somtyme a loud quynyble,
guitar And as wel koude he pleye on a gyterne.

3313 Absolon, or Absalom, was the son of David, and renowned in the Middle Ages as the epitome of male beauty (2 Samuel 14:26).
3318 'With a traceried window carved in lattice-work on the uppers of his shoes'.
3326 It was usual for parish clerks (who were not full-time holders of livings) to supplement their income by acting as amateur surgeons and barbers, and as scribes in the making out of legal documents for land-conveyancing.

In al the town nas brewhous ne taverne
pleasant company That he ne visited with his solas,
merry barmaid Ther any gaylard tappestere was.
squeamish But sooth to seyn he was somdel squaymous
prissy Of fartyng, and of speche daungerous.
This Absolon, that joly was and gay,
incense-burner Gooth with a sencer on the haliday,
(see n.) Sensynge the wyves of the parisshe faste,
And many a lovely look on hem he caste
especially And namely on this carpenteris wyf.
To looke on hire hym thoughte a murye lyf,
nice, tasty-looking She was so propre and sweete and likerous,
I dar wel seyn if she hadde been a mous,
pounce on And he a cat, he wolde hir hente anon.
This parisshe clerk, this joly Absolon,
Hath in his herte swich a love-longynge
That of no wyf ne took he noon offrynge –
For curteisye he seyde he wolde noon.
The moone, whan it was nyght, ful brighte shoon
And Absolon his gyterne hath ytake –
For the sake of love, stay awake For paramours he thoghte for to wake –
And forth he gooth, jolyf and amorous,
Til he cam to the carpenteres hous
A litel after cokkes hadde ycrowe,
(see n.) And dressed hym up by a shot-wyndowe
That was upon the carpenteris wal.
high-pitched He syngeth in his voys gentil and smal,
'Now, deere lady, if thy wille be,
have pity I praye yow that ye wole rewe on me,'
Ful wel acordant to his giternynge.
This carpenter awook and herde him synge
And spak unto his wyf and seyde anon,
'What, Alison! Herestow noght Absolon,
bedroom wall That chaunteth thus under oure boures wal?'
And she answerde hir housbonde therwithal,
'Yis, God woot, John, I here it everydel.'
(what more would you have?) This passeth forth; what wol ye bet than wel?
Fro day to day this joly Absolon
So woweth hire that hym is wo-bigon.
He waketh al the nyght and al the day;
He kembed his lokkes brode and made hym gay;
go-betweens and brokers He woweth hire by meenes and brocage,
personal servant And swoor he wolde been hir owene page;
warbling He syngeth, brokkyng as a nyghtyngale;
spiced wine, mead He sente hire pyment, meeth and spiced ale
glowing coals And wafres pipyng hoot out of the gleede,
money And, for she was of towne, he profred meede –
For som folk wol be wonnen for richesse

3341 'Eagerly carrying the censer up and down among the parish-wives'.

3358 'And set himself up by a shuttered window (hinged at the sides)'.

3380 **for she was of towne**. Absolon thinks that, since she is a townswoman, she will understand the practical value of cash in hand. The meaning is not 'of the streets'.

blows And som for strokes and som for gentilesse.
masterly skill Somtyme, to shewe his lightnesse and maistrye,
He pleyeth Herodes upon a scaffold hye.
But what availleth hym as in this cas?
She loveth so this hende Nicholas
go whistle That Absolon may blowe the bukkes horn;
He ne hadde for his labour but a scorn.
fool And thus she maketh Absolon hire ape
And al his ernest turneth til a jape.
Ful sooth is this proverbe, it is no lye,
sly one near at hand Men seith right thus: 'Alwey the neighe slye
far-off loved one to be unloved Maketh the ferre leeve to be looth.'
For thogh that Absolon be wood or wrooth,
Bycause that he fer was from hir sighte,
This neighe Nicholas stood in his lighte.
Now bere thee wel, thow hende Nicholas,
For Absolon may waille and synge 'allas.'
And so bifel it on a Saterday
This carpenter was goon til Osenay,
And hende Nicholas and Alisoun
Acorded been to this conclusioun,
trick That Nicholas shal shapen hem a wile
This sely jalous housbonde to bigile,
And if so be the game wente aright
She sholde slepen in his arm al nyght –
For this was hir desir and his also.
And right anoon, withouten wordes mo,
This Nicholas no lenger wolde tarie
But dooth ful softe unto his chambre carie
Bothe mete and drynke for a day or tweye
And to hir housbonde bad hire for to seye,
If that he axed after Nicholas,
She sholde seye she nyste wher he was:
Of al that day she seigh hym noght with iye –
She trowed that he was in maladye,
For, for no cry, hir mayde koude hym calle,
whatever happened He nolde answere for nothyng that myghte falle.
This passeth forth al thilke Saterday
That Nicholas stille in his chambre lay
ate and slept And eet and sleepe or dide what hym leste
Til Sonday that the sonne gooth to reste.
This sely carpenter hath greet mervaille
ail Of Nicholas, or what thyng myghte hym aille,
And seyde, 'I am adrad, by Seint Thomas,
It stondeth nat aright with Nicholas.
forbid, should die God shilde that he deyde sodeynly!
unstable This world is now ful tikel, sikerly.
I seigh today a corps yborn to chirche
on Monday That now a Monday last I seigh hym wirche.'
'Go up,' quod he unto his knave anoon,

3384 **Herodes**. A second reference to the mystery plays, this time to the play of King Herod and the Magi; Herod would be on a throne high on the scaffolding that formed the set. His ranting speeches were famous.

'Clepe at his dore, or knokke with a stoon.
Looke how it is, and tel me boldely.'
This knave gooth hym up ful sturdily
And at the chambre dore whil that he stood
He cryde and knokked as that he were wood,
'What, how! What do ye, maister Nicholay?
How may ye slepen al the longe day?'
But al for noght; he herde nat a word.
An hole he foond, ful lowe upon a bord,
Ther as the cat was wont in for to crepe,
And at that hole he looked in ful depe
And atte laste he hadde of hym a sighte.
gaping straight up in the air This Nicholas sat evere capying uprighte,
stared As he had kiked on the newe moone.
Adown he gooth and tolde his maister soone
state In what array he saw this ilke man.
cross himself This carpenter to blessen hym bigan,
And seyde, 'Help us, Seinte Frideswyde!
A man woot litel what hym shal bityde.
astronomy (maybe a malapropism) This man is falle, with his astromye,
madness In som woodnesse or in som agonye.
I thoghte ay wel how that it sholde be!
Men sholde noght knowe of Goddes privetee.
Ye, blessed be alwey a lewed man
faith That noght but oonly his bileve kan!
fared So ferde another clerk with astromye:
gaze He walked in the feeldes for to prye
Upon the sterres, what ther sholde bifalle,
clay-pit Til he was in a marle-pit yfalle –
He saw nat that! But yet, by Seint Thomas,
I feel sorry for Me reweth sore of hende Nicholas.
scolded for He shal be rated of his studiyng,
If that I may, by Jesus, hevene kyng!
lever up from under Get me a staf, that I may underspore,
Whil that thow, Robyn, hevest up the dore.
He shal out of his studyyng, as I gesse.'
And to the chambre dore he gan hym dresse.
fellow His knave was a strong carl for the nones
heaved it off in one go And by the haspe he haaf it up atones;
Into the floor the dore fil anoon.
This Nicholas sat ay as stille as stoon
And evere caped up into the eyr.
thought This carpenter wende he were in despeyr
And hente hym by the sholdres myghtily
fiercely And shook hym harde and cryde spitously,
What ho! 'What! Nicholay! What how! What, looke adoun!

3449 Frideswide was a local Oxford saint, renowned for her healing powers.

3450–61 This little vignette of the carpenter's smug satisfaction in the contemplation of his own simple honest Christian faith and of the fate of clever-dicks like Nicholas reconciles us to the relishing of any indignity that may befall him (though he has his sympathetic moments, as at 3462, 3522–4). The story of the absent-minded **clerk** (3457–61) was a favourite.

3466 It seems too much of a coincidence that the stout servant's name is **Robyn** (like that of the Miller), and that he too has a talent for heaving doors off their hinges (cf. GP 550).

Awake and thenk on Cristes passioun!
(see n.) I crouche thee from elves and fro wightes.'
charm, straightway Therwith the nyght-spel seyde he anon-rightes
On foure halves of the hous aboute
threshold And on the thresshfold of the dore withoute:
Benedict 'Jesus Crist and Seinte Benedight,
Blesse this hous from every wikked wight,
(see n.) For the nyghtes nerye the white *pater-noster*!
did you go Where wentestow, Seinte Petres suster?'
And at the laste this hende Nicholas
sigh deeply Gan for to sike soore, and seyde, 'Allas!
again Shal al the world be lost eftsoones now?'
This carpenter answerde, 'What seistow?
What! Thenk on God, as we doon, men that swynke.'
This Nicholas answerde, 'Fecche me drynke,
And after wol I speke in pryvetee
Of certein thyng that toucheth me and thee.
I wol telle it noon oother man, certayn.'
This carpenter gooth doun and comth agayn
And broghte of myghty ale a large quart,
And whan that eech of hem hadde dronke his part
shut This Nicholas his dore faste shette
And doun the carpenter by hym he sette,
And seyde, 'John, myn hoost, lief and deere,
word of honour Thou shalt upon thy trouthe swere me heere
betray That to no wight thou shalt this conseil wreye,
For it is Cristes conseil that I seye,
tell it to anyone, lost And if thou telle it man, thou art forlore;
For this vengeaunce thow shalt have therfore,
That if thow wreye me thow shalt be wood.'
'Nay, Crist forbede it, for his holy blood!'
blabbermouth Quod tho this sely man, 'I nam no labbe,
(see n.) And, thogh I seye, I nam nat lief to gabbe.
Sey what thow wolt, I shal it nevere telle
harried (despoiled) To child ne wyf, by hym that harwed helle!'
'Now John,' quod Nicholas, 'I wol noght lye:
I have yfounde in myn astrologye,
As I have looked in the moone bright,
on, a quarter of the way through That now a Monday next, at quarter nyght,
Shal falle a reyn, and that so wilde and wood
That half so greet was nevere Noees flood.
This world,' he seyde, 'in lasse than in an hour
drowned Shal al be dreynt, so hidous is the shour.
drown, lose Thus shal mankynde drenche, and lese hir lyf.'
This carpenter answerde, 'Allas, my wyf!
And shal she drenche? Allas, myn Alisoun!'

3478–86 The carpenter uses both orthodox (exhortation to think on Christ's passion, the making of the sign of the cross) and less orthodox means (the magic charm or **nyght-spel** said around the house) to ward off evil spirits. The white *pater-noster* (version of the 'Our Father' prayer, 'white' because not 'black' magic) survives to recent times. Relatives of St Peter (3486) wander in and out of these conjurations.
3479 'I make the sign of the cross over thee (for protection) from elves and (unearthly) creatures'.
3485 'May the white *pater-noster* defend (us) from the night-dangers'.
3510 'And though I say it myself, I am not one to gab'.
3512 **harwed helle**. A reference to the 'Harrowing of Hell', the despoiling or 'harrying' of hell by Christ (in the brief interval between his crucifixion and the resurrection), that freed all of its inmates who had been faithful to the Law in their lives. It was a favourite subject for mystery plays.

For sorwe of this he fil almoost adoun,
And seyde, 'Is ther no remedie in this cas?'
'Why, yis, for Gode,' quod hende Nicholas,
'If thow wolt werken after loore and reed –
Thow mayst noght werken after thyn owene heed;
For thus seith Salomon, that was ful trewe:
"Werk al by conseil, and thow shalt noght rewe."
And if thow werken wolt by good consayl,
I undertake, withouten mast or sayl,
Yit shal I save hire and thee and me.
Hastow nat herd how saved was Noe,
Whan that oure Lord hadde warned hym biforn
That al the world with water sholde be lorn?'
'Yis,' quod this carpenter, 'ful yore ago.'
'Hastow nat herd,' quod Nicholas, 'also
The sorwe of Noe with his felaweshipe
Er that he myghte gete his wyf to shipe?
Hym hadde levere, I dar wel undertake,
At thilke tyme, than alle his wetheres blake,
That she hadde had a ship hirself allone.
And therfore, wostow what is best to done?
This axeth haste, and of an hastyf thyng
Men may noght preche or maken tariyng.
'Anoon go gete us faste into this in
A knedyng-trogh or ellis a kymelyn
For eech of us, but looke that they be large,
In which we mowen swymme as in a barge,
And han therinne vitaille suffisaunt
But for a day – fy on the remenaunt!
The water shal aslake and goon away
Aboute pryme upon the nexte day.
But Robyn may nat wite of this, thy knave,
Ne eek thy mayde Gille I may nat save:
Axe noght why, for thogh thou axe me
I wol noght tellen Goddes pryvetee.
Suffiseth thee, but if thy wittes madde,
To han as greet a grace as Noe hadde.
Thy wyf shal I wel saven, out of doute.
Go now thy wey, and speed thee heer-aboute.
'But when thou hast for hire and thee and me
Ygeten us thise knedyng-tubbes thre,
Thanne shaltow hangen hem in the roof ful hye,
That no man of oure purveiance espye.
And whan thow thus hast doon as I have seyd
And hast oure vitaille faire in hem yleyd
And eek an ax to smyte the corde atwo,
Whan that the water cometh, that we may go

before God
learning and good advice
according to your own ideas
good advice, be sorry
family
black rams
do you know
this dwelling-house
brewing tub
float
subside
around 9 a.m.
(see n.)
about this matter
preparations

3538–43 The story of Noah (Genesis 7) was the subject of perhaps the most popular of the mystery plays, where the apocryphal episode of 'Mrs' Noah's truculent opposition to the Ark-scheme made for vigorous comic relief. John the carpenter does not seem to have learnt much about theology from seeing the play.

3559 'unless you are going out of your mind'.

3563–82 The tumble of Nicholas's sentences, in this wonderful passage, conveys the imaginative energy with which he enters into his plots, solving the problems as he thinks of them, and ending with a rapturous vision of the world renewed for the lucky three-some. One has the impression that Nicholas takes more pleasure in clever plots than anything.

And breke an hole an heigh, upon the gable,
on the garden side Unto the gardyn-ward, over the stable,
That we may frely passen forth oure way
Whan that the grete shour is goon away –
Thanne shaltow swymme as murye, I undertake,
As dooth the white doke after hire drake.
Thanne wol I clepe, "How, Alison! How, John!
Be murye, for the flood wol passe anon."
And thou wolt seyn, "Hail, maister Nicholay!
Good morwe, I see thee wel, for it is day."
And thanne shal we be lordes al oure lyf
Of al the world, as Noe and his wyf.
'But of o thyng I warne thee ful right:
Be wel avysed on that ilke nyght
That we been entred into shippes bord
That noon of us ne speke noght a word,
Ne clepe ne crye, but been in his prayere,
commandment For it is Goddes owene heste deere.
far apart Thy wyf and thow mote hange fer atwynne,
For that bitwixe yow shal be no synne,
Namoore in lookyng than ther shal in dede.
This ordinaunce is seyd: go, God thee spede!
Tomorwe at nyght, whan men been alle aslepe,
Into oure knedyng-tubbes wol we crepe
And sitten there, abidyng Goddes grace.
time Go now thy wey, I have no lenger space
To make of this no lenger sermonyng.
(see n.) Men seyn thus, "Seend the wise, and sey nothyng."
Thow art so wys, it nedeth thee nat teche:
Go save oure lyf, and that I thee biseche.'
This sely carpenter gooth forth his wey –
Ful ofte he seyde 'Allas and weylawey' –
And to his wyf he tolde his privetee
And she was war and knew it bet than he,
ingenious plot was all about What al this queynte cast was for to seye.
acted But nathelees she ferde as she wolde deye,
And seyde, 'Allas! go forth thy wey anon,
Help us to scape or we been dede echon!
I am thy trewe verray wedded wyf –
Go, deere spouse, and help to save oure lyf.'
what, strong emotion Lo, which a greet thyng is affeccioun!
things they imagine Men may dyen of ymaginacioun,
So depe may impressioun be take.
This sely carpenter bigynneth quake;
Hym thynketh verrailiche that he may se
Noes flood come walwyng as the see
To drenchen Alisoun, his hony deere.
has a very woeful appearance He wepeth, waileth, maketh sory cheere;
sighs, groan He siketh with ful many a sory swogh.
He gooth and geteth hym a knedyng-trogh

3589–92 Tradition – conveniently for Nicholas – had it that there was no sexual intercourse on the Ark.

3598 'The wise will understand, though nothing is said' (proverbial: 'A word to the wise is enough').

And after that a tubbe and a kymelyn
And pryvely he sente hem to his in
And heeng hem in the roof in privetee.
With his His owene hand he made laddres thre,
uprights (of the ladders) To clymben by the ronges and the stalkes
rafters Unto the tubbes hangyng in the balkes,
And hem vitailed, bothe trogh and tubbe,
big jug With breed and chese and good ale in a jubbe,
Suffisynge right ynogh as for a day.
preparation But er that he hadde maad al this array,
servant girl He sente his knave and eek his wenche also
business Upon his nede to Londoun for to go.
And on the Monday, whan it drogh to nyght,
He shette his dore withouten candel-lyght
arranged And dressed alle thyng as it sholde be,
in no time And shortly up they clomben alle thre;
(see n.) They seten stille wel a furlong way.
(see n.) 'Now, *Pater-noster*, clom!' seyde Nicholay,
And 'Clum!' quod John, and 'Clum!' seyde Alisoun.
This carpenter seyde his devocioun,
quietly he sits, prays And stille he sit and biddeth his prayere,
might hear Awaitynge on the reyn, if he it heere.
because of his weariness with work The dede sleepe, for wery bisynesse,
Fil on this carpenter right as I gesse
Aboute corfew-tyme, or litel moore;
weariness of his spirit For travaillyng of his goost he groneth soore
likewise he snores And eft he routeth, for his heed myslay.
Doun of the laddre stalketh Nicholay
And Alisoun ful softe adoun she spedde:
Withouten wordes mo they goon to bedde
Ther as the carpenter is wont to lye –
Ther was the revel and the melodye!
And thus lyth Alisoun and Nicholas
In busynesse of myrthe and in solas
Til that the belle of laudes gan to rynge
And freres in the chauncel gonne synge.
This parissh clerk, this amorous Absolon,
That is for love alwey so wo-bigon,
Upon the Monday was at Osneye
With compaignye hym to disporte and pleye,
(see n.) And axed upon caas a cloistrer
Ful pryvely after John the carpenter;
And he drogh hym apart out of the cherche,
And seyde, 'I noot; I saugh hym here noght werche
Sith Saterday; I trowe that he be went
For tymber ther oure abbot hath hym sent,
For he is wont for tymber for to go
(see n.) And dwellen atte graunge a day or two;
Or ellis he is at his hous, certeyn.

3637 **a furlong way**: a couple of minutes – the time taken to go a furlong (an eighth of a mile).
3638 'Now say an "Our Father" and then hush'.
3655 **laudes**: the early morning service, second of the canonical 'hours'.
3661 'And asked in passing one of the canons of the nearby abbey'.
3668 **graunge**: outlying farm belonging to the abbey.

Where that he be I kan noght soothly seyn.'
light-hearted This Absolon ful jolyf was and lyght,
And thoghte, 'Now is tyme to wake al nyght,
For sikerly I saugh hym noght stirynge
Aboute his dore syn day bigan to sprynge.
'So mote I thryve, I shal at cokkes crowe
Ful pryvely knokken at his wyndowe
bedroom's That stant ful lowe upon his boures wal.
To Alison now wol I tellen al
My love-longynge, for yit I shal nat mysse
That at the leeste wey I shal hir kisse.
Som manere confort shal I have, parfay.
My mouth hath icched al this longe day:
That is a signe of kissyng at the leeste.
I dreamed Al nyght me mette eek I was at a feeste.
Therfore I wol go slepe an houre or tweye
And al the nyght thanne wol I wake and pleye.'
Whan that the firste cok hath crowe, anon
rises Up rist this joly lovere Absolon
with attention to every detail And hym arrayeth gay, at point-devys.
But first he cheweth grayn and likorys,
To smellen swete, er he hadde kembd his heer.
Under his tonge a trewe-love he beer,
attractive For therby wende he to be gracious.
He rometh to the carpenteres hous
And stille he stant under the shot-wyndowe –
reached Unto his brest it raughte, it was so lowe –
thin soft sound And softe he cogheth with a semy sown:
'What do ye, hony-comb, swete Alisoun,
bird My faire bryd, my swete cynamome?
Awaketh, lemman myn, and speketh to me!
Wel litel thynken ye upon my wo
That for youre love I swete ther I go.
swoon and sweat No wonder is thogh that I swelte and swete:
I moorne as dooth a lamb after the tete.
Ywis, lemman, I have swich love-longyng
turtle-dove That lyk a turtle trewe is my moornyng.
I may nat ete namoore than a mayde.'
you idiot 'Go fro the wyndow, Jakke fool,' she sayde;
come kiss me 'As help me God, it wol nat be "com pa me."
I love another, and elles I were to blame,
Wel bet than thee, by Jesu, Absolon.
Go forth thy wey, or I wol caste a stoon,
in the name of twenty devils And lat me slepe, a twenty devele wey!'
'Allas,' quod Absolon, 'and weilawey,

3670 All in all, about as helpful a reply as one normally gets in such circumstances.

3680, 3683 **at the leeste wey … at the leeste**. The phrases will come to have a special appropriateness or point in the story, as will Absolon's squeamishness about farting (3337–8) and the repeated specification of the height above ground of the window (3358, 3676–7, 3695–6).

3690 **grayn**: grain of paradise (cardamom, a breath-sweetener).

3692 **trewe-love**: four-leaved sprig of herb paris (like a true-love knot).

3698–707 Some of Absolon's endearments – like **hony-comb** and **cynamome** – echo the language of the biblical Song of Songs (4:11–14), supposedly Solomon's love-song to his beloved, the erotic language of which was enthusiastically allegorized by medieval exegetes; but Absolon's unfortunate image of the lamb longing for the teat is all his own.

ill-bestowed, or ill-circumstanced That trewe love was evere so yvel biset!
Thanne kys me, syn that it may be no bet,
For Jesus love, and for the love of me.'
'Woltow thanne go thy wey therwith?' quod she.
'Ye, certes, lemman,' quod this Absolon.
'Thanne make thee redy,' quod she, 'I come anon.'
softly And unto Nicholas she seyde stille,
hush 'Now hust, and thou shalt laughen al thy fille.'
This Absolon doun sette hym on his knees,
And seyde, 'I am a lord at alle degrees,
For after this I hope ther cometh moore.
mercy Lemman, thy grace, and swete bryd, thyn oore!'
The wyndow she undooth, and that in haste.
get a move on 'Have do,' quod she, 'com of, and speed thee faste,
Lest that oure neghebores thee espye.'
This Absolon gan wipe his mouth ful drye.
Derk was the nyght as pych or as the cole,
And at the wyndow out she putte hir hole,
better nor worse And Absolon, hym fil no bet ne wers
But with his mouth he kiste hir naked ers
With great relish Ful savourly er he were war of this.
Abak he sterte and thoghte it was amys,
For wel he wiste a womman hath no berd.
haired He felte a thyng al rogh and longe yherd,
And seyde, 'Fy! allas! what have I do?'
'Tehee!' quod she, and clapte the wyndow to,
with sad steps And Absolon gooth forth a sory paas.
'A berd! A berd!' quod hende Nicholas,
body 'By Goddes corpus, this gooth faire and wel.'
This sely Absolon herde everydel
And on his lippe he gan for anger byte
And to hymself he seyde, 'I shal thee quyte.'
rubs Who rubbeth now, who froteth now his lippes
With dust, with sond, with straw, with clooth, with chippes,
But Absolon, that seith ful ofte, 'Allas!
commit My soule bitake I unto Sathanas
But me were levere than al this town,' quod he,
insult, avenged 'Of this despit awreken for to be.
turned away Allas,' quod he, 'allas, I ne hadde ybleynt!'
quenched His hote love was coold and al yqueynt;
For fro that tyme that he hadde kist hir ers
romantic love, cress Of paramours he sette noght a kers,
For he was heelyd of his maladye.
renounce Ful ofte paramours he gan defye
And weep as dooth a child that is ybete.
A softe paas he wente over the strete
To a blacksmith Until a smyth men cleped daun Gerveys,

3742 A berd! A berd! It is curious that Absolon's first impression that he has kissed someone with a beard has not been spoken about, but Nicholas seems to know about it.

3761–2 Gervase's smithy is a vivid addition to the sense of 'overpowering substantiality' (see the account of the tale in Muscatine, *Chaucer and the French Tradition*, p. 226) in the tale, the sense of everyday life pursuing its course (friars singing in the chancel, carpentry-work at Osney) in the background of the story, like the background of a fifteenth-century Netherlandish painting. The detail is also scrupulously accurate: blacksmiths often worked at night (and were the cause of many complaints among their neighbours) because the tools they were repairing or sharpening were needed next day.

did blacksmithing work with That in his forge smythed plogh-harneys;
(see n.) He sharpeth shaar and cultour bisily.
gently This Absolon knokketh al esily
And seyde, 'Undo, Gerveys, and that anon!'
'What, who artow?' 'It am I, Absolon.'
cross 'What, Absolon! for Cristes swete tree,
early, bless (me)! Why rise ye so rathe? Ey, benedicitee!
What eyleth yow? Som gay gerl, God it woot,
(see n.) Hath broght yow thus upon the viritoot.
St Neot By Seinte Note, ye woot wel what I mene.'
took not a bit (bean) of notice This Absolon ne roghte nat a bene
in reply Of al his pley; no word agayn he yaf;
(see n.) He hadde moore tow on his dystaf
Than Gerveys knew, and seyde, 'Freend so deere,
fireplace That hoote cultour in the chymenee heere,
lend As lene it me; I have therwith to doone,
And I wol brynge it thee agayn ful soone.'
Gerveys answerde, 'Certes, were it gold,
gold coins all uncounted in a bag Or in a poke nobles al untold,
Thow sholdest have, as I am trewe smyth.
by Christ's foe (the devil) Ey, Cristes foo! What wol ye do therwith?'
'Therof,' quod Absolon, 'be as be may.
I shal wel telle it thee another day'–
handle And caughte the cultour by the colde stele.
Ful softe out at the dore he gan to stele
And wente unto the carpenteris wal.
He cogheth first and knokketh therwithal
before Upon the wyndow, right as he dide er.
This Alison answerde, 'Who is ther
That knokketh so? I warante it a theef.'
dear one 'Wy, nay,' quod he, 'God woot, my swete lief,
I am thyn Absolon, my derelyng.
Of gold,' quod he, 'I have thee broght a ryng –
My moder yaf it me, so God me save;
engraved Ful fyn it is and therto wel ygrave.
This wol I yeven thee if thow me kisse.'
This Nicholas was risen for to pisse
improve on the whole joke And thoghte he wolde amenden al the jape:
He sholde kisse his ers er that he scape.
And up the wyndow dide he hastely
And out his ers he putteth pryvely
Over the buttok to the haunche-bon;
And therwith spak this clerk, this Absolon,
'Spek, swete herte, I noot noght wher thow art.'
This Nicholas anoon leet fle a fart
thunder-blast As greet as it hadde been a thonder-dent,
blinded That with the strook he was almoost yblent,
And he was redy with his iren hoot
And Nicholas amydde the ers he smoot.

3763 'ploughshare and coulter (vertical blade set at the front of the plough)'.

3770 **upon the viritoot**: 'so early astir' (with some salacious innuendo).

3774 **tow on his dystaf**: 'flax on his distaff' (i.e. business in hand).

Off, hand's-breadth Of gooth the skyn an hande-brede aboute:
arse The hoote cultour brende so his toute,
pain That for the smert he wende for to dye.
As he were wood for wo he gan to crye,
'Help! Water! Water! Help, for Goddes herte!'
This carpenter out of his slomber sterte,
And herde oon cryen 'water!' as he were wood
And thoghte, 'Allas, now cometh Nowelys flood!'
He sette hym up withoute wordes mo
And with his ax he smoot the corde atwo
he did not stop And down gooth al; he foond neither to selle
flooring Ne breed ne ale til he cam to the celle
in a dead faint Upon the floor, and there aswowne he lay.
Up jumped Alison Up stirte hire Alison and Nicholay
And cryden 'Out!' and 'Harrow!' in the strete.
The neghebores, bothe smale and grete,
gawp at In ronnen for to gauren on this man
That yet aswowne lay bothe pale and wan,
broken For with the fal he brosten hadde his arm.
(see n.) But stonde he moste unto his owene harm;
overborne by (what the others said) For whan he spak he was anon bore doun
By With hende Nicholas and Alisoun.
They tolden every man that he was wood:
He was agast so of Nowelys flood
deluded imaginings, foolishness Thurgh fantasie, that of his vanytee
He hadde yboght hym knedyng-tubbes thre
And hadde hem hanged in the roof above;
And that he preyde hem, for Goddes love,
for company To sitten in the roof, par compaignye.
The folk gan laughen at his fantasye;
peer and gape Into the roof they kiken and they cape
And turned al his harm unto a jape,
For what-so that this carpenter answerde,
would listen to his explanation It was for noght: no man his reson herde.
overborne by sworn oaths With othes grete he was so sworn adoun
That he was holden wood in al the toun;
agreed For every clerk anon-right heeld with oother.
They seyde, 'The man was wood, my leeve brother',
And every wight gan laughen at this stryf.
Thus swyved was the carpenteris wyf
keeping guard For al his kepyng and his jalousye,
And Absolon hath kist hir nether iye,
And Nicholas is scalded in the toute.
company This tale is doon, and God save al the route!

{The Reeve's Prologue follows}

3811 This is a painful moment for Nicholas, but in the logic of *fabliau* he deserved it, since he tried to play the same trick twice, which is not the cleverness expected of him.

3815 This sublime moment, in which the reader, who has quite forgotten about old John up in his tub, suddenly sees how the two plots are to come together, has been much admired.

3818 **Nowelys**: 'Noah's', or 'Noel's' (John is confused).

3830 'He had to face up to his own discomfiture'.

3850–4 The distribution of punishments is comically apt (and 'morally' absurd), though we should be clear that the *swyving* of Alison is John's punishment, not hers. She gets what she wants, not what she deserves, because she stayed true to the demands of *fabliau*: be smart.

The Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale

The Wife of Bath's Prologue

The Wife of Bath's Prologue begins without introduction or invitation and forms the first tale in the group of tales known as Fragment III, and also the first in the larger group concerning marriage that ends with the Franklin's Tale. Like the Pardoner, the Wife has a long quasi-autobiographical monologue before she tells her tale, which in turn grows directly out of the motives, purposes and consciousness she reveals. Her Prologue derives from the medieval convention of the allegorical 'confession' (usually of a personified vice) and employs the materials of traditional clerical anti-feminism; but the effect of Chaucer's powerful individual realization of the voice of the Wife is to make the 'confession' into a manifesto of woman's sovereignty, and also subtly to expose the foundations of medieval anti-feminism in celibate male prejudice, spite, fear and envy (see M. Carruthers, 'The Wife of Bath and the Painting of Lions', *PMLA* 94 [1979], 209–22). The Prologue deals first with questions of the status of marriage in relation to virginity (1–183) and then with the Wife's first three (184–450) and last two (451–828) husbands. It is a rhetorical tour de force, a torrent of eloquence that sweeps the reader up in its energy; it is also an exploration of the question of female empowerment and the roots of men's fear of women. The Wife secures financial independence by a series of prudent marriages, in which she plays upon her husbands' vanity, weakness and sporadic sexual desires to gain control of their estates; having gained power in a man's world, she struggles heroically to keep at bay a sense of loss. Her Prologue becomes in the end much more than a manifesto of female sovereignty.

written authority
'Experience, though noon auctoritee
Were in this world, is right ynogh for me
To speke of wo that is in mariage;
For lordynges, sith that I twelf yeer was of age,
in life (alive) Thonked be God that is eterne on lyve,
Housbondes atte chirche dore I have had fyve –
If I so ofte myghte han wedded be –
And alle were worthy men in hir degree.
But me was told, certeyn, noght longe agon is,
once That sith that Crist ne wente nevere but onys
To weddyng, in the Cane of Galilee,
That by the same ensample taughte he me
That I ne sholde wedded be but ones.
what Herke eek, lo, which a sharp word for the nones,
Bisyde a welle, Jesus, God and man,
reproof Spak in repreeve of the Samaritan:
"Thow hast yhad fyve housbondes," quod he,
"And that ilke man which that now hath thee
Is nat thyn housbonde," thus he seyde certeyn.
What that he mente therby I kan nat seyn,
Except that I ask But that I axe why that the fifthe man
Was noon housbonde to the Samaritan?
How manye myghte she han in mariage?
Yet herde I nevere tellen in myn age
Upon this nombre diffynycioun.
(see n.) Men may dyvyne and glosen up and doun
expressly But wel I woot, expres, withoute lye,

6 atte chirche dore. See GP 460n.

7 The Wife accepts that there may be reservations about the legitimacy of so many marriages, and goes on to refer to two of the scriptural passages used by theologians such as St Jerome (in his treatise in praise of virginity and chaste wifehood, the *Epistola adversus Jovinianum*) in their argument against second and further marriages: the wedding at Cana (John 2:1) and the meeting of Jesus with the woman of Samaria (John 4:18). She does not so much refute these arguments as allow them to dissolve in their own bizarre illogicality.

26 'Men may conjecture and apply every kind of interpretation'.

God bad us for to wexe and multiplye –
That gentil text kan I wel understonde.
Eek wel I woot he seyde that myn housbonde
leave, cleave (Matt. 19:5) Sholde lete fader and moder and take to me;
But of no nombre mencioun made he,
Of bigamye, or of octogamye;
bad things Why sholde men thanne speke of it vileynye?
take note of Lo here the wise kyng, daun Salomon:
I trowe he hadde wyves many oon –
permissible As wolde God it leveful were to me
To be refresshed half so ofte as he!
What a gift, with Which yifte of God hadde he for alle hise wyvys!
No man hath swich that in this world alyve is.
God woot, this noble kyng, as to my wit,
The firste nyght hadde many a murye fit
so happy was he to be alive With ech of hem, so wel was hym on lyve.
Blessed be God that I have wedded fyve!
Of whiche I have pyked out the beste, 44a
Bothe of here nether purs and of here cheste. 44b
Diverse scoles maken parfyt clerkes, 44c
And diverse practyk in many sondry werkes 44d
Maken the werkman parfyt sekirly; 44e
schooling Of fyve husbondes scoleiyng am I – 44f
Welcome the sixte, whan that evere he shal. 45
For sith I wol nat kepe me chaast in al,
Whan myn housbonde is fro the world agon,
Som Cristen man shal wedde me anon,
For thanne th'Apostle seith that I am free
with God's blessing To wedde, a Goddes half, where it liketh me.
He seith that to be wedded is no synne;
burn Bet is to be wedded than to brynne.
do I care What rekketh me theigh folk seye vileynye
cursed Of shrewed Lameth and his bigamye?
I woot wel Abraham was an holy man
as far as I know And Jacob eek, as fer as evere I kan,
And ech of hem hadde wyves mo than two,
And many another holy man also.
Where kan ye seye in any maner age
forbade That heighe God defended mariage
By expres word? I pray yow telleth me;
Or where comanded he virgynytee?
doubt I woot as wel as ye, it is no drede,
Th'Apostle, whan he speketh of maydenhede,
He seyde that precept therof hadde he noon.

28 This 'text' (Gen. 1:28) is not, of course, the one the Wife was supposed to be talking about: it has to do not with the multiplication of marriages but with the multiplication of the faithful by procreation – quite a different story. But she carries it off.

35 Solomon, used by the Wife as an example of the happy legitimacy of multiple marriage (simultaneous in his case, not consecutive, 1 Kings 11:3), was usually regarded by scriptural exegetes as a wise man who was led into folly by his weakness for women.

44a–f These lines do not appear in either Hg or El but it is presumed that they are original and dropped out of an early exemplar (see Textual Notes).

52–8 The Wife draws on or disputes various biblical texts (all cited by Jerome) in the course of her argument. Paul (1 Cor. 7:28) said it was better to marry than to burn (with unfulfilled lust); Lamech (Gen. 4:19–23) was acclaimed the first bigamist; Abraham (Gen. 12–25) and Jacob (Gen. 27–36) were patriarchs with at least two wives. Paul ('th'Apostle') is further cited (1 Cor. 7:1–25, but again from Jerome) in lines 64–5, 73, 81–4, 87–9.

single (a virgin) Man may conseille a womman to be oon
But conseillyng nys no comandement.
He put it in oure owene juggement;
For hadde God comanded maydenhede,
condemned Thanne hadde he dampned weddyng with the dede,
And certes, if ther were no seed ysowe,
Virgynytee, thanne wherof sholde it growe?
Poul dorste nat comanden, at the leeste,
commandment A thyng of which his mayster yaf noon heeste.
The dart is set up for virgynytee;
Cacche who-so may, who renneth best lat se.
applicable to But this word is noght take of every wight,
pleases But ther as God list yeve it of his myght.
virgin I woot wel that th'Apostle was a mayde,
But nathelees, thogh that he wroot or sayde
He wolde that every wight were swich as he,
Al nys but conseil to virgynytee.
And for to been a wyf he yaf me leve
matter of reproach Of indulgence; so nys it no repreve
mate To wedde me if that my make dye,
objection on the grounds of Withouten excepcioun of bigamye –
even though it were Al were it good no womman for to touche
(He mente as in his bed or in his couche,
flax For peril is bothe fyr and tow t'assemble:
parallel, signify Ye knowe what this ensample may resemble).
This is what it amounts to This al and som: he heeld virgynytee
frailty Moore parfit than weddyng in freletee –
unless Freletee clepe I but if that he and she
Wolde leden al hir lyf in chastitee.
resentment I graunte it wel; I have noon envye,
take precedence over, remarriage Thogh maydenhede preferre bigamye.
spirit It liketh hem to be clene in body and goost;
way of life Of myn estat ne wol I make no boost,
For wel ye knowe a lord in his houshold
Ne hath nat every vessel al of gold;
wood Somme been of tree and doon hir lord servyse.
God clepeth folk to hym in sondry wyse,
special talent And everich hath of God a propre yifte –
as it pleases God to provide Som this, som that, as hym liketh shifte.
Virgynytee is greet perfeccioun
And continence eek with devocioun,
But Crist, that of perfeccion is welle,
Bad nat every wight he sholde go selle
Al that he hadde and yeve it to the poore,
his footsteps And in swich wise folwe hym and his foore.
He spak to hem that wol lyve parfitly –
And lordynges, by youre leve, that am nat I.
I wol bistowe the flour of al myn age
In th'actes and in fruyt of mariage.

75–6 Women are not commanded to be virgins; but being a virgin is a very good thing and whoever wants may strive for the prize it carries (Chaucer's phrasing is directly from Jerome).

99–101 The allusion to 2 Tim. 2:20 is again picked up from Jerome, but the point of the text is mis-taken (in Paul's epistle, the wooden vessels correspond to wicked people who are not valued by God) by conflating it with another text (lines 102–4) from 1 Cor. 7:7.

107–12 Jerome's allusion is to Matt. 19:21.

end Telle me also, to what conclusioun
Were membres maad of generacioun,
And of so parfit wys a wight ywroght?
Trusteth right wel, they were nat maad for noght!
Interpret, in every way Glose who-so wole, and seye bothe up and doun
That they were maked for purgacioun
Of uryne, and oure bothe thynges smale
Was eek to knowe a femelle from a male
And for noon oother cause – sey ye no?
Th'experience woot wel it is noght so.
Provided that So that the clerkes be nat with me wrothe,
I sey this: that they maked been for bothe –
function That is to seyn, for office and for ese
procreation Of engendrure, ther we nat God displese.
Why sholde men ellis in hir bokes sette
That man shal yelde to his wyf hir dette?
Now wherwith sholde he make his paiement
If he ne used his sely instrument?
Thanne were they maad upon a creature
To purge uryne and eek for engendrure.
bound But I seye noght that every wight is holde,
That hath swich harneys as I to yow tolde,
To goon and usen hem in engendrure;
(if they did) then, heed Thanne sholde men take of chastitee no cure.
Crist was a mayde and shapen as a man
And many a seynt sith that the world bigan,
Yet lyved they evere in parfit chastitee.
resent I nyl envie no virgynytee:
Lat hem be breed of pured whete-seed
be called And lat us wyves hote barly-breed –
And yet with barly-breed, Mark telle kan,
Oure Lord Jesu refresshed many a man.
In swich estat as God hath clepyd us
fastidious I wol persevere; I nam nat precius.
In wifhode wol I use myn instrument
As frely as my Makere hath it sent.
play hard to get If I be daungerous, God yeve me sorwe!
Myn housbonde shal it han bothe eve and morwe,
Whan that hym list com forth and paye his dette.
give up my right An housbonde wol I have – I wol nat lette –
slave Which shal be bothe my dettour and my thral
And have his tribulacion withal
Upon his flessh whil that I am his wyf.
I have the power duryng al my lyf
Upon his propre body, and nat he.
Right thus th'Apostle tolde it unto me
And bad oure housbondes for to love us wel.
sound doctrine Al this sentence me liketh everydel.'

129–30 It was accepted in the church's teaching on marriage that sexual intercourse, when required by one partner, was a duty laid on the other.

145 The barley-loaves are mentioned in John 6:9, not Mark (Chaucer's mistake, or the Wife's?).

154–60 The Wife manages to convert Paul's warnings (line 160, from Jerome) about the 'tribulation of the flesh', that is, the bodily pain and grief of the married state (1 Cor. 7:28), into a promise of sexual torment for her husband.

started Up stirte the Pardoner, and that anon;
'Now, dame,' quod he, 'by God and by Seint John!
Ye been a noble prechour in this cas.
I was aboute to wedde a wyf: allas!
Why, pay for it What sholde I bye it on my flessh so deere?
this year Yet hadde I levere wedde no wyf to-yeere!'
'Abyd!' quod she, 'my tale is nat bigonne.
Nay, thow shalt drynken of another tonne
Er that I go, shal savoure wors than ale.
And whan that I have toold thee forth my tale
Of tribulacion in maryage,
Of which I am expert in al myn age –
This is to seye, myself hath been the whippe –
choose Thanne maystow chese wheither that thow wolt sippe
open up Of thilke tonne that I shal abroche.
close Be war of it er thow to neigh approche,
For I shal telle ensamples mo than ten.
warned "Whoso that nyle be war by othere men,
By hym shal othere men corrected be."
Thise same wordes writeth Ptholome:
find Rede in his Almageste and take it there.'
'Dame, I wolde pray yow, if youre wyl it were,'
Seyde this Pardoner, 'as ye bigan,
Telle forth youre tale, spareth for no man,
practical knowledge And techeth us yonge men of youre praktyke.'
'Gladly,' quod she, 'syn it may yow lyke,
But that I praye to al this compaignye,
fancy If that I speke after my fantasye,
don't take offence at As taketh nat agrief of that I seye,
For myn entente nys but for to pleye.
Now, sire, thanne wol I telle yow forth my tale.
As evere moot I drynke wyn or ale,
I shal seye sooth: tho housbondes that I hadde,
As three of hem were goode and two were badde.
The thre men were goode and ryche and olde;
Unnethe myghte they the statut holde
In which that they were bounden unto me –
Ye woot wel what I mene of this, pardee!
As help me God, I laughe whan I thynke
How pitously a-nyght I made hem swynke!
faith, had no regard for it And by my fey, I tolde of it no stoor.
They hadde me yeven hir land and hir tresoor:
Me neded nat do lenger diligence
To wynne hir love or doon hem reverence.

163 The Pardoner's intervention serves to redirect the flow of the Wife's discourse back to what she had promised to talk about (the 'wo that is in mariage', line 3); it also brings together in suggestive conjunction the two most elaborately developed and extraordinary characters on the pilgrimage.

170 thow. The Wife addresses the Pardoner in the familiar or contemptuous second person singular, where he addresses her in the polite or formal plural. **tonne**. Jupiter has two tuns or barrels in his cellar, one full of good, the other of ill fortune.

182–3 The second-century Greek astronomer Ptolemy wrote an astronomical treatise called the *Almagest* to which various well-known apophthegms accrued in medieval Latin translations.

191 As is syntactically superfluous here, and without meaning, as elsewhere (e.g. 196 below).

198 statut: obligation to pay the marriage-debt.

204–6 We hear something in these lines of the manner in which the Wife used her sexual skills to wrest financial control from her husbands.

They loved me so wel, by God above,
set no value on That I ne tolde no deyntee of hir love!
constantly A wys womman wol bisye hire evere in oon
To gete hir love, ye, ther as she hath noon,
power But sith I hadde hem hoolly in myn hond,
And sith that they hadde yeven me al hir lond,
take trouble What sholde I take kepe hem for to plese
Unless But it were for my profit and myn ese?
I sette hem so a-werk, by my fey,
Woe is me! That many a nyght they songen "Weylawey!"
fetched The bacon was nat fet for hem, I trowe,
That som men han in Essex at Donmowe.
I governed hem so wel after my lawe
eager That ech of hem ful blisful was and fawe
To brynge me gaye thynges fro the feyre.
They were ful glad whan I spak to hem feyre,
scolded For, God it woot, I chidde hem spitously.
Now herkneth how I bar me proprely.
Ye wise wyves that konne understonde,
accuse them wrongfully Thus sholde ye speke and bere hem wrong on honde,
For half so boldely kan ther no man
Swere and lye as a womman kan.
for the benefit of wives I sey nat this by wyves that ben wyse,
Except it be, act unadvisedly But if it be whan they hem mysavyse.
knows what's good for her A wys womman, if that she kan hir good,
deceive him into thinking Shal bere hym an hond the cow is wood,
And take witnesse of hir owene mayde
Who is on her side Of hire assent. But herkneth how I sayde:
dotard, way of behaving "Sire olde kaynard, is this thyn array?
Why is my neghebores wyf so gay?
She is honoured overal ther she goth;
decent clothes I sitte at hoom; I have no thrifty cloth.
What dostow at my neghebores hous?
Is she so fair? Artow so amorous?
whisper What rowne ye with oure mayde? Benedicite!
Sire olde lechour, lat thy japes be!
And if I have a gossib or a freend,
Withouten gilt, ye chiden as a feend
If that I walke or pleye unto his hous!
Thow comest hoom as dronken as a mous
curse you! And prechest on thy bench, with yvel preef!
Thow seyst to me it is a greet mescheef
because of the expense To wedde a povre womman, for costage;
high birth And if that she be ryche, of heigh parage,
Thanne seistow that it is a tormentrye

218 An old custom at Dunmow allowed for a prize of a side of bacon (the 'Dunmow flitch') to be given annually to a married couple who could persuade the judges that they had lived a year without quarrelling.

232 The allusion is to the story of the talking bird, or chough (**cow**), that tells the husband of the adultery of his wife, who then persuades him that the bird is crazy. Chaucer tells a variant of the story in the Manciple's Tale.

235–378 This long diatribe is skilfully assembled from the commonplaces of anti-feminist writing (especially Jerome, the *Roman de la Rose*, and the *Miroir de Mariage* of the French poet Deschamps, Chaucer's contemporary), the accusations levelled against women being turned by the Wife into a tirade against men.

bad humour To suffre hir pryde and hir malencolye;
And if that she be fair, thow verray knave,
lecher Thow seist that every holour wol hire have;
She may no while in chastitee abyde
That is assayled upon ech a syde.
"Thow seyst som folk desiren us for richesse,
Somme for oure shape and somme for oure fairnesse
And somme for she kan outher synge or daunce
And somme for gentillesse and dalyaunce,
slender Somme for hir handes and hir armes smale;
according to what you say Thus goth al to the devel, by thy tale.
Thow seyst men may nat kepe a castel wal,
It may so longe assaylled been overal.
"And if that she be foul thow seyst that she
Coveiteth every man that she may se,
For as a spaynel she wol on hym lepe,
do a deal with her Til that she fynde som man hir to chepe;
no goose so grey (i.e. plain) Ne noon so grey goos goth ther in the lake
mate As, seistow, wol be withoute make,
control And seyst it is an hard thyng for to wolde
willingly A thyng that no man wole, his thankes, holde.
wretch Thus seistow, lorel, whan thow goost to bedde,
And that no wys man nedeth for to wedde,
aims for Ne no man that entendeth unto hevene.
lightning With wilde thonder-dynt and firy levene
shrivelled, broken to bits Moote thy welked nekke be to-broke!
leaking "Thow seyst that droppyng houses and eek smoke
And chidyng wyves maken men to flee
Out of hir owene houses; a, benedicitee!
What eyleth swich an old man for to chide?
"Thow seyst we wyves wil oure vices hyde
securely married Til we be fast, and thanne we wol hem shewe –
malicious wretch Wel may that be a proverbe of a shrewe!
"Thow seist that oxen, asses, hors and houndes,
tested, times They been assayed at dyverse stoundes,
basins, wash-bowls Bacynes, lavours, er that men hem bye,
household equipment Spoones, stooles and al swich housbondrye,
And so be pottes, clothes and array;
trial But folk of wyves maken noon assay
Til they be wedded – olde dotard shrewe! –
And thanne, seistow, we wil oure vices shewe.
"Thow seist also that it displeseth me
But if that thow wolt preise my beautee
gaze intently And but thow powre alwey upon my face
And clepe me 'faire dame' in every place,
And but thow make a feeste on thilke day
That I was born and make me fressh and gay,
nurse And but thow do to my norice honour
chambermaid, bedchamber And to my chambrere withinne my bour
kinsfolk And to my fadres folk and his allyes –
Thus seistow, olde barel-ful of lyes!
"And yet of oure apprentice Janekyn,
curly For his crispe heer, shynyng as gold so fyn,

And for he squyereth me bothe up and doun,
Yet hastow caught a fals suspecioun.
I wil hym nat, thogh thow were deed to-morwe!
(damn you) "But tel me this: why hidestow, with sorwe,
The keyes of thy cheste awey fro me?
It is my good as wel as thyn, pardee!
(see n.) What, wenestow make an ydiote of oure dame?
Now by that lord that called is Seint Jame,
Thow shalt noght bothe, thogh that thow were wood,
Be maister of my body and my good;
(i.e. despite all you can do) That oon thow shalt forgo, maugree thyne eyen.
What helpeth it of me enquere and spyen?
I trowe thow woldest lok me in thy chiste!
Thow sholdest seye, 'Wyf, go wher thee liste;
believe Taak youre disport; I nyl leve no talis.
I knowe yow for a trewe wyf, dame Alis.'
takes too keen an interest We love no man that taketh kepe or charge
be free Wher that we goon; we wol been at oure large.
"Of alle men yblessed moote he be,
The wise astrologen, Daun Ptholome,
That seith this proverbe in his Almageste:
'Of alle men his wisdom is hyeste
cares, in his control That rekketh nat who hath the world in honde.'
By this proverbe thow shalt understonde,
what need Have thow ynogh, what thar thee rekke or care
How myrily that othere folkes fare?
For certes, olde dotard, by youre leve,
Ye shal han queynte right ynogh at eve.
refuse He is to greet a nygard that wil werne
A man to lighte a candle at his lanterne;
He shal han never the lasse light, pardee.
Have thow ynogh, thee thar nat pleyne thee.
"Thow seist also that if we make us gay
With clothyng and with precious array
That it is peril of oure chastitee;
try to strengthen your case And yet – with sorwe! – thow most enforce thee
And seye thise wordes in th'Apostles name:
clothing 'In habit maad with chastitee and shame
Ye wommen shal apparaille yow,' quod he,
jewels 'And nat in tressed heer and gay perree,
As perlys, ne with gold, ne clothes ryche.'
instruction for reading a text After thy text ne after thy rubryche
I wol nat werke as muche as is a gnat.
"Thow seydest this, that I was lyk a cat;
singe For who-so wolde senge a cattes skyn,
dwelling-place Thanne wolde the cat wel dwellen in his in;
sleek And if the cattes skyn be slyk and gay,
She wol nat dwelle in house half a day,
But forth she wole er any day be dawed
a-caterwauling To shewe hir skyn and goon a-caterwawed.

311 'What, do you think to make a fool of our mistress (i.e. of me)?'

324–5 See 182–3n above.

341 I.e. Paul (1 Tim. 2:9, quoted in Jerome).

This is to seye, if I be gay, sire shrewe,
cheap clothing I wol renne out my borel for to shewe.
Sire olde fool, what helpeth thee t'espyen?
Thogh thow preye Argus with his hundred eyen
body-guard To be my warde-corps, as he kan best,
unless I please In feith he shal nat kepe me but me lest;
deceive him, as I may thrive! Yet koude I make his berd, as mote I thee!
"Thow seydest eek that ther ben thynges thre,
The whiche thynges troublen al this erthe,
And that no wight may endure the ferthe.
dear O leeve sire shrewe, Jesu shorte thy lyf!
Yet prechestow and seist an hateful wyf
Yrekened is for oon of thise myschaunces.
Been ther noone othere maner resemblaunces
That ye may likne youre parables to,
But if a sely wyf be oon of tho?
"Thow liknest eek wommanes love to helle,
To bareyne lond ther water may nat dwelle.
(see n.) Thow liknest it also to wilde-fyr:
burns The moore it brenneth, the moore it hath desyr
To consumen every thyng that brent wol be.
destroy Thow seist, right as wormes shende a tree,
Right so a wyf destroyeth hir housbonde;
This knowen they that been to wyves bonde."
Lordynges, right thus, as ye han understonde,
Deceived … into thinking Bar I stifly myne olde housbondes on honde
That thus they seyden in hir dronkenesse;
And al was fals, but that I took witnesse
On Janekyn and on my nece also.
suffering O Lord! the pyne I dide hem and the wo,
Ful giltelees, by Goddes swete pyne!
For as an hors I koude byte and whyne.
I koude pleyne – and I was in the gilt –
ruined Or ellis often tyme I hadde been spilt.
grinds Whoso that first to mille comth, first grynt;
finished I pleyned first, so was oure werre stynt.
hurriedly They were ful glad to excusen hem ful blyve
were guilty in their lives Of thyng of which they nevere agilte hir lyve.
Of wenches wolde I beren hem on honde,
sickness, hardly Whan that for syk they myghte unnethe stonde.
Yet tikled I his herte for that he
fondness Wende that I hadde had of hym so greet chiertee!
I swoor that al my walkyng out by nyghte
was having sex with Was for to espye wenches that he dighte;
Under that colour hadde I many a myrthe.
For al swich wit is yeven us in oure birthe;
Deceite, wepyng, spynnyng God hath yeve
by nature To wommen kyndely whil they may lyve.
boast And thus of o thyng I avante me:
in all respects At ende I hadde the bet in ech degree,
By sleighte or force or by som maner thyng,

373 **wilde-fyr**: Greek fire (a burning substance used in warfare).

grumbling As by continuel murmur or grucchyng.
Namely abedde hadden they meschaunce:
Ther wolde I chide and do hem no plesaunce.
I wolde no lenger in the bed abyde,
If that I felte his arm over my syde,
ransom Til he hadde maad his raunceon unto me;
Thanne wolde I suffre hym do his nycetee.
And therfore every man this tale I telle:
Wynne whoso may, for al is for to selle;
With empty hond men may none haukes lure.
profit For wynnyng wolde I al his lust endure
And make me a feyned appetit;
bacon (i.e. old dried meat) And yet in bacoun hadde I nevere delit.
That made me that evere I wolde hem chyde,
sat For thogh the pope hadde seten hem bisyde,
dinner-table I wolde noght spare hem at hir owene bord,
repaid For by my trouthe I quytte hem word for word.
As help me verray God omnipotent,
Thogh I right now sholde make my testament,
I ne owe hem nat a word that it nys quyt.
I broghte it so aboute by my wit
yield That they moste yeve it up, as for the beste,
Or ellis hadde we nevere been in reste;
For thogh he looked as a wood leoun,
purpose Yet sholde he faille of his conclusioun.
'dearie' Thanne wolde I seye, "Goode lief, taak keepe
How mekely looketh Wilkyn, oure sheepe!
kiss Com neer, my spouse, lat me ba thy cheke!
Ye sholden be al pacient and meke
scrupulous And han a swete spyced conscience,
Job's Sith ye so preche of Jobes pacience.
Be patient Suffreth alwey, syn ye so wel kan preche,
And but ye do, certeyn we shal yow teche
That it is fair to han a wyf in pees.
Oon of us two moste bowen, doutelees,
And sith a man is moore resonable
patient Than womman is, ye mosten been suffrable.
What eyleth yow to grucche thus and grone?
Is it for ye wolde have my queynte allone?
Wy, taak it al! Lo, have it everydel!
By St Peter, damn you! Peter! I shrewe yow, but ye love it wel.
fair thing For if I wolde selle my *bele chose*,
I koude walke as fressh as is a rose;
But I wol kepe it for youre owene tooth.
Ye be to blame, by God! I sey yow sooth."
on a regular basis Swiche manere wordes hadde we on honde.
Now wol I speken of my ferthe housbonde.
My ferthe housbonde was a revelour –
This is to seyn, he hadde a paramour –
wild wantonness And I was yong and ful of ragerye,
Untamed, magpie Stibourne and strong, and joly as a pye.
How koude I daunce to an harpe smale
And synge, ywys, as any nyghtyngale,

Whan I hadde dronke a draghte of swete wyn!
Metellyus, the foule cherl, the swyn,
That with a staf birafte his wyf hir lyf
For she drank wyn, though I hadde been his wyf
frightened He sholde nat han daunted me fro drynke!
And after wyn on Venus moste I thynke,
For al so siker as coold engendreth hayl,
greedy, lecherous A likerous mouth moste han a likerous tayl.
drunk with wine In wommen vynolent is no defence –
This knowen lechours by experience.
But – Lord Crist! – whan that it remembreth me
Upon my yowthe and on my jolytee,
It tikeleth me aboute myn herte roote.
good (a healing remedy) Unto this day it dooth myn herte boote
That I have had my world as in my tyme.
poison But age, allas, that al wole envenyme,
Hath me biraft my beautee and my pith.
Lat go, farewel! The devel go therwith!
The flour is goon, ther is namoore to telle:
bran The bren as I best kan now moste I selle;
strive But yet to be right murye wol I fonde.
Now wol I tellen of my ferthe housbonde.
I seye, I hadde in herte gret despit
That he of any oother had delit;
paid back, St Judocus But he was quyt, by God and by Seint Joce!
I made hym of the same wode a croce –
Nat of my body, in no foul manere,
But certeynly I made folk swich chiere
That in his owene grece I made hym frye
For angre and for verray jalousye.
By God, in erthe I was his purgatorie,
For which I hope his soule be in glorie.
For God it woot, he sat ful ofte and soong
pinched Whan that his shoo ful bitterly hym wroong.
Ther was no wight, save God and he, that wiste
tormented In many wise how soore I hym twiste.
He deyde whan I cam fro Jerusalem
And lith ygrave under the roode beem,
Al is his toumbe noght so curyus
that Darius As was the sepulcre of hym Daryus,
Which that Appellus wroghte subtilly;
waste It nys but wast to burye hym preciously.
Lat hym fare wel, God gyve his soule reste!
coffin He is now in his grave and in his cheste.
Now of my fifthe housbonde wol I telle –
God lat his soule nevere come in helle!
greatest scoundrel And yet was he to me the mooste shrewe:

460 A story familiar to Chaucer from a popular Latin collection of anecdotes and exempla such as the *Facta et dicta memorabilia* ('Memorable Deeds and Sayings') of Valerius Maximus (first century AD).

469–73 This beautiful passage was inspired by the lament of the old woman (*La Vieille*) in the *Roman de la Rose* (12932–48) for her lost youth and beauty.

496 He had a very respectable burial place under the transverse beam that supported the cross (**roode**) at the rood-screen separating the nave from the chancel.

498–9 The Jewish craftsman Appelles was reputed to have made an elaborate tomb for the Persian king Darius.

one by one in a row That feele I on my rybbes al by rewe
And evere shal unto myn endyng day.
But in oure bed he was so fressh and gay
flatter And therwithal so wel koude he me glose,
wanted Whan that he wolde han my *bele chose*,
beaten That thogh he hadde me bet on every bon
He koude wynne agayn my love anon.
I trowe I loved hym best for that he
coldly reserved Was of his love daungerous to me.
We wommen han, if that I shal nat lye,
strange and curious In this matere a queynte fantasye:
Look for whatever, easily Wayte what thyng we may nat lightly have,
Therafter wol we crye al day and crave.
Forbede us thyng, and that desiren we;
Entreat us earnestly Preesse on us faste, and thanne wol we fle.
coy reserve, put out, merchandise With daunger oute we al oure chaffare;
crowd, expensive Greet prees at market maketh deere ware,
bargain, value And to greet cheepe is holden at litel prys:
This knoweth every womman that is wys.
My fifthe housbonde – God his soule blesse! –
Which that I took for love and no rychesse,
He somtyme was a clerk of Oxenford,
And hadde laft scole and wente at hom to bord
With my gossyb, dwellyng in oure town –
God have hir soule! Hir name was Alisoun.
secrets She knew myn herte and eek my pryvetee
as I may thrive Bet than oure parysshe preest, so mote I thee!
revealed, secret To hire biwreyed I my conseil al,
For hadde myn housbonde pissed on a wal
Or doon a thyng that sholde have cost his lyf,
To hire and to another worthy wyf
And to my nece, which that I loved wel,
I wolde han toold his conseil everydel;
And so I dide ful often, God it woot,
That made his face often reed and hoot
For verray shame, and blamed hymself for he
Hadde toold to me so greet a pryvetee.
And so bifel that ones in a Lente –
So often tymes I to my gossyb wente,
For evere yet I lovede to be gay,
And for to walke in March, Averyll and May
From hous to hous to here sondry tales –
That Jankyn clerk and my gossyb dame Alys
And I myself into the feeldes wente.
Myn housbonde was at Londoun al that Lente:
leisure I hadde the bettre leyser for to pleye
seen And for to se and eek for to be seye
Of lusty folk – what wiste I wher my grace
Was shapen for to be, or in what place?
Therfore I made my visitacions

530 Both the Wife herself (320, 804) and her 'gossip' (530, 548) are called 'Alys' or (dim.) 'Alisoun'. If they are 'god-siblings', co-sponsored at baptism, this would be natural enough; but Chaucer is generally parsimonious with names.

To vigilies and to processions,
To prechyng eek and to thise pilgrymages,
To pleyes of myracles and to mariages,
had on, gowns And wered upon my gaye scarlet gytes.
Thise wormes ne thise mothes ne thise mytes,
On peril of my soul, devoured Upon my peril, frete hem never a del;
And wostow why? For they were used wel.
Now wol I tellen forth what happed me.
I seye that in the feeldes walked we,
Til trewely we hadde swich daliaunce,
as part of my forward planning This clerk and I, that of my purveiaunce
I spak to hym and seyde hym how that he,
If I were wydewe, sholde wedde me.
boastfulness For certeynly – I seye for no bobaunce –
Yet was I nevere withouten purveiaunce
Of mariage, n'of othere thynges eek:
I holde a mouses herte noght worth a leek
run off to That hath but oon hole for to sterte to,
And if that faille thanne is al ydo.
deceived him into thinking I bar hym on honde he hadde enchanted me –
mother, subtle trick My dame taughte me that soutiltee –
dreamed And eek I seyde I mette of hym al nyght,
flat on my back He wolde han slayn me as I lay upright,
And al my bed was ful of verray blood –
But yet I hope that he shal do me good,
For blood bitokeneth gold, as me was taught.
And al was fals, I dremed of it right naught –
But I folwed ay my dames loore,
As wel of this as othere thynges moore.
But now, sire, lat me se, what shal I seyn?
A ha! by God, I have my tale ageyn.
bier Whan that my fourthe housbonde was a-beere
I wept, anyhow I weep, algate, and made sory cheere,
As wyves mooten, for it is usage,
And with my coverchief covered my visage;
provided beforehand with a mate But for that I was purveyed of a make
I wepte but smal, and that I undertake.
To chirche was myn housbonde born a-morwe
With neghebores that for hym maden sorwe,
And Jankyn oure clerk was oon of tho.
As help me God, whan that I saw hym go
After the beere, me thoughte he hadde a payre
Of legges and of feet so clene and fayre
keeping That al myn herte I yaf unto his hoold.
He was, I trowe, twenty wynter oold,
And I was fourty, if I shal seye sooth –
youthful tastes But yet I hadde alwey a coltes tooth,
Gat-tothed I was, and that bicam me weel;
(birth)mark I hadde the preynte of seynte Venus seel.

556 vigilies: feasts on the evenings before saints' days.
558 pleyes of myracles: miracle-plays (outdoor religious plays).
575–84 The frequency of these textual lacunae in Hg (see also 609–12, 619–26, 717–20, and Textual Notes) suggests some process of revision in the Prologue unrepresented in the earlier MS (though 717–20 look suspect).
585–6 Not for the first time (cf. 453, 480, 503, 525, 563) the Wife seems carried away by the flood of reminiscence.

As help me God, I was a lusty oon,
well set up And fayr and ryche and yong and wel bigoon,
And trewely, as myne housbondes tolde me,
'whatsit' ('whatchamacallit') I hadde the beste *quonyam* myghte be.
For certes I am al Venerien
In feelynge, and myn herte is Marcien:
Venus me yaf my lust, my likerousnesse,
boldness And Mars yaf me my sturdy hardynesse.
Myn ascendent was Taur, and Mars therinne –
Allas, allas! that evere love was synne!
I folwed ay myn inclinacioun
By vertu of my constellacioun;
That made me I koude noght withdrawe
My chambre of Venus from a good felawe.
the (birth)mark of Mars Yet have I Martes mark upon my face
And also in another privee place.
As surely as God may be For God so wys be my savacioun,
I ne loved nevere by no discrecioun
But evere folwed myn appetit,
dark or fair Al were he short or long or blak or whit;
pleased I took no kepe, so that he liked me,
How poore he was ne eek of what degree.
What sholde I seye but at the monthes ende
courteous This joly clerk Jankyn that was so hende
Hath wedded me with greet solempnytee
property And to hym yaf I al the lond and fee
That evere was me yeven therbifore.
But afterward repented me ful sore;
allow, desire He nolde suffre nothyng of my list.
ear By God, he smoot me ones on the lyst,
For that I rente out of his book a leef,
That of the strook myn ere weex al deef.
Stibourne I was as is a leonesse
loud chatterbox And of my tonge a verray jangleresse,
And walke I wolde as I hadde doon biforn
sworn to forbid it From hous to hous, althogh he hadde it sworn;
For which he often tymes wolde preche,
stories And me of olde Romayn gestes teche,
How he Symplicius Gallus lafte his wif
to the end of And hire forsook for terme of al his lif,
bare-headed Noght but for open-heveded he hir say
Lokynge out at his dore upon a day.
Another Romayn tolde he me by name
That for his wyf was at a someres game

609–20 The Wife declares herself to be the way she is because of her horoscope: when she was born, the zodiacal sign of Taurus was in the ascendant (i.e. the sun was passing through it), and Mars was in it in conjunction with Venus. This determines her nature and prevents her from behaving other than according to her nature; it is a shame that people do not realize this and simply think that 'love' (i.e. being highly sexed) is sinful. Medieval people had a high regard for astrology, but would not normally assume that planetary influences created more than a 'disposition' or **inclinacioun** (615) to particular forms of behaviour.

616 **constellacioun**: configuration of the heavenly bodies at one's birth.

621–6 The Wife's claim to an almost heroic sexual appetite may be deliberately outrageous; it is not fully in accord with her care elsewhere to make it clear that she was not an adulteress (485).

630–1 The Wife's big mistake: the money and property that she had accumulated from her marriages she was by no means obliged to alienate to her husband; it was a loving act, which she came to regret.

643 This story, like the one below (647), is from Valerius Maximus (see 460n, above).

knowledge Withouten his wityng, he forsook hire eke.
And thanne wolde he upon his Bible seke
(Ecclus. 25:26) That ilke proverbe of Ecclesiaste
strictly Where he comandeth and forbedeth faste
wander Man shal nat suffre his wyf go roule aboute.
Thanne wolde he seye right thus, withouten doute:
willow branches "Whoso that buyldeth his hous al of salwes,
fallow fields And priketh his blynde hors over the falwes,
pilgrimage shrines And suffreth his wyf to go seken halwes,
Is worthy to been hanged on the galwes!"
hawthorn-berry But al for noght – I sette noght an hawe
saying Of his proverbe n'of his olde sawe,
N'I wolde nat of hym corrected be.
I hate hym that my vices telleth me,
And so doon mo, God woot, of us than I.
absolutely This made hym with me wood al outrely;
submit to I nolde noght forbere hym in no cas.
Now wol I seye yow sooth, by Seint Thomas,
Why that I rente out of his book a leef,
For which he smoot me so that I was deef.
He hadde a book that gladly, nyght and day,
For his disport he wolde rede alway;
He clepyd it "Valerie and Theofraste",
laughed At which book he logh alwey ful faste.
And eek ther was somtyme a clerk at Rome,
A cardynal that highte Seint Jerome
That made a book agayn Jovinian;
In which book eek ther was Tertulan,
Crisippus, Trotula and Helowys,
That was abbesse nat fer fro Parys,
the Book of Proverbs And eek the Parables of Salomon,
many a one Ovydes Art, and bokes many on –
And alle thise were bounden in o volume.
And every nyght and day was his custume,
spare time Whan he hadde leyser and vacacioun
From oother worldly ocupacioun,
To reden in this book of wikked wyves.
He knew of hem mo legendes and lyves
Than been of goode wyves in the Bible.
For trusteth wel, it is an inpossible
That any clerk wol speke good of wyves,
But if it be of holy seintes lyves,
N'of noon oother womman never the mo.
Who peynted the leoun, tel me who?

655–8 This little quatrain of 'inadvisables' is cited as if it were a well-known jingle, but it is not elsewhere recorded.

669–81 Jankyn's 'book of wikked wyves' (685) is a not unrepresentative example of collections of anti-feminist and anti-marriage stories and *exempla* such as were popular among clerics as an aid to the celibate life. It includes the famous twelfth-century letter of 'Valerius to Rufinus' advising him not to marry (*Epistola Valerii ad Rufinum*) and the 'Golden Book of Marriage' (*Liber aureolus de nuptiis*) of Theophrastus, known only from being quoted by Jerome (674–5; see note to line 7 above); also others such as the early theologian Tertullian, the female gynaecologist Trotula from the great medical school at Salerno (she seems to have dropped in by mistake), and Héloïse, who dispraised marriage in her letters to Abélard.

680 Ovydes Art: Ovid's *Ars amatoria*, or 'Art of Love'.

692 A proverbial phrase, referring to the lion's question when he saw a picture of a peasant killing a lion with an axe. The view chosen depends on who is painting the picture. See M. Carruthers, 'The Wife of Bath and the Painting of Lions', *PMLA* 94 (1979), 209–22.

By God, if wommen hadden writen stories
As clerkes han, withinne hir oratories,
They wolde han writen of men moore wikkednesse
the male sex Than al the mark of Adam may redresse.
The children of Mercurie and Venus
Been in hir wirkyng ful contrarius:
knowledge Mercurie loveth wysdam and science
And Venus loveth riot and dispence:
And for hir diverse disposicioun
Ech faileth in ootheres exaltacioun,
And thus, God woot, Mercurie is desolat
In Pisces, wher Venus is exaltat,
And Venus faileth ther Mercurie is reysed.
Therfore no womman of no clerk is preysed.
The clerk, whan he is old and may noght do
Of Venus werkes worth his olde sho,
Thanne sit he doun and writ in his dotage
That wommen kan nat kepe hir mariage.
But now to purpos why I tolde thee
That I was beten for a book, pardee!
my husband Upon a nyght Jankyn, that was oure sire,
Redde on his book as he sat by the fire
Of Eva first, that for hir wikkednesse
Was al mankynde broght to wrecchednesse,
For which that Jesu Crist hymself was slayn
That boghte us with his herte blood agayn.
explicitly Lo, heere expres of womman may ye fynde
ruin That womman was the los of al mankynde.
Tho redde he me how Sampson loste his herys:
lady-love, cut Slepynge, his lemman kitte it with hir sherys,
Thurgh which tresoun loste he bothe his eyen.
Tho redde he me, if that I shal nat lyen,
Of Hercules and of his Dianyre,
That caused hym to sette hymself afyre.
Nothyng forgat he the sorwe and wo
That Socrates hadde with his wyves two,
How Xantippa caste pisse upon his heed.
This sely man sat stille as he were deed;
He wiped his heed, namoore dorste he seyn
stops But "Er that thonder stynte, comth a reyn!"
Of Phasifpha, that was the queene of Crete,
For shrewednesse hym thoughte the tale swete;
Fy! spek namoore – it is a grisly thyng –
Of hire horrible lust and hir likyng.
Of Clitermystra, for hir lecherye,

697–706 Clerks (under the influence of the planet Mercury, signifying knowledge and learning) and sexually active women (under Venus) are opposed in their very nature (see note to line 609 above) or **disposicioun** (701). Each is weakest where the other is strongest, as with the planets, where each is weakest in the zodiacal sign, such as Pisces (704), in which the other has its greatest power, or **exaltacioun** (702).

721–64 Stories well known from anti-feminist writings and other sources: Samson, betrayed by Delilah; Hercules, burnt to death in a fiery shirt given to him (unwittingly) by Deïaneira; Socrates, the model of husbandly patience; Pasiphae, who gave birth to the Minotaur after an amorous encounter with a bull; Clytemnestra, who had her husband Agamemnon murdered by her lover Aegisthus on his return from Troy; Amphioraus, betrayed by his wife Eriphyle; and other stories from the *Epistola Valerii*.

That falsly made hir housbonde for to dye,
He redde it with ful good devocioun.
He tolde me eek for what occasioun
Amphiorax at Thebes loste his lyf.
Myn housbonde hadde a legende of his wyf
brooch Eriphilem, that for an ouch of gold
Hath prively unto the Grekys told
Wher that hir housbonde hidde hym in a place,
sad fate For which he hadde at Thebes sory grace.
Of Lyvia tolde he me and of Lucie:
They bothe made hir housbondes for to dye,
That oon for love, that oother was for hate.
Lyvia hir housbonde, on an even late,
Empoysoned hath for that she was his fo;
Lucya, likerous, loved hir housbonde so
That for he sholde alwey upon hir thynke
She yaf hym swich a manere love-drynke
That he was deed er it were by the morwe.
always And thus algates housbondes han sorwe.
a certain Thanne tolde he me how that oon Latumyus
Compleyned unto his felawe Arrius
That in his gardyn growed swich a tree
On which he seyde how that hise wyves thre
out of spite Honged hemself for hertes despitus.
"O leeve brother," quod this Arrius,
"Yif me a plante of thilke blissed tree
And in my gardyn planted shal it be."
Of latter date of wyves hath he red
That somme han slayn hir housbondes in hir bed
have sex with And lete hir lechour dighte hire al the nyght
stretched out flat Whan that the corps lay in the floor upryght;
And somme han dryven nayles in hir brayn
Whil that they sleepe and thus they han hem slayn;
Somme han hem yeven poysoun in hir drynke.
imagine He spak moore harm than herte may bithynke,
And therwithal he knew of mo proverbes
Than in this world ther growen gras or herbes.
"Bet is," quod he, "thyn habitacioun
Be with a leoun or a foul dragoun
Than with a womman usyng for to chide.
Bet is," quod he, "hye in the roof abyde
Than with an angry wyf down in the hous.
They been so wikked and contrarious,
what They haten that hir housbondes loveth ay."
casts He seyde, "A womman cast hir shame away,
Whan she cast of hir smok", and forthermo,
"A fair womman, but she be chaast also,
Is lyk a gold ryng in a sowes nose."
Who wolde wene, or who wolde suppose,
pain The wo that in myn herte was, and pyne?

775–85 Proverbs from Ecclus. 15:16, Prov. 21:9, Jerome, and Prov. 11:22, respectively.

saw, finish And whan I say he wolde nevere fyne
To reden on this cursed book al nyght,
snatched Al sodeynly thre leves have I plyght
was reading Out of his book, right as he radde, and eke
I with my fist so took hym on the cheke
That in oure fyr he fil bakward adown.
And he up stirte as dooth a wood leoun
And with his fest he smoot me on the heed
That in the floor I lay as I were deed.
And whan he say how stille that I lay,
He was agast and wolde have fled his way,
swoon, started awake Til atte laste out of my swowgh I brayde:
"O! hastow slayn me, false theef?" I sayde,
"And for my land thus hastow mordred me?
Er I be deed yet wol I kisse thee."
And neer he cam and kneled faire adown,
And seyde, "Deere suster Alisoun,
As help me God, I shal thee nevere smyte!
blame That I have doon it is thyself to wyte.
Foryeve it me, and that I thee biseke!"
straightway And yet eftsoones I hitte hym on the cheke,
revenged And seyde, "Theef, thus muchel am I wreke;
Now wol I dye, I may no lenger speke."
But at the laste, with muchel care and wo,
We fille acorded by us selven two.
He yaf me al the brydel in myn hond
To han the governance of hous and lond
And of his tonge and his hond also;
And made hym brenne his book anon right tho.
And whan that I hadde geten unto me
By maistrye al the soveraynetee,
And that he seyde, "Myn owene trewe wyf,
to the end Do as thee lust the terme of al thy lyf;
Keepe thyn honour, and keepe eek myn estaat" –
After that day we hadden nevere debaat.
God help me so, I was to hym as kynde
As any wyf from Denmark unto Inde
And also trewe, and so was he to me.
I pray to God that sit in magestee,
So blesse his soule for his mercy deere.
Now wol I seye my tale, if ye wol heere.'
The Frere logh, whan he hadde herd al this;
'Now dame,' quod he, 'so have I joye or blys,
This is a long preamble of a tale!'
exclaim thus And whan the Somnour herde the Frere gale,
'Lo,' quod the Somonour, 'Goddes armes two!
always be meddling A frere wol entremette hym everemo.

811–25 This is not an undignified close, but the amity of their future proceeding, it should be noted, is not based on a reciprocal exchange of rights but on Jankyn's total capitulation to all Alysoun's demands. She is *kynde* and *treue* to him for ever after, but he has to give up everything to her.

829–49 Friars and summoners were traditional professional rivals, though the Summoner here seems most offended by the Friar's verbal ostentation (**preamble**), which he mocks and parodies (837–8). The main reason for introducing their argument is to whet the reader's appetite for the violently abusive tales that they are to tell after the Wife has finished.

Loo, goode men, a flye and eek a frere
Wol falle in every dyssh and ech matere.
What spekestow of preambulacioun?
What! amble or trotte or pisse or go sit doun!
spoilest our fun Thow lettest oure disport in this manere.'
'Ye, woltow so, sire Somnour?' quod the Frere;
'Now by my feith I shal er that I go
Telle of a somnour swich a tale or two
That al the folk shal laughen in this place.'
curse 'Now ellis, Frere, I wol bishrewe thy face,'
Quod this Somnour, 'and I bishrewe me
But if I telle tales two or thre
Of freres er I come to Sydyngborne
mourn That I shal make thyn herte for to morne,
For wel I woot thy pacience is gon.'
Oure Hoost cryde 'Pees! and that anon!'
And seyde, 'Lat the womman telle hir tale.
Ye fare as folk that dronken ben of ale.
Do, dame, tel forth youre tale, and that is best.'
'Al reddy, sire,' quod she, 'right as yow lest,
If I have licence of this worthy Frere?'
'Yis, dame,' quod he, 'tel forth, and I wol heere.'

The Wife of Bath's Tale

The Wife of Bath's Tale is apparently a demonstration of her argument, that not only do women have an inalienable right to sovereignty in marriage, but men cannot themselves be happy until they recognize this fact. The story is derived from an old folk-tale of transformation, the story of the Loathly Hag, but is retold so as to enforce the Wife's argument: the knight's offence is specifically an offence against womankind; it is the intervention of women that saves him from death; and it is an old woman who gives him the answer to the question he has been set. Further, she explains patiently to him, on their wedding-night, not only the love and duty he owes to her as his wife but the whole basis, in respect for ideal values, of his vocation as a knight. She is then transformed into a beautiful woman. Is it the knight's transformation that makes possible her transformation? Or does she *choose* to be transformed when the knight has properly learnt his lesson? Questions of love, power, sexuality and the mutual respect due in human relationships, raised in the Wife's Prologue, are here further explored within the context of a traditional story. Study by S. Crane, in *PMLA* 102 (1987), 20–8.

In th'olde dayes of the kyng Arthour,
Of which that Britons speken greet honour,
full of supernatural creatures Al was this land fulfild of fairye.
The elf-queene with hir joly compaignye
Daunced ful ofte in many a grene mede;
This was the olde opynyoun, as I rede –
I speke of manye hundred yerys ago.
But now kan no man se none elves mo,
For now the grete charitee and prayeres
Of lymytours and othere holy freres,

847 Sittingbourne, a town on the road to Canterbury half-way from London.

857 Chaucer rarely mentions Arthurian legend, and when he does he associates it with the tastes of women (Nun's Priest's Tale, VII.3212) or with fairy-tales, as here. To him it probably seemed old-fashioned, provincial and unsophisticated. The behaviour of the knight of the tale does not reflect much credit on the court of Arthur.

866–81 **lymytours**: friars licensed to beg in a particular area. The comic picture of the land filled with friars instead of fairies is obviously directed at the Friar, not so much to mock him as to arouse his attention: the Wife's remarks are quite salacious, especially the suggestion that friars have taken the place of the elf and incubus (demons who jumped out of the woods and raped women and left them pregnant).

find their way to That serchen every lond and every streem,
specks of dust As thikke as motes in the sonne-beem,
Blessynge halles, chambres, kichenes, boures,
Citees, burghes, castels, hye toures,
Villages, barns, stables Thropes, bernes, shipnes, dayeryes –
This maketh that ther been no fairyes.
For ther as wont to walken was an elf
Ther walketh now the lymytour hymself
early afternoons, mornings In undermelys and in morwenynges,
And seith his matyns and his holy thynges
assigned territory As he gooth in his lymytacioun.
Wommen may go saufly up and down:
In every bussh or under every tree
Ther is noon oother incubus but he,
And he ne wol doon hem but dishonour.
And so bifel that this kyng Arthour
young knight Hadde in his hous a lusty bachiler,
hawking by the riverside That on a day cam ridyng fro ryver,
And happed that, allone as he was born,
He say a mayde walkynge hym biforn,
despite all she could do Of which mayde anoon, maugree hir hed,
By verray force he rafte hir maydenhed.
For which oppressioun was swich clamour
suing for justice And swich pursuyte unto the kyng Arthour
That dampned was this knyght for to be deed
By cours of lawe and sholde han lost his heed –
Paraventure swich was the statut tho –
But that the queene and othere ladyes mo
So longe preyeden the kyng of grace
Til he his lyf hym graunted in the place
And yaf hym to the queene, al at hir wille,
cause to die To chese wheither she wolde hym save or spille.
The queene thanketh the kyng with al hir myght
And after this thus spak she to the knyght,
Whan that she saw hir tyme upon a day:
in such a state 'Thow standest yet,' quod she, 'in swich array
That of thy lyf yet hastow no suretee.
I graunte thee lyf if thow kanst tellen me
What thyng is it that wommen moost desiren:
iron (i.e. the executioner's axe) Be war, and keepe thy nekke-boon from iren!
straightaway And if thow kanst nat tellen me anon
Yet wol I yeve thee leve for to gon
search and learn A twelf-monthe and a day to seche and lere
An answere suffisant in this matere;
depart And seuretee wol I han, er that thow pace,
surrender Thy body for to yelden in this place.'
sighs Wo was this knyght and sorwefully he siketh;
But what! he may nat doon al as hym liketh,
chose And atte laste he chees hym for to wende
And come agayn right at the yeres ende
provide With swich answere as God wolde hym purveye;
And taketh his leve, and wendeth forth his weye.
He seketh every hous and every place

Where as he hopeth for to fynde grace
To lerne what thyng wommen love moost,
region But he ne koude arryven in no coost
Where as he myghte fynde in this matere
together Two creatures acordyng in-feere.
Somme seyden wommen loven best richesse,
Somme seyde honour, somme seyde jolifnesse,
Somme riche array, somme seyden lust abedde,
And ofte tyme to be widwe and wedde.
Somme seyde that oure herte is moost esed
Whan that we been yflatered and yplesed –
He gooth ful ny the sothe, I wol nat lye:
A man shal wynne us best with flaterye,
And with attendaunce and with bisynesse
ensnared Been we ylymed, bothe moore and lesse.
And somme seyn that we loven best
For to be free and do right as us lest
And that no man repreve us of oure vice
foolish But seye that we be wise and nothyng nyce.
For trewely ther is noon of us alle,
sore spot If any wight wolde clawe us on the galle,
will not kick out That we nyl kike for he seith us sooth.
Assay and he shal fynde it that so dooth;
For be we never so vicious withinne
wish to be considered We wol be holden wise and clene of synne.
And somme seyn that greet delit han we
able to keep a secret For to be holden stable and eek secree
And in o purpos stedefastly to dwelle
betray And nat biwreye thyng that men us telle –
rake-handle But that tale is nat worth a rake-stele.
hide Pardee, we wommen konne nothyng hele:
Witnesse on Mida – wol ye heere the tale?
Ovyde, amonges othere thynges smale,
Seyde Mida hadde under his longe herys,
Growynge upon his heed, two asses erys,
defect The whiche vice he hidde as he best myghte
Ful sotilly from every mannes sighte,
That save his wyf ther wiste of it namo.
He loved hire moost and trusted hire also;
He preyed hire that to no creature
disfigurement She sholde tellen of his diffigure.
She swoor him nay – for al this world to wynne,
She nolde do that vileynye or syn
To make hir housbonde han so foul a name;
She nolde nat telle it for hir owene shame.
would die But nathelees hir thoughte that she dyde
secret That she so longe sholde a conseil hyde;
swelled Hir thoughte it swal so soore aboute hir herte
of necessity, must escape That nedely som word hir moste asterte;
And sith she dorste nat telle it to no man,

951–82 In Ovid's story (*Met.* XI.174–93), it is King Midas's barber who knows his secret and cannot keep it. Her version of the story enables the Wife to make her point, though at the expense of reminding us of her own free-running tongue.

marsh
Doun to a marys faste by she ran –
Til she cam there hir herte was afyre –
bittern (type of heron) booms And as a bitore bombleth in the myre
She leyde hir mouth unto the water down:
'Biwrey me nat, thow water, with thy sown,'
Quod she. 'To thee I telle it and namo:
Myn housbonde hath longe asses erys two!
Now is myn herte al hool, now is it oute.
I myghte no lenger kepe it, out of doute.'
Heere may ye se, thogh we a tyme abyde,
Yet out it moot; we kan no conseil hyde.
The remenant of the tale if ye wol heere,
learn Redeth Ovyde, and ther ye may it leere.
This knyght, of which my tale is specially,
Whan that he say he myghte nat come therby –
This is to seye, what wommen loven moost –
spirit Withinne his brest ful sorweful was the goost.
But hom he gooth, he myghte nat sojorne;
The day was come that homward moste he torne.
And in his wey it happed hym to ryde
In al this care under a forest syde,
Wher as he say upon a daunce go
Of ladyes foure and twenty and yet mo;
eagerly Toward the whiche daunce he drow ful yerne
In hope that som wysdom sholde he lerne.
But certeynly er he cam fully there
knew not Vanysshed was this daunce, he nyste where.
was living No creature say he that bar lyf
Save on the grene he say sittynge a wyf –
A fouler wight ther may no man devyse.
At the approach of Agayn the knyght this olde wyf gan ryse,
And seyde, 'Sire knyght, heer forth ne lyth no wey.
Tel me what that ye seken, by youre fey!
Paraventure it may the bettre be;
These This olde folk konne muchel thyng,' quod she.
'My leeve moder,' quod this knyght, 'certeyn
I nam but deed but if that I kan seyn
What thyng it is that wommen moost desire.
inform, pay you a reward Koude ye me wisse I wolde wel quyte youre hyre.'
'Plight me thy trouthe here in myn hand,' quod she,
'The nexte thyng that I requere thee
Thow shalt it do, if it lye in thy myght,
And I wol telle it yow er it be nyght.'
'Have heer my trouthe,' quod the knyght, 'I graunte.'
make boast 'Thanne,' quod she, 'I dar me wel avaunte
be your support Thy lyf is sauf, for I wole stonde therby;
Upon my lyf the queene wol seye as I.
Lat see which is the prouddeste of hem alle
has on, decorative hairnet That wereth on a coverchief or a calle

1011–12 She does not tell him what it is she will require of him in return, as she does in the traditional version of the story told for instance by Gower in his tale of Florent (*Confessio Amantis* I.1407–1861). This change is made so that, when he finds out, he is trapped (at the queen's court) and has no choice. He does not even get the chance to choose whether to behave honourably.

That dar seye nay of that I shal thee teche.
Lat us go forth withouten lenger speche.'
whispered, message Tho rowned she a pistel in his ere
And bad hym to be glad and have no fere.
Whan they be comen to the court, this knyght
promised Seyde he hadde holde his day as he had hight
And redy was his answere, as he sayde.
Ful many a noble wyf and many a mayde
And many a widwe – for that they ben wise –
The queene hirself sittyng as justise,
Assembled been this answere for to here,
bidden to And afterward this knyght was bode appere.
To every wight comanded was silence
And that the knyght sholde telle in audience
What thyng that worldly wommen loven best.
beast This knyght ne stood nat stille as dooth a best
But to his question anon answerde
With manly voys that al the court it herde:
liege 'My lige lady, generally,' quod he,
'Wommen desire to have sovereyntee
As wel over hir housbonde as hir love
And for to been in maistrie hym above.
This is youre mooste desir, thogh ye me kille.
Dooth as yow list: I am here at youre wille.'
In al the court ne was ther wyf ne mayde
Ne wydwe that contraryed that he sayde
But seyden he was worthy han his lyf.
And with that word up stirte that olde wyf
Which that the knyght say sittyng on the grene:
'Mercy,' quod she, 'my sovereyn lady queene!
Er that youre court departe, do me right.
I taughte this answere unto the knyght,
For which he plighte me his trouthe there,
The firste thyng that I wolde hym requere
He wolde it do, if it laye in his myght.
Bifore the court thanne preye I thee, sire knyght,'
Quod she, 'that thow me take unto thy wyf,
For wel thow woost that I have kept thy lyf.
If I seye fals, sey nay, upon thy fey!'
This knyght answerde, 'Allas and weilawey!
promise I woot right wel that swich was my biheste.
choose For Goddes love, as chees a newe requeste!
wealth Taak al my good and lat my body go.'
curse 'Nay, thanne,' quod she, 'I shrewe us bothe two!
For thogh that I be foul, old and poore
I nolde for al the metal ne for oore
That under erthe is grave or lith above
But if thy wyf I were and eek thy love.'
'My love?' quod he, 'nay, my dampnacioun!
family Allas, that any of my nacioun
disgraced Sholde evere so foule disparaged be!'
But al for noght; th'ende is this, that he
Constreyned was, he nedes moste hir wedde;

And taketh his olde wyf and goth to bedde.
Now wolden som men seye, paraventure,
(see n.) That for my necligence I do no cure
To tellen yow the joye and al th' array
That at the feste was that ilke day.
To which thyng shortly answere I shal:
I seye ther nas no joye ne feste at al;
Ther nas but hevynesse and muche sorwe.
For prively he wedded hire on morwe
And al day after hidde hym as an owle,
So wo was hym his wyf looked so foule.
Greet was the wo the knyght hadde in his thoght
Whan he was with his wyf abedde ybrought;
He walweth and he turneth to and fro.
His olde wyf lay smylynge everemo,
And seyde, 'O deere housbonde, benedicite!
Fareth every knyght thus with his wyf as ye?
Is this the lawe of kyng Arthures hous?
of his (court) Is every knyght of his thus daungerous?
I am youre owene love and youre wyf;
I am she which that saved hath youre lyf,
And certes yet ne dide I yow nevere unright;
Why fare ye thus with me this firste nyght?
Ye faren lyk a man hadde lost his wit.
What is my gilt? For Goddes love, tel it
And it shal ben amended, if I may.'
'Amended?' quod this knyght, 'Allas, nay, nay!
It wol nat ben amended neveremo.
Thow art so loothly and so old also
low-born And therto comen of so lowe a kynde
twist about That litel wonder is thogh I walwe and wynde.
break So wolde God myn herte wolde breste!'
'Is this,' quod she, 'the cause of youre unreste?'
'Ye, certeynly,' quod he, 'no wonder is.'
'Now, sire,' quod she, 'I koude amende al this,
If that me liste, er it were dayes thre,
Provided that, behave well So wel ye myghte bere yow unto me.
'But for ye speken of swich gentillesse
As is descended out of old richesse –
That therfore sholden ye be gentil men –
Swich errogaunce is nat worth an hen.
Looke who that is moost vertuous alway,
In private and in public Pryvee and apert, and moost entendeth ay
To do the gentil dedes that he kan:
Taak hym for the gentileste man.
wishes that Crist wol we clayme of hym oure gentilesse,

1074 'That it's because of my negligence that I take no trouble'.

1109–1216 The old wife takes up the knight's grievances (1100–1) in turn, adding poverty (1177), which he did not complain about, for good measure. The case concerning *gentillesse*, that 'noble is as noble does', is a medieval commonplace, given eloquent expression by Boethius in the *Consolation of Philosophy* (II, prose 6; III, prose 4); by Jean de Meun in the *Roman de la Rose* (6579–92, 11607–896); and by Dante in the *Convivio* (*Trattato* 4 and the *canzone* preceding). The prevalence of the sentiment did not much affect actual attitudes or behaviour towards people of rank.

Nat of oure eldres for hir old richesse.
For thogh they yeve us al hir heritage,
noble lineage For which we clayme to been of hir parage,
Yet may they nat biquethe for nothyng
To noon of us hir vertuous lyvyng,
That made hem gentil men ycalled be,
And (made that they) bade us And bad us folwen hem in swich degree.
'Wel kan the wise poete of Florence,
on this theme That highte Dant, speken in this sentence.
Lo, in swich maner rym is Dantes tale:
by the branches (of his family tree) "Ful selde up riseth by his braunches smale
Prowesse of man, for God of his goodnesse
Desires Wole that of hym we clayme oure gentilesse".
For of oure eldres may we nothyng clayme
(i.e. that is transient) But temporel thyng that man may hurte and mayme.
'Eek every wight woot this as wel as I,
If gentilesse were planted naturelly
Unto a certeyn lynage doun the lyne,
cease Pryvee and apert, thanne wolde they nevere fyne
To doon of gentilesse the faire office –
They myghte do no vileynye or vice.
'Taak fyr and bere it in the derkeste hous
Caucasus Bitwix this and the mount of Kaukasous
thence And lat men shette the dores and go thenne,
Yet wol the fyr as faire lye and brenne
As twenty thousand men myghte it biholde:
His office naturel ay wol it holde,
I stake my life on it Up peril of my lyf, til that it dye.
innate nobility 'Here may ye se wel how that genterye
Is nat annexed to possessioun,
what they should do Sith folk ne doon hir operacioun
according to its nature Alwey, as dooth the fyr, lo, in his kynde.
For God it woot men may wel often fynde
A lordes sone do shame and vileynye;
And he that wol han prys of his gentrye,
For he was born of a gentil hous
And hadde his eldres noble and vertuous,
And nyl hymselven do no gentil dedis
who is dead Ne folwen his gentil auncestre that deed is –
He nys nat gentil, be he duc or erl,
For vileynes synful dedes maken a cherl.
the gentility you claim, renown For gentilesse nys but renomee
goodness Of thyne auncestres for hir hye bountee,
a thing alien to Which is a straunge thyng for thy persone;
Thy gentilesse cometh fro God allone.
Thanne comth oure verray gentilesse of grace;
It was nothyng biquethe us with oure place.
'Thenketh how noble, as seith Valerius,
Was thilke Tullius Hostillius
That out of poverte roos to heigh noblesse.

1125–30 Close to Dante, *Purgatorio* 7.121–3.
1165–8 The story of Tullius Hostilius, legendary third king of Rome, is told by Valerius Maximus (see 460n, above); for Seneca, see Epistle 44.

Redeth Senek and redeth eek Boece:
there is no doubt Ther shul ye seen expres that no drede is
That he is gentil that dooth gentil dedis.
'And therfore, leve housbonde, I thus conclude:
low-born Al were it that myne auncestres weren rude,
Yet may the hye God – and so hope I –
Graunte me grace to lyven vertuously.
Thanne am I gentil whan that I bigynne
abandon To lyven vertuously and weyve synne.
'And ther as ye of poverte me repreve,
The hye God, on whom that we bileve,
voluntary In wilful poverte chees to lyve his lyf.
And certes every man, mayden or wyf
May understonde that Jesus, hevene kyng,
Ne wolde nat chese a vicious lyvyng.
honourable Glad poverte is an honeste thyng, certeyn;
This wol Senek and othere clerkes seyn.
is content with Whoso that halt hym payd of his poverte
I holde hym riche, al hadde he nat a sherte.
He that coveiteth is a povre wight
For he wolde han that is nat in his myght;
But he that noght hath, ne coveiteth have,
peasant Is riche, althogh we holde hym but a knave.
of its own accord Verray poverte, it syngeth proprely:
Juvenal seith of poverte, "Myrily
The povre man, whan he gooth by the weye,
Biforn the theves he may synge and pleye."
Poverte is hateful good and, as I gesse,
(see n.) A ful greet bryngere out of bisynesse,
improver A greet amendere eek of sapience
To hym that taketh it in pacience.
wretched Poverte is this, althogh it seme elenge:
Possessioun that no wight wol chalenge.
Poverte ful often, whan a man is lowe,
Enables him Maketh hymself and eek his God to knowe.
eyeglass Poverte a spectacle is, as thynketh me,
Thurgh which he may his verray freendes se.
And therfore, sire, syn that I noght yow greve,
Of my poverte namoore ye me repreve.
'Now, sire, of elde ye repreve me:
And certes, sire, thogh noon auctoritee
gentlemen Were in no book, ye gentils of honour
Seyn that men an old wight sholde doon favour
And clepe hym fader, for youre gentilesse:
authoritative writers (to support this) And auctours shal I fynden, as I gesse.
'Now ther ye seye that I am foul and old –
cuckold Thanne drede yow noght to been a cokewold,
age For filthe and elde, also mote I thee,
guardians Been grete wardeyns upon chastitee.

1177–1206 Voluntary and patient poverty were widely acclaimed by medieval writers, using both classical (e.g. Seneca, Epistle 2; Juvenal, Satire 10) and biblical (e.g. 2 Cor. 8:9) sources.

1196 'Something that is very effective in freeing one from care'.

what you take pleasure in
But nathelees, syn I knowe youre delit,
I shal fulfille youre worldly appetit.
'Chees now,' quod she, 'oon of thise thynges tweye:
To han me foul and old til that I deye
And be to yow a trewe, humble wyf
And nevere yow displese in al my lyf;
Or ellis ye wol han me yong and fair
chance, resort (visits) And take youre aventure of the repair
That shal be to youre hous bycause of me –
Or in som oother place, may wel be.
whichever of the two Now chees yourselven wheither that yow liketh.'
considers carefully This knyght avyseth hym and soore siketh,
But atte laste he seyde in this manere:
'My lady and my love, and wyf so deere,
I putte me in youre wise governaunce:
Cheseth youreself which that may be moost plesaunce
And moost honour to yow and me also.
I do not care I do no fors the wheither of the two,
For as yow liketh it suffiseth me.'
'Thanne have I gete of yow maistrye,' quod she,
'Syn I may chese and governe as me lest?'
'Ye, certes, wyf,' quod he, 'I holde it best.'
'Kys me,' quod she, 'we be no lenger wrothe,
For by my trouthe I wol be to yow bothe –
This is to seyn, ye, bothe fair and good.
may die insane I prey to God that I mote sterven wood
as good But I to yow be also good and trewe
As evere was wyf syn that the world was newe.
in the morning And but I be to-morn as fair to sene
As any lady, emperice or queene
That is bitwix the est and eek the west,
Do with my lyf and deth right as yow lest.
curtain (round the bed) Cast up the curtyn, looke how that it is.'
And whan the knyght say verraily al this,
That she so fair was and so yong therto,
For joye he hente hire in his armes two,
His herte bathed in a bath of blisse.
in succession A thousand tyme a-rewe he gan hir kisse
And she obeyed hym in every thyng
That myghte do hym plesance or likyng.
And thus they lyve unto hir lyves ende
In parfit joye; and Jesu Crist us sende
Housbondes meke, yonge and fressh abedde –
outlive And grace t'overbyde hem that we wedde;
And eek I praye Jesu shorte hir lyves

1219–27 The question in the traditional story is, would you rather have me fair by day and foul by night, or foul by day and fair by night? The old wife's version gives no power to the husband to exercise a preference between two kinds of marital satisfaction (private and public) but only to choose between two ways in which his wife has the power to make him unhappy.

1230 The knight's form of address seems spontaneously generous and loving, not merely conciliatory, as if he has truly learnt his lesson; he has not yet, it should be noted, as he has in the analogues, had the encouragement of actually witnessing the effects of the promised transformation.

1255–6 The exact nature of this 'obedience' (whether merely sexual *complaisance* or something more) is left ambiguous, and goes with the raucous tone of the Wife's last lines (1257–64) in leaving a question mark hovering over the apparently happy ending of the story.

That noght wol be governed by hir wyves;
expenditure And olde and angry nygardes of dispence,
God sende hem soone verray pestilence!

{The Friar's Prologue follows}

The Franklin's Prologue and Tale

Fragment V began with the Squire's Tale, an oriental romance which looked as though it might go on for ever and which Chaucer left unfinished. Whether the Franklin's commendation of the Tale was intended to follow on smoothly from the Tale when Chaucer eventually got round to finishing it, or whether it is to be seen as an interruption, in which the Franklin, with the company's sanity in mind, pretends to believe that the Tale is really over, is not certain. He soon introduces preoccupations of his own – his anxiety about his son's wayward career and his admiration for *gentillesse*. The Host is scornful of the Franklin's pretensions to 'gentle' status (as a rich independent landowner, the Franklin has a claim to belong to this privileged class, but his status, like Chaucer's, is interestingly 'liminal'), but the Franklin's Tale turns out to be much preoccupied with questions of *gentillesse*.

The Words of the Franklin to the Squire, and of the Host to the Franklin

acquitted 'In feith, Squyer, thow hast thee wel yquyt
And gentilly. I preise wel thy wit,'
Quod the Frankeleyn: 'considerynge thy youthe,
commend you highly So feelyngly thow spekest, sire, I allow the!
In my judgement As to my doom ther is noon that is heere
Of eloquence that shal be thy peere,
If that thow lyve; God yeve thee good chaunce
And in vertu sende thee continuaunce,
pleasure For of thy speche I have gret deyntee.
I have a sone, and by the Trinitee
(see n.) I hadde levere than twenty pound worth lond,
Thogh it right now were fallen in myn hond,
He were a man of swich discrecioun
As that ye ben! Fy on possessioun
But if a man be vertuous withal!
rebuked I have my sone snybbed and yit shal,
chooses to pay no attention For he to vertu lusteth nat entende,
dice, spend But for to pleye at dees and to despende
lose And lese al that he hath is his usage.
servant-lad And he hath levere talken with a page
Than to commune with any gentil wight
Where he myghte lerne gentillesse aright.'
'Straw for youre gentillesse!' quod oure Hoost.
'What, Frankeleyn! Pardee, sire, wel thow woost
That ech of yow moot tellen atte leeste
promise A tale or two, or breken his biheste.'
'That knowe I wel, sire,' quod the Frankeleyn.
'I prey yow, haveth me nat in desdeyn,
Thogh to this man I speke a word or two.'
'Telle on thy tale withouten wordes mo.'

683 'I would rather have land yielding an annual income of twenty pound'.

686–7 Like the hag in WBT 1146–7, the Franklin says that having money and property is worth nothing unless a man is virtuous, and has true **gentillesse** and inward nobility of nature.

'Gladly, sire Hoost,' quod he, 'I wol obeye
Unto youre wyl; now herkneth what I seye.
I wol yow nat contrarien in no wise
As fer as that my wittes wole suffise.
I prey to God that it may plesen yow;
Thanne woot I wel that it is good ynow.'

The Franklin's Prologue

Bretons
Thise olde gentil Britons in hir dayes
Of diverse aventures maden layes,
Composed in verse, original
Rymeyed in hir firste Briton tonge,
Whiche layes with hir instrumentz they songe
Or ellis redden hem for hire plesaunce;
And oon of hem have I in remembraunce,
Which I shal seyn with good wyl as I kan.
a plain unlearned man
But sires, bycause I am a burel man,
At my bigynnyng first I yow biseche
Have me excused of my rude speche.
I lerned nevere rethorik, certeyn;
Thyng that I speke it moot be bare and pleyn.
slept, Parnassus (home of the Muses)
I sleepe nevere on the Mount of Parnaso,
Cicero
Ne lerned Marcus Tullius Scithero.
doubt
Colours ne knowe I none, withouten drede,
But swiche colours as growen in the mede,
Or ellis swiche as men dye or peynte.
too strange and esoteric
Colours of rethoryk they ben to queynte;
My spirit feeleth nat of swich matere.
But if yow list, my tale shul ye heere.

The Franklin's Tale

The Tale is derived from the traditional story of 'the Damsel's Rash Promise', where a woman is rescued from the painful consequences of the promise-that-must-be-kept by another's unexpected act of generosity. Such stories act to reassure us that human truth and love and loyalty can dispel the illusions in which we ensnare ourselves through wilfulness and folly. Chaucer complicates this simple but powerful story-line by giving the Tale the aristocratic setting of medieval romance (partly influenced by the version of the story in Boccaccio's *Filocolo*: see R.R. Edwards, in *MP* 94 [1996–7], 141–62), by describing it (in the Prologue) as an old 'Breton lay' and placing it in a long-ago and apparently pre-Christian world (so that the issues of conduct can be developed in a more open and less swiftly resolvable way), and by representing the endangered heroine and her husband as partners in an ideal marriage. Within the Tale, he gives particular depth and interest to the portrayal of Dorigen, and a dramatic reality to her dilemma (for instance, the change in the terms of her promise) which threaten to throw the story off its romantic fairy-tale course. The Tale ends happily, but it is hard to know whether this is achieved at Dorigen's expense, by forcing her back into a position of marital subordination in which male solidarity is reasserted (see Aers, *Chaucer, Langland and the Creative Imagination*, pp. 160–9), or whether there is a subtler strength to her relationship with Arveragus which rests upon the power to surrender freedom as well as the power to exercise it (see J. Mann, 'Chaucerian Themes and Style in the Franklin's Tale', in B. Ford, ed., *The New Pelican Guide to English Literature*,

707–8 The Franklin's claim to speak of **gentillesse**, so brusquely rejected by the Host, is perhaps well demonstrated in the impeccably courteous way in which he 'puts down' the Host.

709–15 A classic statement of the origin of the 'Breton lay', from which a number of Middle English verse-romances known to Chaucer derive or claim to derive. The magical and romantic associations of the genre are useful to Chaucer here.

723–5 The Franklin's little joke, or 'modesty-topos': he claims to know nothing of the **Colours of rethoryk**, or figures and ornaments of speech, but of course the manner in which he makes his disclaimer shows that he is perfectly at ease with them.

Vol. I, Part 1 [Harmondsworth, 1982], pp. 133–53). There is also, despite the pagan setting, a religious dimension to the story in which the final question as to who was 'the mooste free' (1622) is intriguingly related to the question of who kept best the 'trouthe' (1479), since, as the Gospel says, it is 'the truth shall make you free' (John 8:32). The interpretation of the story in terms of the character of the teller, whether as a social upstart who bungles the whole idea of aristocratic marriage because of his bourgeois origins (Robertson, *A Preface to Chaucer*, pp. 470–2), or as a perfect gentleman who understands exactly what a thoroughly modern marriage should be (G.L. Kittredge, in *MP* 9 [1912], 435–67), seems to over-simplify the questions and issues that the Tale explores.

Armorica (ancient name of) Brittany In Armorik, that called is Britayne,
did his utmost Ther was a knyght that lovede and dide his payne
To serve a lady in his beste wise;
chivalric exploit And many a labour, many a gret emprise,
He for his lady wroghte er she were wonne.
For she was oon the faireste under sonne,
And eek therto come of so heigh kynrede
That wel unnethes dorste this knyght for drede
Telle hire his wo, his peyne and his distresse.
But atte laste she, for his worthynesse,
especially, obedience And namely for his meke obeysance,
Hath swich a pitee caught of his penance
That prively she fel of his acord
To taken hym for hir housbonde and hir lord –
Of swich lordshipe as men han over hir wyves.
And for to lede the moore in blisse hir lyves
Of his fre wyl he swoor hire as a knyght
That nevere in al his lyf he, day ne nyght,
Ne sholde upon hym take no maistrye
show Agayn hir wyl, ne kithe hire jalousye,
But hire obeye and folwe hir wyl in al
As any lovere to his lady shal,
Save that the name of soveraynetee,
That wolde he have for shame of his degree.
She thonked hym, and with ful gret humblesse
since She seyde, 'Sire, sith of youre gentilesse
so free a rein (so much freedom) Ye profre me to have so large a reyne,
God would never wish Ne wolde nevere God bitwix us tweyne,
For any fault of mine, war As in my gilt, were outher werre or stryf.
Sire, I wol be youre humble trewe wyf –
troth (pledged word of honour), break Have heer my trouthe – til that myn herte breste.'
Thus been they bothe in quiete and in reste.
for certain For o thyng, sires, saufly dar I seye:
That freendes everich oother moote obeye,
If they wol longe holden compaignye.
exercise of force Love wol nat be constreyned by maistrye:
Whan maistrie comth, the God of Love anon

751–2 The marriage-arrangement may seem admirable to us, but it would have been against accepted practice in the Middle Ages, and Arveragus conceals it in order not to bring shame upon himself (and therefore upon his wife) in his status as a lord and his wife's lord. The distinction between the public and private spheres of action is characteristic of a 'shame-culture' (in which propriety and reputation are more important than the strict honesty and adherence to a moral code of a 'guilt-culture') and is not necessarily a form of hypocrisy, but it is potentially problematic.

761–90 Throughout this paragraph, Chaucer manoeuvres to find a language for the mutual forbearance and tolerance that seem required in any sensible and successful relationship. The words he uses are partly from the discourse of courtly love (though it is not only sexual relations that are being spoken about) and partly from the moral discourse of **pacience** and **suffraunce** (though it is human relations that are at issue, not moral obligations). There was as yet no other language: the words so commonplace to us (tolerance, mutual respect, etc.) had to be 'invented' (found).

Beteth his wynges, and farwel, he is gon!
Love is a thyng as any spirit free.
by nature Wommen, of kynde, desiren libertee,
servant And nat to been constreyned as a thral –
And so doon men, if I sooth seyen shal.
Looke who that moost is pacient in love,
(see n.) He is at his avantage al above.
Pacience is an heigh vertu, certeyn,
achieves For it venquysseth, as thise clerkes seyn,
accomplish Thynges that rigour sholde nevere atteyne.
At every (annoying) word, complain For every word men may nat chide or pleyne.
be patient, ('so help me') Lerneth to suffre, or ellis, so moot I gon,
whether Ye shul it lerne, wher-so ye wole or non.
For in this world, certeyn, ther no wight is
That he ne dooth or seith somtyme amys.
the influences of one's stars Ire, siknesse, or constellacioun,
balance of body-humours Wyn, wo, or chaungyng of complexioun
Causeth ful ofte to doon amys or speken.
avenged On every wrong a man may nat be wreken.
According to the occasion After the tyme moste be temperaunce
knows about self-control To every wight that kan on governaunce.
And therfore hath this wise worthy knyght,
promised her patient forbearance To lyve in ese, suffraunce hire bihight,
And she to hym ful wisly gan to swere
defect That nevere sholde ther be defaute in here.
Here may men seen an humble wys acord.
Thus hath she take hir servant and hir lord –
Servant in love and lord in mariage.
in the position of a servant Thanne was he bothe in lordshipe and servage –
in a superior kind of 'lordship' Servage? Nay, but in lordshipe above,
Sith he hath bothe his lady and his love –
His lady, certes, and his wyf also,
The which that lawe of love acordeth to.
And whan he was in this prosperitee,
Hom with his wyf he gooth to his contree,
Penmarch (on west coast of Brittany) Nat fer fro Pedmark, ther his dwellyng was,
Wher-as he lyveth in blisse and in solas.
unless Who koude telle but he hadde wedded be
The joye, the ese and the prosperitee
That is bitwix an housbonde and his wyf?
A yeer and moore lasted this blisful lyf,
Til that the knyght of which I speke of thus,
Kerru (a town in Brittany) That of Kairrud was clepid Arveragus,
Made his plans Shoope hym to goon and dwelle a yeer or twayne
In Engelond, that clepid was ek Britayne,
To seke in armes worshipe and honour –
For al his lust he sette in swich labour –
And dwelled ther two yeer, the book seith thus.

772 'He has the advantage of being in the superior position'.

791–8 The language of reciprocal relationship is here more witty and brilliant, playing rhetorically with the happy paradox of Arveragus's position as simultaneously the lord of his wife and the servant of his lady. Perhaps inevitably, the language here is more male-centred: Arveragus can eat his cake and have it too, but Dorigen is out of the picture.

803–5 These lines echo ironically similar lines in the Merchant's Tale (IV.1259–60), a mordant marriage-satire.

stop talking about
Now wol I stynte of this Arveragus
And speke I wole of Dorigene his wyf,
That loveth hir housbonde as hire hertes lyf.
sighs
For his absence wepeth she and siketh,
when it pleases them
As doon thise noble wyves whan hem liketh.
She moorneth, waketh, waileth, fasteth, pleyneth;
afflicts
Desir of his presence hir so destreyneth
valued
That al this wide world she set at noght.
sad state of mind
Hir freendes, whiche that knowe hir hevy thoght,
Conforten hire in al that ever they may.
They prechen hire, they telle hire nyght and day
That causelees she sleeth hirself, allas!
And every confort possible in this cas
They doon to hire with al hir bisynesse,
Al for to make hire leve hir hevynesse.
In course of time
By proces, as ye knowen everichoon,
engrave
Men may so longe graven in a stoon
inscribed
Til som figure therinne emprinted be.
So longe han they conforted hire til she
Receyved hath, by hope and by resoun,
impression of their
The emprintyng of hir consolacioun,
Thurgh which hir grete sorwe gan aswage:
continue, passionate grief
She may nat alwey duren in swich rage.
time of distress
And eek Arveragus in al this care
Hath sent hire lettres hom of his welfare
And that he wole come hastily agayn –
Or ellis hadde this sorwe hir herte slayn.
Hire freendes sawe hir sorwe gan to slake
And preyde hire on knees for Goddes sake
have a stroll
To come and romen hire in compaignye,
imaginings
Awey to dryve hir derke fantasye;
And finally she graunted that requeste,
For wel she saw that it was for the beste.
Now stood hir castel faste by the see
And often with hir freendes walketh she
the high cliff
Hir to disporte upon the bank an heigh,
sailing-vessel
Wher-as she many a shipe and barge seigh
Seillynge hir cours, wher-as hem liste go.
part
But thanne was that a parcel of hir wo
For to hirself ful ofte, 'Allas!' seith she,
'Is ther no shipe, of so manye as I se,
Wol bryngen hom my lord? Thanne were myn herte
cured
Al warisshed of hise bittre peynes smerte.'
Another tyme there wolde she sitte and thynke,
And caste hir eyen downward fro the brynke.
But whan she seigh the grisly rokkes blake,
For verray fere so wolde hir herte quake
That on hir feet she myghte hir noght sustene.
Thanne wolde she sitte adoun upon the grene

818 whan hem liketh. This has a dismissive sound, as if upper-class women fell to tears on cue like heroines in a melodrama. The next line, with its slightly sarcastic multiplication of verbs of grieving, reinforces the impression. The effect may be part of the 'colouring' of the Tale with residual traces of the Franklin's opinions – here a nervous breeziness about overdoing the expression of feeling.

And pitously into the see biholde
sad and grievous sighs And seyn right thus, with sorweful sikes colde:
providence (foresight) 'Eterne God, that thurgh thy purveiance
Ledest the world by certeyn governance,
In vain (for no purpose) In ydel, as men seyn, ye nothyng make.
diabolical But, Lord, thise grisly feendly rokkes blake,
chaos That semen rather a foul confusioun
Of werk than any fair creacioun
Of swich a parfit wys God and a stable,
Why han ye wroght this werk unresonable?
For by this werk, south, north, ne west, ne eest,
benefited Ther nys yfostred man, ne bryd, ne beest;
does harm It dooth no good, to my wit, but anoyeth.
Se ye nat, Lord, how mankynde it destroyeth?
An hundred thousand bodies of mankynde
although they cannot be remembered Han rokkes slayn, al be they nat in mynde –
Which mankynde is so fair part of thy werk
image That thow it madest lyk to thyn owen merk.
loving-kindness Thanne semed it ye hadde a greet chiertee
Toward mankynde; but how thanne may it be
That ye swiche menes make it to destroyen,
Whiche menes do no good, but evere anoyen?
I woot wel clerkes wol seyn as hem leste,
By argumentz, that al is for the beste,
Thogh I ne kan the causes nat yknowe.
But thilke God, that made wynd to blowe,
Look after my lord! As kepe my lord! This my conclusioun.
logical disputation To clerkes lete I al disputisoun.
But wolde God that alle thise rokkes blake
Were sonken into helle for his sake!
Thise rokkes sleen myn herte for the feere.'
Thus wolde she seyn, with many a pitous teere.
Hir freendes sawe that it was no disport
To romen by the see, but disconfort,
arranged And shopen for to pleyen somwher ellys.
springs They leden hire by ryvers and by wellys,
delightful And eek in othere places delitables;
backgammon They dauncen and they pleyen at ches and tables.
morning So on a day, right in the morwe-tyde,
Unto a gardyn that was ther bisyde,
arrangements In which that they hadde maad hir ordinance
food, provision Of vitaille and of oother purveiance,
They goon and pleye hem al the longe day.
And this was on the sixte morwe of May,
Which May hadde peynted with his softe shoures
This gardyn ful of leves and of floures;
skilfully And craft of mannes hond so curiously
Arrayed hadde this gardyn, trewely,

865–90 Debates about the existence of evil in the universe, and why God allows it, were familiar to Chaucer from Book IV of the *Consolation of Philosophy* (see *TC* II.621n) by Boethius (see also Book I, metre 5); the language of logical disputation is echoed in 886–90. But the rocks around the sea-coast, though on occasion inconvenient, are hardly a proof of God's lack of care for his creatures, except to a mind distempered by anxiety.

907–17 Gardens are traditionally a place of beauty and refreshment in medieval poetry, also of amorous flirtation – and dangerous temptation, as the allusion to the Garden of Eden (912) reminds us.

excellence That nevere was ther gardyn of swich prys
the very Garden of Eden But if it were the verray paradys.
The odour of floures and the fresshe sighte
Wolde han maked any herte lighte
too great That evere was born, but if to greet siknesse
Or to greet sorwe helde it in destresse,
So ful it was of beautee with plesaunce.
At after-dyner gonne they to daunce,
And synge also, save Dorigen allone,
lament Which made alwey hir compleynt and hir mone,
For she ne saugh hym on the daunce go
That was hir housbonde and hir love also.
must But nathelees she moste a tyme abyde
allow her sorrow to be assuaged And with good hope lete hir sorwe slyde.
Upon this daunce, amonges othere men,
Daunced a squier bifore Dorigen,
That fressher was and jolier of array,
According to my judgement As to my doom, than is the monthe of May.
He syngeth, daunceth, passyng any man
That is or was sith that the world bigan.
describe Therwith he was, if men sholde hym discryve,
most handsome Oon of the beste farynge man on lyve;
Yong, strong, right vertuous, and riche and wys,
in high repute And wel biloved, and holden in gret prys.
And shortly if the sothe I tellen shal,
Unwityng of this Dorigen at al,
This lusty squier, servant to Venus,
Which that yclepid was Aurelius,
Hadde loved hire best of any creature
(good or bad) fortune Two yeer and moore, as was his aventure,
But nevere dorste he tellen hire his grevance:
(see n.) Withouten coppe he drank al his penance.
He was despeyred, nothyng dorste he seye –
reveal Save in his songes somwhat wolde he wreye
His wo, as in a general compleynyng:
He seyde he lovede and was biloved nothyng,
Of which matere made he many layes,
Songes, compleyntes, roundels, vyrelayes,
How that he dorste nat his sorwe telle,
But langwissheth as a furye dooth in helle;
And dye he moste, he seyde, as dide Ekko
For Narcisus, that dorste nat telle hir wo.
In oother manere than ye heere me seye
reveal Ne dorste he nat to hire his wo biwreye,
Save that, paraventure, somtyme at daunces,
follow their amorous rituals Ther yonge folk kepen hir observaunces,
It may wel be he looked on hir face
In swich a wise as man that asketh grace;

942 Withouten coppe: 'Not in cupfuls' (i.e. he suffered abundantly).

948 roundels and **vyrelayes**: songs of love with fixed rhyming form and refrain. The number of different kinds of verse-form in which Aurelius pours forth the unutterableness of his love is one of a number of wry and ironic touches in this passage, suggestive of an uneasiness with high-flown passion (cf. 818n).

950 a furye: one of the Furies (goddesses of torment, Eumenides).

951–2 In classical legend, Echo was unable to tell her love for Narcissus and died of despair, leaving only her voice to deputize.

But nothyng wiste she of his entente.
Nathelees it happed, er they thennes wente,
Bycause that he was hir neghebour
And was a man of worshipe and honour,
And she had known him And hadde yknowen hym of tyme yoore,
They fille in speche, and forth moore and moore
Unto his purpos drough Aurelius
And whan he saugh his tyme he seyde thus:
'Madame,' quod he, 'by God that this world made,
Provided that I thought, gladden So that I wiste it myghte youre herte glade,
I wolde that day that youre Arveragus
Wente over the see that I, Aurelius,
come back Hadde went ther nevere I sholde have come agayn.
For wel I woot my servyce is in vayn:
reward, breaking My gerdon is but brestyng of myn herte.
have pity Madame, reweth upon my peynes smerte,
For with a word ye may me sle or save.
buried Here at youre feet God wolde that I were grave!
I ne have as now no leyser moore to seye;
cause me to die Have mercy, swete, or ye wol do me deye!'
She gan to looke upon Aurelius;
'Is this youre wil,' quod she, 'and sey ye thus?
before, had in mind Nevere erst,' quod she, 'ne wiste I what ye mente.
But now, Aurelie, I knowe youre entente,
By thilke God that yaf me soule and lyf,
Ne shal I nevere been untrewe a wyf
In word ne werk, as fer as I have wyt;
I wol been hys to whom that I am knyt.
Taak this for fynal answere as of me.'
But after that in pleye thus seyde she:
'Aurelie,' quod she, 'by heighe God above,
Yet wolde I graunte yow to been youre love,
Syn I yow se so pitously complayne.
the whole length of the Brittany coast Looke what day that endelong Britayne
Ye remoeve alle the rokkes, stoon by stoon,
hinder That they ne lette shipe ne boot to goon –
I seye, whan ye han maad the coost so clene
Of rokkes that ther nys no stoon ysene,
Thanne wol I love yow best of any man –
Have heer my trouthe – in al that evere I kan.'
'Is ther noon oother grace in yow?' quod he.
'No, by that Lord', quod she, 'that maked me!
For wel I woot that it shal nevere bityde.
Lat swiche folies out of youre herte slyde.
pleasure What deyntee sholde a man han in his lyf
For to go love another mannes wyf,
That hath hir body whan so that hym liketh?'
Aurelius ful ofte soore siketh:
Wo was Aurelie whan that he this herde,

989–98 In Boccaccio, the lady promises to reward her suitor if he can make a garden bloom in January. In Chaucer, the promise is changed and, though made in play and in the conscious knowledge that its fulfilment is **an inpossible** (1009), draws its origin, and its bitter irony, from Dorigen's obsessive fears for her husband's safety. To save her love, she promises what would destroy it.

And with a sorweful herte he thus answerde:
an impossibility 'Madame,' quod he, 'this were an inpossible!
Thanne moot I dye of sodeyn deth horrible.'
And with that word he turned hym anon.
Then Tho coome hir othere freendes many oon
garden paths And in the aleyes romeden up and doun
this business And nothyng wiste of this conclusioun.
But sodeynly bigonne revel newe
Til that the brighte sonne loste his hewe;
horizon, taken away For th'orisonte hath reft the sonne his light –
This is as muche to seye as it was nyght –
And hom they goon in joye and in solas,
Save oonly wrecche Aurelius, allas!
He to his hous is goon with sorweful herte.
escape He seeth he may nat from his deeth asterte;
Hym semed that he felte his herte colde.
Up to the hevene hise hondes he gan holde,
knees And on his knowes bare he sette hym doun,
prayer And in his ravynge seyde his orisoun.
went abruptly For verray wo out of his wit he breyde.
He nyste what he spak, but thus he seyde;
With pitous herte his pleynt hath he bigonne
Unto the goddes, and first unto the sonne.
He seyde, 'Appollo, god and governour
Of every plaunte, herbe, tree and flour,
(see n.) That yevest after thy declynacioun
To ech of hem his tyme and his sesoun,
(see n.) As thyn herberwe chaungeth, lowe or heighe,
Lord Phebus, cast thy merciable eighe
lost On wrecche Aurelie which that am but lorn.
Lo, lord! My lady hath my deeth ysworn
unless Withouten gilt, but thy benygnytee
death-doomed Upon my dedly herte have som pitee.
For wel I woot, lord Phebus, if yow lest,
Ye may me helpen, save my lady, best.
vouchsafe (grant), describe Now voucheth sauf that I may yow devyse
helped How that I may been holpe and in what wyse.
bright 'Youre blisful suster, Lucyna the shene,
That of the see is chief goddesse and queene –
Thogh Neptunus have deitee in the see,
Yet empiresse aboven hym is she –
Ye knowen wel, lord, that right as hir desir
quickened into life Is to be quyked and lighted of youre fyr,
For which she folweth yow ful bisily,

1018 The rhetorical 'colour' of the previous line (*circumlocutio*) is self-consciously signalled, in a manner reminiscent of the tone of the Franklin's Prologue.

1031–79 Aurelius prays to Apollo, or Phoebus (god of the sun), to use his influence upon his sister Lucina (goddess of the moon, and therefore in control of the tides) so that the next time they are in opposition (i.e. when the moon is on the opposite side of the earth from the sun, which is one of the two times when tides are fullest), and the sun is in the sign of Leo (when the sun's power is strongest), an exceptional flood-tide may occur and the rocks be fully covered. He further prays that the sun may hold this position, with the moon at the full and in opposition, for fully two years; if this cannot be done, he prays in desperation that all the rocks may be sunk into the underworld, through the power of Lucina (Diana) in her capacity as Proserpina, goddess of the underworld.

1033 'according to your angle and position in the sky'.

1035 **herberwe**: astrological 'lodging' (position in the zodiac).

Right so the see desireth naturelly
To folwen hire, as she that is goddesse
Bothe in the see and ryvers moore and lesse.
Wherfore, lord Phebus, this is my requeste –
make my heart break Do this myracle, or do myn herte breste –
That now next at this opposicioun
Which in the signe shal be of the Lioun,
flood-tide As preyeth hire so greet a flood to brynge
fathoms That fyve fadme at the leeste it oversprynge
The hyeste rok in Armoryk Britayne;
And lat this flood endure yeris twayne.
Thanne certes to my lady may I seye,
Keep your promise "Holdeth youre heste, the rokkes been aweye."
'Lord Phebus, dooth this myracle for me.
Pray hire she go no faster cours than ye –
I seye this, prayeth youre suster that she go
No faster cours than ye thise yeris two.
Thanne shal she been evene at the fulle alway,
And spryng-flood lasten bothe nyght and day.
And but she vouche sauf in swich manere
To graunte me my soverayn lady deere,
Pray hire to synken every rok adown
Into hir owene dirke regioun
(god of the underworld) Under the ground ther Pluto dwelleth inne,
Or nevere mo shal I my lady wynne.
Delphi (in Greece) Thy temple in Delphos wol I bar-foot seke.
Lord Phebus, se the teerys on my cheke
And of my peyne have som compassioun.'
And with that word in swowne he fil adoun,
And longe tyme he lay forth in a traunce.
His brother, which that knew of his penaunce,
Up caughte hym and to bedde he hath hym broght.
mental anxiety Despeired in this torment and this thoght
Leave Lete I this woful creature lye;
(see n.) Chese he for me wher he wol lyve or dye.
prosperity Arveragus, with heele and greet honour,
Being the one that As he that was of chivalrie the flour,
Is comen hom, and othere worthy men.
O blisful artow now, thow Dorigen,
That hast thy lusty housbonde in thyn armes,
The fresshe knyght, the worthy man of armes,
That loveth thee as his owene hertes lyf.
to imagine to himself Nothyng list hym to been ymagynatyf
If any wight hadde spoke whil he was oute
To hire of love; he ne hadde of it no doute.
pays no attention He noght entendeth to no swich matere,
But daunceth, justeth, maketh hir good cheere.
And thus in joye and blisse I lete hem dwelle,
And of the syke Aurelius wol I telle.
In langour and in torment furyus

1086 'Let him choose for himself, as far as I am concerned, whether he live or die'. The tone is somewhat dismissive and unsympathetic (see 818n, 948n).

Two yeer and moore lay wrecche Aurelius,
Er any foot he myghte on erthe gon,
Ne confort in this tyme hadde he non,
Save of his brother, which that was a clerk.
He knew of al this wo and al this werk,
For to noon oother creature, certeyn,
Of this matere he dorste no word seyn.
Under his brist he baar it moore secree
Than evere dide Panfilus for Galathee.
on the outside His brist was hool withoute for to sene
But in his herte ay was the arwe kene.
wound healed only on the surface And wel ye knowe that of a sursanure
In surgerye is perilous the cure,
Unless But men myghte touche the arwe or come therby.
His brother weepe and wayled pryvely,
he happened to remember Til at the laste hym fil in remembrance
Orleans (at the university) That whils he was at Orliens in France –
eager As yonge clerkes that been lykerous
subjects of study, arcane To reden artes that been curious
in every nook and cranny Seken in every halke and every herne
Specialized branches of learning Particuler sciences for to lerne –
He hym remembred that upon a day
At Orliens in studie a book he say
Of magyk naturel, which his felawe,
That was that tyme a bachiler of lawe,
Al were he ther to lerne another craft,
left Hadde prively upon his desk ylaft;
Which book spak muchel of the operaciouns
day-by-day stations Touchynge the eighte and twenty mansiouns
appertain That longen to the moone – and swich folye
As in oure dayes is nat worth a flye,
according to our belief For holy chirches feith, in oure bileve,
Ne suffreth noon illusioun us to greve.
And whan this book was in his remembraunce,
Anon for joye his herte gan to daunce
And to hymself he seyde pryvely:
cured 'My brother shal be warisshed hastily;
For I am siker that ther be sciences
visual illusions By whiche men make diverse apparences,
magicians Swiche as thise subtile tregettours pleye.
For ofte at festes have I wel herd seye
That tregettours withinne an halle large
Have maad come in a water and a barge,
And in the halle rowen up and doun.
Somtyme hath semed come a grym leoun,
And somtyme floures sprynge as in a mede;

1110 Pamphilus and Galatea are the lovers in the thirteenth-century Latin poem of *Pamphilus de amore*; in a line cited in the margin of MS El, Pamphilus complains of the arrow of love that festers hidden in his breast.

1125 **magyk naturel** is the science of controlling and manipulating events by the use of astrological prediction (see GP 416n), as opposed to calling up spirits ('black' magic).

1131–2 Whether the contempt for astrological 'magic' is meant to be understood as the Franklin's – a kind of bourgeois we-know-better complacency – is a question Chaucer happily evades.

1142–51 Tricks like this are well documented in contemporary sources describing French court-entertainments (see R.S. Loomis, in *Speculum* 33 [1958], 242–55).

Somtyme a vyne, and grapes white and rede,
Somtyme a castel, al of lym and stoon,
they made it disappear And whan hem lyked, voyded it anoon:
Thus semed it to every mannes sighte.
'Now thanne conclude I thus, that if I myghte
fellow-student At Orliens som old felawe yfynde
That hadde this moones mansions in mynde,
in addition Or oother magyk naturel above,
He sholde wel make my brother han his love.
For with an apparence a clerk may make
To mannes sighte that alle the rokkes blake
Of Britaigne were yvoyded everichon,
And shippes by the brynke comen and gon,
And in swich forme enduren a day or two.
cured Thanne were my brother warisshed of his wo;
Thanne moste she nedes holden hir biheste,
Or ellis he shal shame hire at the leeste.'
What sholde I make a lenger tale of this?
Unto his brotheres bed he comen is,
And swich confort he yaf hym for to gon
To Orliens that he up stirte anon,
gone And on his wey forthward thanne he is fare
relieved In hope for to been lissed of his care.
Whan they were come almoost to that citee,
But if it were a two furlong or thre,
A yong clerk romynge by hymself they mette,
in a very proper manner, greeted Which that in Latyn thriftily hem grette
And after that he seyde a wonder thyng:
'I knowe,' quod he, 'the cause of youre comyng.'
And er they ferther any foote wente,
He tolde hem al that was in hir entente.
This Britoun clerk hym asked of felawes
days The whiche that he hadde knowe in olde dawes
And he answerde hym that they dede were,
For which he weepe ful ofte many a teere.
Doun of his hors Aurelius lighte anon
And with this magicien forth he is gon
Hom to his hous, and maden hem wel at ese.
Hem lakked no vitaille that myghte hem plese.
as the one that was there So wel arrayed hous as ther was oon
Aurelius in his lyf saw nevere noon.
He shewed hym, er he wente to soper,
Forestes, parkes ful of wilde deer:
Ther saw he hertes with hir hornes hye,
The gretteste that evere were seyn with eye,
He say of hem an hundred slayn with houndes
And somme with arwes blede of bittre woundes.
made to disappear He saw, whan voyded were thise wilde deer,
hawking ground by a river Thise fawconers upon a fair ryver,
That with hir hawkes han the heron slayn.

1175 **a wonder thyng**. One can think of various ways in which this apparently amazing act of telepathy could have been accomplished; it is nevertheless a very effective sales gimmick, as is the Latin salutation.

Tho saugh he knyghtes justyng in a playn;
And after this he dide hym this plesaunce –
That he hym shewed his lady on a daunce
On which hymself he daunced, as hym thoughte.
And whan this maister that this magyk wroughte
Saugh it was tyme, he clapte his handes two,
And farwel! al oure revel was ago.
And yet remoeved they nevere out of the hous
Whil they sawe al this sighte merveillous,
But in his studie, ther as his bookes be,
They sitten stille, and no wight but they thre.
To hym this maister called his squyer
And seide hym thus: 'Is redy oure soper?
Almoost an houre it is, I undertake,
Sith I yow bad oure soper for to make,
Whan that thise worthy men wenten with me
Into my studie, ther as my bookes be.'
'Sire,' quod this squyer, 'whan it liketh yow,
even if you want it right now It is al redy, thogh ye wol right now.'
'Go we thanne soupe,' quod he, 'as for the beste.
Thise amorous folk somtyme mote han hir reste!'
negotiation At after-soper fille they in tretee
sum, reward What somme sholde this maistres gerdoun be
To remoeven alle the rokkes of Britayne,
(rivers) Gironde, Seine And eek from Gerounde to the mouth of Sayne.
He raised difficulties He made it straunge, and swoor, so God hym save,
Lasse than a thousand pound he wolde nat have,
Ne gladly for that somme he wolde nat gon.
Aurelius, with blisful herte anon,
Answerde thus: 'Fy on a thousand pound!
This wyde world, which that men seye is round,
I wolde it yeve if I were lord of it.
fully made, in agreement This bargayn is ful dryve, for we ben knyt.
Ye shal be payed trewely, by my trouthe!
But looketh now, for no necligence or slouthe
Ye tarie us heer no lenger than to-morwe.'
as a pledge 'Nay,' quod this clerk, 'have heer my feith to borwe.'
To bedde is goon Aurelius whan hym leste
And wel-neigh al that nyght he hadde his reste.
What for his labour and his hope of blisse
respite His woful herte of penaunce hadde a lisse.
Upon the morwe, whan that it was day,
direct To Britayne tooke they the righte way,
Aurelius and this magicien bisyde,
dismounted And been descended ther they wolde abyde.
remind And this was, as thise bookes me remembre,
The colde, frosty seson of Decembre.
(see n.) Phebus wax old, and hewed lyk latoun,

1203 clapte his handes: to dispel the illusion and to summon the servants. The suggestion is that the clerk-magician has not been putting himself out to display his skills but just passing the time agreeably till dinner. Did Shakespeare remember these lines in *The Tempest* (IV.i.148)?

1228 That the world was round, or spherical, was taken for granted in the Middle Ages; but no one seemed much exercised to find out for certain.

1245–6 'The sun grew old (i.e. it was late in the year) and hued like copper alloy, that in his high summer position in the sky (in Cancer) …'

That in his hote declynacioun
burnished, rays Shoon as the burned gold with stremys brighte;
But now in Capricorn adoun he lighte,
Where as he shoon ful pale, I dar wel seyn.
The bittre frostes with the sleet and reyn
garden Destruyed hath the grene in every yerd.
sits Janus sit by the fyr, with double berd,
wild-ox horn And drynketh of his bugle-horn the wyn;
stands meat, boar Biforn hym stant brawen of the tusked swyn,
Noel And 'Nowel!' crieth every lusty man.
Aurelius, al that evere he kan,
good cheer Dooth to this maister cheere and reverence
And preyeth hym to doon his diligence
To bryngen hym out of his peynes smerte,
Or with a swerd that he wolde slytte his herte.
pity This subtil clerk swich routhe hadde of this man
all he knows how That nyght and day he spedde hym that he kan
(see n.) To wayten a tyme of his conclusioun,
This is to seyn, to make illusioun
illusion or conjuring trick By swich an apparence or jogelrye –
I ne kan no termes of astrologye –
think That she and every wight sholde wene and seye
That of Britayne the rokkes were aweye,
Or ellis they were sonken under grounde.
So at the laste he hath his tyme yfounde
tricks, contemptible exercise To maken his japes and his wrecchednesse
Of swich a supersticious cursednesse.
(see n.) His tables Tolletanes forth he broght,
Ful wel corrected, ne ther lakked noght,
(see n.) Neither his collect ne his expans yeris,
base-dates, paraphernalia Ne hise rootes, ne hise othere geris,
(see n.) As been his centris and hise argumentz
And hise proporcionels convenientz
For hise equacions in every thyng.
eighth sphere (of the fixed stars) And by his eighte speere in his wirkyng
had moved He knew ful wel how fer Alnath was shove
fixed constellation Fro the heed of thilke fixe Aries above,
observed That in the ninthe speere considered is;
Ful subtilly he kalkuled al this.
Whan he hadde founde his firste mansioun,
(see n.) He knew the remenaunt by proporcioun,

1248 Capricorn: the zodiacal sign that the sun passes through in December.

1252 Janus is the god of entrances, and therefore of January; he looks backward and forward, and so has a **double berd**. The echo is of calendar-pictures in books of hours, which often show feasting-scenes for January. The passage as a whole (1245–55) is prompted by the garden in Boccaccio that must be made to bloom in January, but Chaucer turns it to wonderfully effective use as a seasonal turning-point in the narrative: deep in the midwinter of misfortune lies the promise of hope.

1263 'To look for a good time for his astrological operation'.

1270–96 The description of the magician's operations tumbles forth somewhat impatiently, as if the narrator were anxious not to be seen to know too much about such dubious practice (see 1264–6, 1271–2, 1292–3, and 1131–2n); but Chaucer's expertise on the subject is evident.

1273 tables Tolletanes: astronomical tables adapted for use in Toledo (Spain) in 1272.

1275 'his tables of planetary positions in multiple or single years'.

1277–9 'his tables and figures used in calculating planetary positions, and his tables for computing planetary motions for his divisions of the planetary sphere into astrological houses'.

1281 Alnath: a star in the constellation Aries.

1283 ninthe speere: the sphere of the Primum Mobile (see *PF* 59n).

1286 'by calculations derived from his astronomical tables'.

And knew the arisyng of his moone wel,
(see n.) And in whos face, and terme, and everydel;
And knew ful wel the moones mansioun
To be conformable Acordaunt to his operacioun,
And knew also hise othere observaunces
evil practices For swiche illusions and swiche meschaunces
As hethen folk useden in thilke dayes.
For which no lenger maked he delayes,
week But thurgh his magyk, for a wyke or tweye,
It semed that alle the rokkes were aweye.
still Aurelius, which that yet despeired is
Whether, have everything go wrong Wher he shal han his love or fare amys,
Awaiteth nyght and day on this myracle;
And whan he knew that ther was noon obstacle,
That voyded were thise rokkes everichon,
Doun to his maistres feet he fil anon,
And seyde, 'I, woful wrecche Aurelius,
Thonke yow, lord, and lady myn Venus,
helped That me han holpen fro my cares colde.'
And to the temple his wey forth hath he holde,
Wher as he knew he sholde his lady se.
And whan he saw his tyme, anon-right he,
fearful With dredful herte and with ful humble cheere,
Greeted Salued hath his soverayn lady deere:
true 'My righte lady,' quod this woful man,
'Whom I moost drede and love as I best kan,
And lothest were of al this world displese,
Were it not, distress Nere it that I for yow have swich disese
That I moste dyen heer at youre foot anon,
Noght wolde I telle how me is wo-bigon.
either, complain But certes outher moste I dye or pleyne:
Ye sleen me giltelees for verray peyne.
But of my deeth thogh that ye have no routhe,
Think hard Avyseth yow er that ye breke your trouthe.
Repenteth yow, for thilke God above,
Er ye me sleen bycause that I yow love.
promised For, madame, wel ye woot what ye han hight –
claim Nat that I chalange any thyng of right
Of yow, my sovereyn lady, but youre grace –
But in a gardyn yond, at swich a place,
promised Ye woot right wel what ye bihighten me;
And in myn hand your trouthe plighten ye
To love me best – God woot, ye seyden so,
Al be that I unworthy am therto.
Madame, I speke it for the honour of yow
Moore than to save myn hertes lyf right now.
I have do so as ye comaunded me;
And if ye vouche sauf, ye may go se.
promise Dooth as yow list; have youre biheste in mynde,
living For, quyk or deed, right ther ye shal me fynde.
lies In yow lyth al to do me lyve or deye:

1288 **face, terme**: names for sectors of the zodiacal sign.

But wel I woot the rokkes been aweye.'
astonished He taketh his leve, and she astoned stood;
In al hir face nas a drope of blood.
thought She wende nevere have come in swich a trappe.
'Allas,' quod she, 'that evere this sholde happe!
For wende I nevere by possibilitee
monstrous thing That swich a monstre or merveille myghte be!
It is agayns the proces of nature.'
And hom she gooth a sorweful creature;
For verray feere unnethe may she go.
She wepeth, wayleth, al a day or two,
And swowneth that it routhe was to se.
But why it was to no wight tolde she,
For out of towne was goon Arveragus.
But to hirself she spak, and seyde thus,
With face pale and with ful sorweful cheere,
In hire compleinte, as ye shal after heere:
complain 'Allas,' quod she, 'on thee, Fortune, I pleyne,
without my being aware of it That unwar wrapped hast me in thy cheyne,
For which t'escape woot I no socour,
Save oonly deeth or elles deshonour –
Oon of thise two bihoveth me to chese.
rather lose But nathelees, yet have I levere to lese
My lyf than of my body to have a shame,
Or knowen myselven fals, or lese my name,
discharged of my promise And with my deth I may be quyt, ywis.
Hath ther nat many a noble wyf er this,
And many a mayde, yslayn hirself, allas,
Rather than with hir body doon trespas?
'Yis, certes, lo, thise stories beren witnesse:
Whan thritty tirauntz, ful of cursednesse,
Hadde slayn Phidon in Atthenes atte feste,
to be arrested They comaunded his doghtren for t'areste
And bryngen hem biforn hem in despit
Al naked, to fulfille hir foul delit,
And in hir fadres blood they made hem daunce
Upon the pavement, God yeve hem meschaunce!
For which thise woful maydens, ful of drede,
Rather than they wolde lese hir maydenhede,
jumped They pryvely been stirt into a welle
drowned And dreynte hemselven, as the bokes telle.
caused to be enquired out and sought 'They of Mecene leete enquere and seke
Lacedaemon (Sparta) Of Lacedomye fifty maydens eke,
On whiche they wolden doon hir lecherye.
But was ther noon of al that compaignye

1355–1456 Dorigen's **compleinte** draws on Jerome's treatise *Adversus Jovinianum* (see WBP 7n), which is extensively quoted in the margins of MS El. Jerome, in the praise of womanly virtue that accompanies his generally anti-feminist tirade, cites many examples of maidens and wives who slew themselves rather than submit to rape, or after being raped; he also cites examples of wives, unthreatened by rape, who led notably blameless lives. Strictly speaking irrelevant to Dorigen's plight, these exemplary wives may indicate the drift of her mind (not to do anything drastic, but to be a faithful wife – and tell her husband). This would be to see her *compleinte* as a genuine soliloquy, in some way processing her anxieties; but its character as a rhetorical *tour de force* has also to be reckoned with, and the manner in which, representing Dorigen in this unlikely and operatic (and even comic) way, it distances the reader and prepares for the oblivions of the romance-ending.

That she nas slayn, and with a good entente
Chees rather for to dye than assente
ravished To been oppressed of hir maydenhede.
Why sholde I thanne to dye been in drede?
'Loo, eek, the tiraunt Aristoclides
called That loved a mayden, highte Stymphalides,
Whan that hir fader slayn was on a nyght,
directly Unto Dianes temple gooth she right,
clasped And hente the ymage in hir handes two,
Fro which ymage wolde she nevere go.
tear No wight ne myghte hir handes of it arace
very same Til she was slayn right in the selve place.
indignant scorn 'Now sith that maydens hadden swich despit
To been defouled with mannes foul delit,
Wel oghte a wyf rather hirselven sle
Than be defouled, as it thynketh me.
'What shal I seyn of Hasdrubales wyf,
deprived herself of That at Cartage birafte hirself hir lyf?
For whan she saw that Romayns wan the town,
She took hir children alle and skipte adown
Into the fyr, and chees rather to dye
Than any Romayn dide hire vileynye.
'Hath nat Lucresse yslayn hirself, allas,
raped At Rome, whan that she oppressed was
Of Tarquyn, for hir thoughte it was a shame
To lyven whan she hadde lost hir name?
Miletus The sevene maydens of Milesie also
Han slayn hemself for verray drede and wo
Galatia (or Gaul?) Rather than folk of Gawle hem sholde oppresse.
Mo than a thousand stories, as I gesse,
Koude I now telle as touchyng this matere.
Whan Habradate was slayn, his wyf so deere
Hirselven slow, and leet hir blood to glyde
In Habradates woundes depe and wyde,
And seyde, 'My body, at the leeste way,
if I can help it Ther shal no wight defoulen, if I may.'
'What sholde I mo ensamples her-of sayn?
Sith that so manye han hemselven slayn
Wel rather than they wolde defouled be,
I wol conclude that it is bet for me
To sleen myself than ben defouled thus.
I wol be trewe unto Arveragus,
Or rather sle myself in som manere,
As dide Democienis doghter deere
Bycause that she wolde nat defouled be.
Scedasus O Cedasus, it is ful gret pitee
To reden how thy doghtren deyde, allas,
cause That slowe hemself for swich maner cas.
As greet a pitee was it, or wel moore,
(see n.) The Theban mayden that for Nychanore

1432 **for Nychanore**: 'because of the conqueror Nicanor's desire for her'.

slew Hirselven slow right for swich manere wo.
Another Theban mayden dide right so:
Macedonia, raped For oon of Macedonye hadde hire oppressed,
made amends for She with hir owene deeth hir maydenhed redressed.
What shal I seyn of Nyceratis wyf
That for swich cas birafte hirself hir lyf?
How trewe eek was to Alcebiades
His love, that rather for to dyen chees
Than for to suffre his body unburyed be.
what Lo, which a wyf was Alceste,' quod she.
Homer 'What seith Omer of goode Penelopee?
Al Grece knoweth of hir chastitee.
Pardee, of Laodomya is writen thus,
That whan at Troye was slayn Protheselaus,
Ne lenger wolde she lyve after his day.
The same of noble Porcia telle I may:
Withoute Brutus koude she nat lyve,
entirely To whom she hadde al hool hir herte yeve.
The parfit wifhod of Arthemesye
all heathendom Honoured is thurgh al the Barbarye.
(queen of Illyria) O Teuta, queene, thy wyfly chastitee
To alle wyves may a mirour bee.
The same thyng I seye of Bilyea,
Of Rodogone and eek Valeria.'
Thus pleyned Dorigene a day or tweye,
Purposynge evere that she wolde deye.
But nathelees, upon the thridde nyght,
Hom cam Arveragus, this worthy knyght,
And asked hire why that she weepe so soore;
And she gan wepen ever lenger the moore.
'Allas,' quod she, 'that evere was I born!
Thus have I seyd,' quod she, 'thus have I sworn' –
And tolde hym al as ye han herd bifore:
It nedeth nat reherce it yow namoore.
This housbonde with glad cheere in frendly wyse
Answerde and seyde as I shal yow devyse:
'Is ther oght ellis, Dorigen, but this?'
as surely as God may help me! 'Nay, nay,' quod she, 'God help me so as wys!
if it were This is to muche, and it were Goddes wille.'
'Ye, wyf,' quod he, 'lat slepen that is stille.
It may be wel, paraventure, yet to-day.
Ye shul youre trouthe holden, by my fay!
For God so wisly have mercy upon me,
stabbed to death I hadde wel levere ystiked for to be
For verray love which that I to yow have,
Than that . . . uot But if ye sholde youre trouthe kepe and save.
Trouthe is the hyeste thyng that man may kepe.'
burst suddenly into tears But with that word he brast anon to wepe,
on pain And seyde, 'I yow forbede, up peyne of deeth,

1442 Alceste chose to die in place of her husband Admetus.
1451 Artemisia built a great tomb to honour her husband Mausolus.
1455–6 Bilia was famed for her chastity and for not complaining of her husband's bad breath, while Rhodogone and Valeria refused to remarry after their husbands' death.

That nevere whil thee lasteth lyf ne breeth
To no wight tel thow of this aventure –
As I may best I wol my wo endure –
carry a sad face Ne make no contenance of hevynesse,
concerning you, imagine That folk of yow may demen harm or gesse.'
And forth he clepyd a squyer and a mayde:
'Goth forth anon with Dorigen,' he sayde,
'And bryngeth hire to swich a place anon.'
They toke hir leve and on hir wey they gon,
But they ne wiste why they thider wente:
He nolde to no wight tellen his entente.
lot Paraventure an heepe of yow, ywis,
stupid and ignorant Wol holden hym a lewed man in this,
jeopardy That he wol putte his wyf in jupartie.
Herkneth the tale er ye upon hire crie:
(than you think) She may have bettre fortune than yow semeth;
make your judgement And whan that ye han herd the tale, demeth.
This squyer which that highte Aurelius,
On Dorigen that was so amorus,
By chance Of aventure happed hir to meete
busiest Amydde the town, right in the quykkest strete,
prepared, directly As she was boun to goon the wey forth-right
Toward the gardyn ther as she had hight.
And he was to the gardyn-ward also,
For wel he spyed whan she wolde go
Out of hir hous to any maner place.
But thus they meete, of aventure or grace,
greets And he saluеth hire with glad entente
And asked of hire whiderward she wente;
And she answerde, half as she were mad,
'Unto the gardyn, as myn housbond bad,
My trouthe for to holde – allas, allas!'
Aurelius gan wondren on this cas
And in his herte hadde greet compassioun
Of hire and of hire lamentacioun,
And of Arveragus, the worthy knyght,
That bad hir holden al that she had hight,
So looth hym was his wyf sholde breke hir trouthe;
And in his herte he caughte of this greet routhe,
Considerynge the beste on every syde,
he would rather abstain That fro his lust yet were hym levere abyde
low-born miserable act Than doon so heigh a cherlyssh wrecchednesse
Against noble generosity Agayns franchise and alle gentillesse;
For which in fewe wordes seyde he thus:
'Madame, seyeth to youre lord Arveragus
That sith I se his grete gentillesse
To yow – and eek I se wel youre distresse –
That hym were levere han shame (and that were routhe)
Than ye to me sholde breke thus your trouthe,

1489 **swich a place** ('such-and-such a place') proves to be the garden (1504), a symbolically appropriate if not altogether convenient place for the keeping of the promise, which now seems to be understood as a single act of sex (cf. 997).

1493–8 The absence of these lines in Hg suggests they were added by Chaucer in revision as a further set of modulations from the anxious tensions of the Dorigen story to the cheerful romance-conclusion.

I have wel levere evere to suffre wo
Than I departe the love bitwix yow two.
give you back (release to you) I yow relesse, madame, into youre hond
(see n.) Quyt every serement and every bond
That ye han maad to me as her-biforn
Sith thilke tyme which that ye were born.
pledge My trouthe I plighte, I shal yow never repreve
Of no biheeste. And here I take my leve,
As of the treweste and the beste wyf
That evere yet I knew in al my lyf.
take warning from her promise But every wyf be war of hir biheste!
On Dorigene remembreth at the leste.
Thus kan a squyer doon a gentil dede
doubt As wel as kan a knyght, withouten drede.'
She thonketh hym upon hir knees al bare
gone And hom unto hir housbond is she fare
(heard me say) And tolde hym al as ye han herd me sayd;
sure, pleased And be ye siker, he was so wel apayd
That it were inpossible me to write.
What sholde I lenger of this cas endite?
Arveragus and Dorigene his wyf
In sovereyn blisse leden forth hir lyf.
Nevere eft ne was ther angre hem bitwene:
He cherisseth hire as thogh she were a queene,
And she was to hym trewe for everemoore.
Of thise two folk ye gete of me namoore.
has lost all his investment Aurelius, that his cost hath al forlorn,
Curseth the tyme that evere he was born:
'Allas!' quod he, 'allas, that I bihighte
weight Of pured gold a thousand pound of wighte
Unto this philosophre! How shal I do?
ruined I se namoore but that I am fordo.
Myn heritage moot I nedes selle
And been a beggere; here may I nat dwelle
And shamen al my kynrede in this place,
Unless But I of hym may gete bettre grace.
try But nathelees I wol of hym assaye
At certeyn dayes yeer by yeer to paye,
And thonke hym of his grete curteisye.
will not My trouthe wol I kepe, I nel nat lye.'
With herte soor he gooth unto his cofre
And broghte gold unto this philosophre
The value of fyve hundred pound, I gesse,
And hym bisecheth of his gentillesse
additional time to pay the balance To graunten hym dayes of the remenant,
boast And seyde, 'Maister, I dar wel make avant,
I fayled nevere of my trouthe as yit.
paid For sikerly my dette shal be quyt

1534 'Every oath and bond (considered to be) satisfactorily discharged'.

1541–2 These lines are spoken somewhat 'out of character', but 'character' in Chaucer is not such an impermeable container as to argue that they should be detached from Aurelius.

1549 **write**: a slip in dramatic consistency on Chaucer's part, not the only one in the *Canterbury Tales*.

Towardes yow, howevere that I fare
a-begging, tunic and nothing else To goon a-begged in my kirtel bare.
on provision of some security But wolde ye vouche sauf, upon seuretee,
grant me a respite Two yeer or thre for to respiten me,
Thanne were I wel, for elles moot I selle
Myn heritage; ther is namoore to telle.'
This philosophre sobrely answerde,
And seyde thus, whan he thise wordes herde:
'Have I nat holden covenant unto thee?'
'Yis, certes, wel and trewely,' quod he.
'Hastow nat had thy lady as thee liketh?'
'No, no,' quod he, and sorwefully he siketh.
'What was the cause? Tel me if thow kan.'
Aurelius his tale anon bigan
And tolde hym al as ye han herd bifore:
It nedeth nat to yow reherce it moore.
He seyde, 'Arveragus, of gentillesse,
Hadde levere dye in sorwe and in distresse
Than that his wyf were of hir trouthe fals.'
also The sorwe of Dorigen he tolde hym als,
How looth hir was to ben a wikked wyf,
And that she levere had lost that day hir lyf,
And that hir trouthe she swoor thurgh innocence:
before, illusion She nevere erst hadde herde speke of apparence.
'That made me han of hire so greet pitee;
And right as frely as he sente hir me
As frely sente I hire to hym agayn.
This is the whole story This al and som; ther is namoore to sayn.'
This philosophre answerde, 'Leeve brother,
Everich of yow dide gentilly til oother.
Thow art a squyer, and he is a knyght:
But God forbede, for his blisful myght,
But if a clerk koude doon a gentil dede
As wel as any of yow, it is no drede!
(see n.) 'Sire, I relesse thee thy thowsand pound,
had crept As thow right now were cropen out of the ground,
Ne nevere er now ne haddest knowen me.
For, sire, I wol nat take a peny of thee
the exercise of my art, labour For al my craft ne noght for my travaille.
Thow hast ypayed wel for my vitaille:
It is ynogh. And farewel, have good day!'
And took his hors and forth he goth his way.
Lordynges, this questioun than wol I aske now:
generous Which was the mooste free, as thynketh yow?
Now telleth me, er that ye ferther wende.
I kan namoore; my tale is at an ende.

1604–5 'Traffic in women' seems here the means of restoring male solidarity.

1613 **relesse thee**: 'return back to you' (release you from obligation for).

1622 The question is not only asked but also discussed in Boccaccio's *Filocolo* (where it is decided that the husband showed most *gentillesse*). Chaucer leaves the debate open, perhaps encouraging us to insert Dorigen as a possible outsider in the contest (since it is her honesty which triggers the denouement, and honesty is a kind of truth and generosity of spirit that makes for 'freedom').

The Pardoner's Prologue and Tale

The Introduction

The Host is much moved by the Physician's Tale, of how the Roman lord Virginius slew his daughter Virginia to save her from the lust of the judge Appius. He moralizes upon the Tale and misses the point in a characteristic way. He then calls upon the Pardoner to tell his tale; the two tales together form what is usually called Fragment VI of the *Tales*, the line-numbering of which is followed here.

Oure Hoost gan to swere as he were wood:
Alas! 'Harrow!' quod he, 'by nayles and by blood!
This was a fals cherl and a fals justise.
As shameful deeth as herte may devyse
Come to thise juges and hire advocatz!
All the same, innocent Algate this sely mayde is slayn, allas!
Allas, to deere boghte she beautee!
Wherfore I seye al day that men may se
gifts That yiftes of Fortune and of Nature
Been cause of deeth to many a creature.
Hir beaute was hir deth, I dar wel sayn.
Allas, so pitously as she was slayn!
Of bothe yiftes that I speke of now
benefit Men han ful ofte moore for harm than prow.
But trewely, myn owene maister deere,
This is a pitous tale for to heere.
it's no matter But nathelees, passe over, is no fors.
body I pray to God so save thy gentil cors,
(medical vessels) And eek thyne urynals and thy jurdones,
(medicines) Thyn ypocras, and eek thy galiones,
box, medicine And every boyste ful of thy letuarie –
God blesse hem, and oure lady Seinte Marie!
as I may thrive So mote I then, thow art a propre man,
Ronan And lyk a prelat, by Seint Ronyan!
technical language Seyde I nat wel? I kan nat speke in terme,
makest, grieve But wel I woot thow doost myn herte to erme,
That I almoost have caught a cardynacle.
medicine By corpus bones! but if I have triacle,
fresh and malty Or ellis a draghte of moyste and corny ale,
Or but I heere anon a murye tale,
Myn herte is lost for pitee of this mayde.
fair friend (perhaps mockingly) Thow *beel amy*, thow Pardoner,' he sayde,
funny stories 'Tel us som myrthe or japes right anon.'
'It shal be doon,' quod he, 'by Seint Ronyon!
But first,' quod he, 'heere at this ale-stake
I wol bothe drynke and eten of a cake.'
gentlefolk And right anon thise gentils gonne to crye,
filthiness 'Nay, lat hym telle us of no ribawdye!

313–14 The Host's determination to show off his knowledge of medical terms ends in disaster; the word he is after is *cardiacle* (a heart-attack). In the next line he garbles two oaths, 'by Corpus Christi' and 'by Goddes bones'.

320 **Ronyon**. Perhaps a mocking echo of the Host's garbled oath (there is sixteenth-century evidence of a word 'runnion' meaning 'male sexual organ').

323–8 Why the **gentils** are allowed to exercise censorship on this occasion, and not others, is not clear, unless it be to prepare for the rich retrospective irony of the Pardoner's offer of **som honeste thyng** as an alternative to **ribawdye**.

learn Telle us som moral thyng, that we may leere
wisdom Som wit, and thanne wol we gladly heere.'
'I graunte, ywis,' quod he, 'but I moot thynke
Upon som honeste thyng whil that I drynke.'

The Pardoner's Prologue

For the profession of the Pardoner, see GP 669n. Like the Wife of Bath, the Pardoner has a quasi-autobiographical monologue before he begins his tale, describing the practices by which he deceives his simple audiences into parting with their money. As with the Wife of Bath, Chaucer draws upon the convention of the confession of the allegorical vice-figure, in this case the figure of *Faus-Semblant* ('Hypocrisy') in *RR* 11065–11974. The outrageousness of the Pardoner's account of his evil-doing and perversion of his holy office can be associated with the allegory of its origin, but it comes to seem, because of the vividness of Chaucer's individual realization of the speaker, a part of his 'character'. Whether it is seen as an arrogant display of power on the part of one who knows the contempt in which he is held, or a boasting of 'normal' depravity on the part of one who is fearful of revealing his outcast state as a homosexual (see M. McAlpine, 'The Pardoner's Homosexuality and How it Matters', *PMLA* 95 [1980], 8–22), or a destabilization of traditional values by an untraditionally gendered person (see C. Dinshaw, 'Eunuch Hermeneutics', in *Chaucer's Sexual Poetics* [Madison, 1989]), is matter for debate. We may be observing, more simply, the atrophy of moral sensibility in one whose profession, systematically, year in and year out, is lying.

'Lordynges,' quod he, 'in chirches whan I preche
lofty and resonant I peyne me to han an hauteyn speche
And rynge it out as round as gooth a belle,
For I kan al by rote that I telle.
sermon-text, one and the same My theme is alwey oon, and evere was –
Radix malorum est cupiditas.
'First I pronounce whennes that I come
one and all And thanne my bulles shewe I, alle and some.
Oure lige lordes seel on my patente,
protect That shewe I first, my body to warente,
That no man be so boold, ne preest ne clerk,
Me to destourbe of Cristes holy werk.
And after that thanne telle I forth my tales;
Bulles of popes and of cardynales,
Of patriarkes and bisshopes I shewe,
And in Latyn I speke a wordes fewe
add spice to To saffron with my predicacioun
And for to stire hem to devocioun.
glass cases Thanne shewe I forth my longe cristal stones,
rags Ycrammed ful of cloutes and of bones –
think Relikes been they, as wenen they echon.
latten (brass alloy) Thanne have I in a latoun a shulder-bon
Which that was of an holy Jewes sheepe.
"Goode men," I seye, "tak of my wordes keepe:
If that this boon be wasshe in any welle,
If cow or calf or sheepe or oxe swelle
snake That any worm hath ete or worm ystonge,
Taak water of that welle and wassh his tonge,

334 'Cupidity is the root of all evils', from 1 Tim. 6:10.

336–7 The **bulles** are the papal authorization of the grant of indulgence, which could be directly obtained from other sources than the pope (see 342–3). The open letter or **patente**, with the seal of **oure lige lorde** (presumably the pope or bishop, rather than the king), is what authorizes the Pardoner to preach in a particular area (since he is not an ordained priest: see 391).

whole And it is hool anoon; and forthermoor,
Of pokkes and of scabbe and every soor
Shal every sheepe be hool that of this welle
Drynketh a draughte. Taak kepe eek what I telle:
householder, owns If that the goode-man that the bestes oweth
week Wol every wike, er that the cok hym croweth,
Fastynge, drynken of this welle a draghte,
As thilke holy Jew oure eldres taghte,
stock Hise bestes and his stoor shal multiplie.
"'And, sire, also it heeleth jalousie:
For thogh a man be falle in jalous rage,
soup Lat maken with this water his potage
mistrust And nevere shal he moore his wyf mystriste,
misdeed Thogh he the soothe of hir defaute wiste,
Al hadde she taken preestes two or thre.
mitten (glove for sowing seed) "'Heere is a miteyn eek that ye may se:
He that his hand wol putte in this mitayn,
He shal have multiplyyng of his grayn
Whan he hath sowen, be it whete or otes,
pence, groats (worth fourpence) So that he offre pens or ellis grotes.
"'Goode men and wommen, o thyng warne I yow:
If any wight be in this chirche now
That hath doon synne horrible, that he
confessed Dar nat for shame of it yshryven be,
Or any womman, be she yong or old,
That hath ymaked hir housbond cokewold,
Swich folk shal have no power ne no grace
To offren to my relikes in this place.
And whoso fyndeth hym out of swich blame
in God's name He wol come up and offre a Goddes name
absolve And I assoille him by the auctoritee
Which that by bulle ygraunted was to me."
trick 'By this gaude have I wonne, yeer by yeer,
(a mark is two-thirds of a pound) An hundred mark sith I was pardoner.
I stonde lyk a clerk in my pulpet
ignorant And whan that lewed peple is doun yset
I preche so as ye han herd bifore
And telle an hundred false japes more.
Thanne peyne I me to strecche forth the nekke
nod my head And est and west upon the peple I bekke
barn-roof As dooth a dowve sittyng on a berne.
briskly Myne handes and my tonge goon so yerne
That it is joye to se my bisynesse.
'Of avarice and of swich cursednesse
Is al my prechyng, for to make hem free
To yeven hir pens, and namely unto me.
obtain money For myn entente is nat but for to wynne
And nothyng for correccioun of synne.
I rekke nevere, whan that they been beryed,

387 **assoille**. The Pardoner, it should be emphasized, has no power to grant absolution (a sacrament that only an ordained priest can administer), only to give indulgences (remissions of earthly penance) to those who are truly penitent.

399 The **joye** of which the Pardoner speaks is an almost aesthetic delight in watching a supremely skilful practitioner at work.

a-blackberrying Thogh that hir soules goon a-blakeberyed!
For certes many a predicacioun
Comth ofte tyme of yvel entencioun:
Som for plesance of folk and flaterye,
To been avanced by ypocrisie,
And som for veyne glorie and som for hate.
argue against someone For whan I dar noon oother weyes debate,
sharply Thanne wol I stynge hym with my tonge smerte
escape In prechyng, so that he shal nat asterte
To been diffamed falsly, if that he
fellow-pardoners Hath trespased to my bretheren or to me.
For though I telle noght his propre name,
Men shal wel knowe that it is the same
By signes and by othere circumstances.
pay back Thus quyte I folk that doon us displesances;
spit, colour (pretence) Thus spete I out my venym under hewe
Of holynesse, to seme holy and trewe.
describe 'But shortly myn entente I wol devyse:
I preche of nothyng but for coveitise.
Therfore my theme is yet and evere was
Radix malorum est cupiditas.
against Thus kan I preche agayn that same vice
Which that I use, and that is avarice.
But though myself be gilty in that synne,
turn away Yet kan I maken oother folk to twynne
From avarice and soore to repente –
But that is nat my principal entente:
I preche nothyng but for coveitise.
Of this matere it oghte ynow suffise.
exemplary stories 'Thanne telle I hem ensamples many oon
Of olde stories longe tyme agoon,
For lewed peple loven tales olde –
Swiche thynges kan they wel reporte and holde.
What, trowe ye that whiles I may preche
because of how And wynne gold and silver for I teche,
in voluntary poverty That I wol lyve in poverte wilfully?
had it in mind Nay, nay, I thoghte it nevere, trewely!
For I wol preche and begge in sondry landes;
I wol nat do no labour with myne handes
Ne make baskettes and lyve therby,
without making a profit Bycause I wol nat beggen ydelly.
I wol none of the apostles countrefete;
wool(len clothes) I wol have moneye, wolle, chese and whete,
lad Al were it yeven of the poverest page
Or of the povereste widwe in a village,
Al sholde hir children sterve for famyne.
Nay, I wol drynke licour of the vyne
And have a joly wenche in every toun.

432 The eagerness with which the Pardoner disclaims any intention of doing good suggests that his anxious determination to do evil is something of a point of pride with him. This determination is further expressed in his obsessively insistent repetition of **I wol** (443–52).

447–8 The apostles were sent out to preach and told to take no thought for worldly things but simply to beg for their daily bread (Mark 6:7–10).

'But herkneth, lordynges, in conclusioun:
Youre likyng is that I shal telle a tale;
Now have I dronke a draghte of corny ale,
By God, I hope I shal yow telle a thyng
That shal by resoun been at youre likyng.
For thogh myself be a ful vicious man,
A moral tale yet I yow telle kan
Which I am wont to preche for to wynne.
Now holde youre pees! My tale I wol bigynne.'

The Pardoner's Tale

The Pardoner's Tale is in two parts: a sermon on the sins of the tavern (drunkenness, gluttony, gambling and swearing), prompted by the introduction of the riotous company from whom the three protagonists of the Tale are drawn; and the Tale proper, which functions as the sermon *exemplum*. The homily is forceful and lurid, and can be seen as apt to the extravagant rhetoric of one who wants, above all, to achieve a dramatic effect – though it is not uncharacteristic of medieval sermons. The Tale is told with outstanding economy and power, evocative of the real world and yet verging on allegory in the namelessness of the personages of the story and the belief of all of them that Death is literally a person. It is a traditional story, widely disseminated in western and eastern cultures. On the level of *exemplum*, or preacher's illustrative story, it is perfectly designed to convince the Pardoner's ignorant audience that greed for money is a (literally) deadly sin which they can avoid by giving their money to him. On another level, it reveals an automaton-like quality in the Pardoner, a death-like atrophy of sensibility in which he can think of nothing to do in the way of telling a story other than to do what he always does in his professional life. He seems to have no life but in the act of performance or in boasting about it, no awareness but of the act of will that drives his performance and that must for ever be reiterated. In some sense, he is 'dead'.

'In Flandres whilom was a compaignye
lived a life of Of yonge folk that haunteden folye,
debauchery, gambling, brothels As riot, hasard, stewes and tavernes,
guitars Where as with harpes, lutes, and gyternes
dice They daunce and pleyen at dees bothe day and nyght
And ete also and drynke over hir myght,
Thurgh which they doon the devel sacrifise
Withinne that develes temple in cursed wise
By superfluytee abhomynable.
Hir othes been so grete and so dampnable
That it is grisly for to heere hem swere.
tear in pieces Oure blissed Lordes body they to-tere –
Hem thoughte that Jewes rente hym noght ynough –
And eech of hem at otheres synne lough.
dancing-girls And right anon thanne coomen tombesteres
shapely and slender, fruit-girls Fetys and smale, and yonge frutesteres,
cake-sellers Syngeris with harpes, baudes, waufereres,
Whiche been the verray develes officers
To kyndle and blowe the fyr of lecherye,
That is annexed unto glotonye.
The holy writ take I to my witnesse
lechery That luxure is in wyn and dronkenesse.

483–572 The material for the Pardoner's discourse on drunkenness and gluttony is drawn from a variety of sources: the Bible, for the stories of Lot (Gen. 19:30–6), Herod (Matt. 14:3–12) and Samson (Judges 13:5), and for Paul (1 Cor. 6:13) in lines 521–3; Jerome *Adversus Jovinianum* (see WBP 7n) for parts of 505–28 and 547–50; Seneca, Epistle 83, for lines 493–7; and, for lines 538–9, the *De miseria condicionis humanae* (written 1195 by Lotario dei Segni, later Pope Innocent III), a violent outburst against 'the misery of the human condition', of which Chaucer did a translation, now lost.

against nature

Lo, how that dronken Loth unkyndely
Lay by his doghtres two, unwityngly:
So dronke he was he nyste what he wroghte.
Herodes, whoso wel the stories soghte,
Whan he of wyn was replet at his feste,
command Right at his owene table he yaf his heste
To sleen the Baptist John, ful giltelees.
Senec seith a good word doutelees:
He seith he kan no difference fynde
Bitwix a man that is out of his mynde
habitually drunk And a man which that is dronkelewe,
bad man But that woodnesse, yfallen in a sherewe,
Persevereth lenger than dooth dronkenesse.
O glotonye, ful of cursednesse!
ruin O cause first of oure confusioun!
O original of oure dampnacioun,
Til Crist hadde boght us with his blood agayn!
Lo, how deere, shortly for to sayn,
Aboght was thilke cursed vileynye!
Corrupt was al this world for glotonye.
Adam oure fader and his wyf also
Fro Paradys to labour and to wo
Were dryven for that vice, it is no drede.
For whil that Adam fasted, as I rede,
He was in Paradys, and whan that he
forbidden Eet of the frut defended on a tree,
Anon he was out cast to wo and peyne.
O glotonye, on thee wel oghte us pleyne!
O, wiste a man how manye maladies
Folwen of excesse and of glotonyes,
He wolde been the moore mesurable
Of his diete, sittyng at his table.
Allas, the shorte throte, the tendre mouth,
Maketh that est and west and north and south,
In erthe, in eyr, in water, men to swynke
To gete a gloton deyntee mete and drynke!
Of this matere, O Paul, wel kanstow trete:
belly "Mete unto wombe, and wombe eek unto mete,
Shal God destroyen bothe," as Paulus seith.
Allas, a foul thyng is it, by my feith,
To seye this word, and fouler is the dede,
(wines) Whan man so drynketh of the white and rede
That of his throte he maketh his pryvee
Thurgh thilke cursed superfluite.
The Apostle wepyng seith ful pitously,
"Ther walken manye of whiche yow toold have I –
I seye it now wepyng with pitous voys –
cross Ther been enemys of Cristes croys,
Of whiche the ende is deth; wombe is hir god!"
bag of guts O wombe! O bely! O stynkyng cod,
Fulfilled of dong and of corrupcioun!
At either ende of thee foul is the soun.
it is to provide food for you How greet labour and cost is thee to fynde!

Thise cokes, how they stampe and streyne and grynde
And turnen substance into accident
gluttonous inclination To fulfillen al thy likerous talent!
Out of the harde bones knokke they
marrow The mary, for they caste nat awey
(Anything) that, sweetly That may go thurgh the golet softe and soote.
Of spicerie of lief and bark and roote
for his pleasure Shal been his sauce ymaked by delit,
To make hym yet a newer appetit.
delights But certes he that haunteth swiche delices
Is deed, whil that he lyveth in tho vices.
A lecherous thyng is wyn, and dronkenesse
strife Is ful of stryvyng and of wrecchednesse.
O dronke man, disfigured is thy face,
Sour is thy breeth, foul artow to embrace,
And thurgh thy dronke nose semeth the soun
As thogh thou seydest ay "Sampsoun, Sampsoun!"
And yet, God woot, Sampson drank nevere no wyn.
stuck pig Thou fallest as it were a stiked swyn;
care for decency Thy tonge is lost and al thyn honest cure,
For dronkenesse is verray sepulture
Of mannes wit and his discrecioun.
In whom that drynke hath domynacioun
secret He kan no conseil kepe, it is no drede.
Now kepe yow fro the white and fro the rede
And namely fro the white wyn of Lepe
That is to selle in Fissh-strete or in Chepe:
This wyn of Spaigne crepeth subtilly
In othere wynes growynge faste by,
Of which ther riseth swich fumositee
That whan a man hath dronken draghtes thre
And weneth that he be at hom in Chepe,
He is in Spaigne, right at the toune of Lepe –
Nat at the Rochel, ne at Burdeux toun –
And thanne wol he seyn "Sampson, Sampsoun!"

{The Pardoner continues with further examples against drunkenness and then goes on to gambling and swearing.}

But, sires, now wol I telle forth my tale.
Thise riotoures thre of whiche I telle,
Longe erst er pryme ronge of any belle,
Were set hem in a taverne to drynke,
And as they sat they herde a belle klynke
Biforn a cors, was caryed to his grave.

539 The scholarly allusion, drawn directly from Innocent III's *De miseria*, is to the presence within an object of an inner informing reality (**substance**) and an outward set of signs by which it is recognized (**accident**); the cooks are perverting nature by converting the one into the other. An allusion to the doctrine of transubstantiation (the miraculous conversion of the substance of the communion wafer into the flesh of Christ as another substance, a 'real presence') and to the denial of this doctrine by Wyclif and his Lollard followers (who said that the 'accidents' of the bread remain), is possible.

562–72 An allusion to the selling in Fish Street and Cheapside of wines from La Rochelle and Bordeaux in south-west France (the best area for wine) that had been mixed with cheaper wines from **Lepe**, in southern Spain, producing a particularly heady concoction.

662 Long before the bell rang for the first service of the day (the first of the seven canonical 'hours'), about 6 a.m.

servant That oon of hem gan callen to his knave:
Go quickly "Go bet," quod he, "and axe redily
goes past by here What cors is this that passeth heer forby,
And looke that thow reporte his name wel."
lad "Sire," quod this boy, "it nedeth never-a-del;
It was me told er ye cam heer two houres.
He was, pardee, an old felawe of youres
And sodeynly he was yslayn to-nyght,
Blind drunk Fordronke, as he sat on his bench upright.
Ther cam a privee theef men clepeth Deeth
That in this contree al the peple sleeth
And with his spere he smoot his herte a-two
And wente his wey withouten wordes mo.
He hath a thousand slayn this pestilence,
And, maister, er ye come in his presence,
Me thynketh that it were necessarie
For to be war of swich an adversarie.
Beeth redy for to meete hym everemoore:
mother Thus taughte me my dame; I sey namoore."
"By seinte Marie!" seyde this taverner,
young lad "The child seith sooth, for he hath slayn this yer,
From here Henne over a myle, withinne a greet village,
farm-worker and serving boy Bothe man and womman, child and hyne and page:
I trowe his habitacioun be there.
wary To been avysed greet wisdom it were,
Er that he dide a man a dishonour."
"Ye, Goddes armes!" quod this riotour,
"Is it swich peril with hym for to meete?
(everywhere) I shal hym seke by wey and eek by strete,
worthy I make avow to Goddes digne bones!
all of one mind Herkneth, felawes, we thre been al ones:
Lat ech of us holde up his hand to oother
And ech of us bicomen ootheres brother
And we wol sleen this false traytour Deeth.
He shal be slayn, he that so manye sleeth,
By Goddes dignytee, er it be nyght!"
Togidres han thise thre hir trouthes plyght
To lyve and dyen ech of hem with oother,
brother by birth As thogh he were his owene ybore brother.
And up they stirte, al dronken in this rage,
And forth they goon towardes that village
Of which the taverner hadde spoke biforn,
And many a grisly ooth thanne han they sworn
tore to pieces And Cristes blessed body they to-rente –
seize Deeth shal be deed if that they may hym hente!
Whan they had goon nat fully half a myle,
Right as they wolde han treden over a style,
An old man and a povre with hem mette.

699 The rioters' determination to slay Death gives them the air of public-spirited vigilantes, but they are of course blasphemously usurping the role of Christ as the slayer of 'death', that is, eternal perdition. They fail to understand the difference between physical death (which is not the enemy of the good Christian but the stimulus to good deeds and the only possible gateway to heaven) and spiritual death, which they have already undergone. The text they need is Romans 8:13: 'If you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the spirit you put to death the deeds of the body you will live'.

greeted
This olde man ful mekely hem grette
And seyde thus, "Now, lordes, God yow se!"
The proudeste of thise riotoures thre
in reply, churl, damn you
Answerde agayn, "What, carl, with sory grace!
completely wrapped up
Why artow al forwrapped save thy face?
Why lyvestow so longe in so greet age?"
This olde man gan looke in his visage
And seyde thus: "For I ne kan nat fynde
A man, thogh that I walked into Inde,
Neither in citee ne in no village,
That wolde chaunge his youthe for myn age;
And therfore moot I han myn age stille,
As longe tyme as it is Goddes wille.
Ne Deeth, allas, ne wol nat have my lyf.
captive wretch
Thus walke I lyk a restelees caytyf
And on the ground, which is my modres gate,
I knokke with my staf bothe erly and late
Dear
And seye, 'Leeve moder, leet me in!
Lo how I vanysshe, flessh and blood and skyn!
Allas, whan shal my bones been at reste?
treasure-chest
Moder, with yow wolde I chaunge my cheste
That in my chambre longe tyme hath be,
haircloth (shroud)
Ye, for an heyre clowt to wrappe me!'
But yet to me she wol nat do that grace,
withered
For which ful pale and welked is my face.
"But, sires, to yow it is no curteisye
offensive words
To speken to an old man vileynye
Unless
But he trespase in word or ellis in dede.
In holy writ ye may yourself wel rede:
In the presence of, grey-haired
'Agayns an old man, hoor upon his heed,
stand up (in respect), advice
Ye shal arise'; wherfore I yeve yow reed,
Ne dooth unto an old man noon harm now
Namoore than that ye wolde men dide to yow
In age – if that ye so longe abyde.
wherever you walk
And God be with yow wher ye go or ryde!
I moot go thider as I have to go."
"Nay, olde cherl, by God, thow shalt nat so,"
Seyde this oother hasardour anon;
"Thow partest nat so lightly, by Seint John!
Thow speeke right now of thilke traytour Deeth
That in this contree alle oure freendes sleeth;
spy
Have heer my trouthe, as thow art his espye,
pay for it
Tel wher he is or thow shalt it abye,
By God and by the holy sacrament!
in league with him
For soothly thow art oon of his assent
To sleen us yonge folk, thow false theef!"

720–38 The Old Man has been identified with Cain, doomed to wander the world for ever, or with the Wandering Jew, or with Death. He is an outcast soul (728), a restless prisoner in exile (see Romans 7:24), obscurely aware (721–6) of a promise of youth or new life which is denied to him (i.e. the exchange of the 'old Adam' of sin, crucified with Christ on the cross, for the 'new man' of grace: see Romans 6:6). He is likewise obscurely aware that he must 'die to the world' before he can be spiritually reborn, but he sees this as a literal death or re-entry into mother-earth (729–38); like Nicodemus he can only ask, bewildered, when Christ speaks of being reborn, 'How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born again?' (John 3:4). The Old Man is in some sense a physical manifestation of the Pardoner's spiritual state.

desirous

"Now, sires," quod he, "if that yow be so leef
To fynde Deeth, turn up this croked wey,
For in that grove I lafte hym, by my fey,
Under a tree, and there he wol abyde;
Nat for youre boost he wol hym nothyng hyde.
Se ye that ook? Right ther ye shal hym fynde.
God save yow that boghte agayn mankynde,
And yow amende!" Thus seyde this olde man.
And everich of thise riotoures ran
Til he cam to that tree, and ther they founde
Of floryns fyne of gold ycoyned rounde
Wel-ny an eighte busshels, as hem thoughte:
No lenger thanne after Deeth they soughte.
But ech of hem so glad was of the sighte,
For that the floryns been so faire and brighte,
That doun they sette hem by this precious hoord.
The worste of hem, he spak the firste word.
"Bretheren," quod he, "taak kepe what that I seye:

jest

My wit is greet, thogh that I bourde and pleye.
This tresor hath Fortune unto us yeven
In myrthe and jolitee oure lyf to lyven,
And lightly as it cometh so wol we spende.

would have thought

Ey, Goddes precious dignytee! Who wende
Today that we sholde han so fair a grace?
But myghte this gold be caried fro this place
Hoom to myn hous, or ellis unto youres –
For wel ye woot that al this gold is oures –
Thanne were we in heigh felicitee.
But trewely, by daye it may nat be:

arrant thieves

Men wolde seyn that we were theves stronge

have us hanged

And for oure owene tresor doon us honge.
This tresor moste ycaried be by nyghte
As wisly and as sleyly as it myghte.

advise, lots be drawn

Therfore I rede that cut amonges us alle
Be drawe and lat se wher the cut wol falle,
And he that hath the cut with herte blithe

very quickly

Shal renne to the towne, and that ful swithe,
And brynge us breed and wyn ful prively.
And two of us shal kepen subtilly
This tresor wel; and if he wol nat tarye,
Whan it is nyght we wol this tresor carye
By oon assent wher as us thynketh best."

fist

That oon of hem the cut broghte in his fest
And bad hem drawe and looke wher it wol falle;
And it fel on the yongeste of hem alle
And forth toward the town he wente anon.
And also soone as that he was agon
That oon of hem spak thus unto that oother:
"Thow knowest wel thow art my sworn brother;

766 **boghte agayn**: redeemed for a second time. The Old Man's sardonic reference is to the rioters' re-enactment of Christ's victory over death (see 699n).

772 The double meaning here (they do not seek it further – because without realizing it they have found it) is the hinge on which the tale's irony turns.

Thy profit wol I telle thee anon.
Thow woost wel that oure felawe is agon,
And heere is gold, and that ful greet plentee,
divided That shal departed been among us thre.
But nathelees, if I kan shape it so
That it departed were among us two,
Hadde I nat doon a freendes torn to thee?"
That oother answerde, "I noot how that may be:
He woot how that the gold is with us tweye.
What shal we doon? What shal we to hym seye?"
a secret, villain "Shal it be conseil?" seyde the firste shrewe,
"And I shal tellen in a wordes fewe
What we shul doon and brynge it wel aboute."
"I graunte," quod that oother, "out of doute,
betray That by my trouthe I wol thee nat biwreye."
"Now," quod the firste, "thow woost wel we be tweye
And two of us shul strenger be than oon.
sat down Looke whan that he is set, that right anon
(have some horse-play) Arys as though thow woldest with hym pleye
stab And I shal ryve hym thurgh the sydes tweye
Whil that thow strogelest with hym as in game
And with thy daggere looke thow do the same;
And thanne shal al this gold departed be,
My deere freend, bitwixe thee and me.
Thanne may we bothe oure lustes al fulfille
And pleye at dees right at oure owene wille."
And thus acorded been thise sherewes tweye
To sleen the thridde, as ye han herd me seye.
This yongeste, which that wente to the toun,
Ful ofte in herte he rolleth up and doun
The beautee of thise floryns newe and brighte.
"O Lord!" quod he, "if so were that I myghte
Have al this tresor to myself allone,
throne Ther is no man that lyveth under the trone
Of God that sholde lyve so myrie as I!"
And at the laste the feend, oure enemy,
buy Putte in his thoght that he sholde poyson beye
With which he myghte sleen his felawes tweye –
The reason being that, state of life For-why the feend foond hym in swich lyvynge
permission (from God) That he hadde leve hym to sorwe brynge.
plainly For this was outrely his ful entente,
To sleen hem bothe and nevere to repente.
And forth he goth – no lenger wolde he tarye –
Into the toun unto a pothecarye,
And preyed hym that he hym wolde selle
kill Som poysoun that he myghte his rattes quelle;
yard And eek ther was a polcat in his hawe
That as he seyde his capons hadde yslawe,
avenge himself And fayn he wolde wreke hym, if he myghte,
On vermyn that destroyed hym by nyghte.

847–8 An important theological point: the Devil can only bring into mortal sin those from whom, because of their sinful life, God has withdrawn his grace.

The pothecarie answerde, "And thow shalt have
A thyng that, also God my soule save,
In al this world ther is no creature
mixture That ete or dronke hath of this confiture
amount Nat but the montaunce of a corn of whete
lose That he ne shal his lyf anoon forlete –
die Ye, sterve he shal, and that in lasse while
at a walking pace Than thow wolt goon a-paas nat but a myle,
The poyson is so strong and violent."
seized This cursed man hath in his hand yhent
This poyson in a box and sith he ran
Into the nexte strete unto a man
And borwed hym large botels thre
And in the two his poison poured he;
The thridde he kepte clene for his drynke,
planned For al the nyght he shoope hym for to swynke
In cariyng of the gold out of that place.
accursed may he be And whan this riotour, with sory grace,
Hadde filled with wyn hise grete botels thre,
returns To hise felawes agayn repaireth he.
preach What nedeth it to sarmone of it moore?
planned For right as they hadde cast his deeth bifore,
Right so they han hym slayn and that anon.
And whan that this was doon, thus spak that oon:
"Now lat us sitte and drynke and make us merye
And afterward we wol his body berye."
by chance And with that word it happed hym, *par cas*,
To take the botel ther the poyson was,
And drank, and yaf his felawe drynke also,
died For which anon they storven bothe two.
But certes, I suppose that Avycen
set of rules, chapter of treatise Wroot nevere in no canon ne in no *fen*
Mo wonder signes of empoysonyng
Than hadde thise wrecches two er hir endyng.
Thus ended been thise homicides two
And eek the false empoysonere also.
O cursed synne of alle cursednesse!
treacherous O traytours homicide, O wikkednesse!
lechery O glotonye, luxure, and hasardrye!
Thou blasphemour of Crist with vileynye
oaths, habit And othes grete of usage and of pryde!
Allas, mankynde, how may it bityde
That to thy Creatour which that thee wroghte
redeemed thee And with his precious herte-blood the boghte
Thow art so fals and so unkynde, allas!
Now, goode men, God foryeve yow youre trespas
guard And ware yow fro the synne of avarice!
save Myn holy pardoun may yow alle warisse,
(see n.) So that ye offre nobles or starlynges,
Or ellis silver broches, spones, rynges.

889 Avicenna was an Arabic scholar, and author of medical treatises.
895–915 The Pardoner goes into his closing professional routine, as he recognizes (915), even though the situation is different and his audience is not the usual congregation of simpletons. There is a suggestion of an automaton-like acting-out of a set performance.
907 'Provided that you offer gold coins or silver pennies'.

Boweth youre heed under this holy bulle!
wool Cometh up, ye wyves, offreth of youre wolle!
Youre name I entre here in my rolle anon:
Into the blisse of hevene shul ye gon.
absolve I yow assoille, by myn heighe power,
Ye that wol offre, as clene and eek as cler
As ye were born. – And lo, sires, thus I preche.
physician And Jesu Crist, that is oure soules leche,
So graunte yow his pardoun to receyve,
For that is best – I wol yow nat deceyve.
But sires, o word forgat I in my tale:
bag I have relikes and pardon in my male
As faire as any man in Engelond,
Whiche were me yeven by the popes hond.
If any of yow wol of devocion
Offren and han myn absolucioun,
Com forth anon and kneleth here adoun
And mekely receyveth my pardoun;
Or ellis taketh pardoun as ye wende
Al newe and fressh at every myles ende,
So that ye offren, alwey newe and newe,
Nobles or pens whiche that been goode and trewe.
It is an honour to everich that is heer
competent That ye mowe have a suffisant pardoner
T'assoille yow in contree as ye ryde
chances, befall For aventures whiche that may bityde.
Paraventure ther may falle oon or two
Doun of his hors and breke his nekke a-two:
what an excellent form of insurance Looke which a seuretee is it to yow alle
That I am in youre felaweship yfalle
That may assoille yow, bothe moore and lasse,
Whan that the soule shal fro the body passe.
suggest I rede that oure Hoost heere shal bigynne,
For he is moost envoluped in synne.
Com forth, sire Hoost, and offre first anon
And thow shalt kisse the relikes everychon,
even if you only give a groat Ye, for a grote! Unbokele anon thy purs.'
may I be damned first! 'Nay, nay!' quod he, 'thanne have I Cristes curs!
as I may thrive (I swear) Lat be,' quod he, 'it shal nat be, so thee ich!
drawers (under-breeches) Thow woldest make me kisse thyn olde breech
And swere it were a relyk of a seint,
arse-hole Thogh it were with thy fondement depeynt!
But, by the croys which that Seint Eleyne foond,
testicles I wold I hadde thy coylons in myn hond.
Instead of, a sainted relic Instide of relikes or of seintuarie
Let's have them cut off Lat cutte hem of, I wol thee helpe hem carie:
turd They shul be shryned in an hogges toord!'

919–45 The Pardoner's tone here, especially the reference to the unfortunate accidents that may befall (936), seems intended to amuse, as do his remarks at the Host's expense (941–5). His humour proves ill-judged.

946–55 The scatological violence of the Host's response is perhaps not inexplicable; whether it suggests that the Pardoner has or has not got testicles (see GP 691n) has been debated, inconclusively.

951 **Eleyne**: St Helena, discoverer of the True Cross.

955 The pig's turd is to act as the reliquary in which the Pardoner's testicles, thought of as the relics of a saint (following a famous joke in *RR* 7108–9), are to be enshrined and carried in procession before the people.

This Pardoner answerde nat a word:
So wrooth he was, no word ne wolde he seye.
'Now,' quod oure Hoost, 'I wol no lenger pleye
With thee, ne with noon oother angry man.'
But right anon the worthy Knyght bigan,
Whan that he saugh that al the peple lough,
'Namoore of this, for it is right ynough!
Sire Pardoner, be glad and murye of cheere;
And ye, sire Hoost, that been to me so deere,
I pray yow that ye kisse the Pardoner.
And Pardoner, I pray thee, drawe thee neer,
laugh And as we diden lat us lawe and pleye.'
rode Anon they kiste, and ryden forth hir weye.

Minor Poems

Adam Scriveyn

This little poem reminds one of the circumstances under which long texts were copied by a professional scribe and returned to the author for correction before being 'published' (e.g. sent to a prospective patron). Complaints about the carelessness of scribes are a topos among medieval authors. One imagines the poem being sent with a new batch of work to the scribe: its mock-ferocity bespeaks a certain familiarity. The poem appears in only one MS, TCC MS R.3.20 (p. 367), copied by the ubiquitous scribe and Chaucerian enthusiast John Shirley: see Lerer (1993), pp. 117–46.

scribe Adam scriveyn, if ever it thee bifalle
anew (again) Boece or Troylus for to wryten newe,
may you Under thy long lokkes thow most have the scalle
writing, accurately But after my makyng thow wryte more trewe:
must So ofte a-daye I mot thy werk renewe,
It to correcte and eke to rubbe and scrape,
haste And al is thorugh thy neglygence and rape.

Truth

Called in some MSS a 'Balade de Bon Conseyl', the poem called *Truth* by its modern editors is an unambiguously hortatory poem, echoing a classical and Boethian tradition of stoic rejection of worldly ambition and court corruption. In form it is a 'balade', that is, a poem of three seven-line or eight-line stanzas on the same rhymes with the last line of each stanza repeated as a refrain. Often such poems have an 'envoy' consisting of a further stanza in which the poem is addressed (sent, Fr. *envoyé*) to a particular recipient: such a stanza, addressed to one 'Vache', is added in one MS of *Truth* (BL MS Add. 10340, the one used here); the effect is to lighten and personalize the tone of the poem, especially through the comical aptness of the friend's name ('Cow') to the *beste* (18) urged forth from its stall. The poem, perhaps specially valued for its grand (and unChaucerian) simplicity (to which the remarkably large number of end-stopped lines contributes), was copied into 24 MSS.

Adam Scriveyn

1 **Adam**, as the scribe's real name, allows the comic implication that he repeats the primal sin of Adam, through whose fall language fell from its pristine truth; **scriveyn** is an occupational identification, hovering on becoming a surname.

2 **Boece or Troylus**. Chaucer's prose translation of Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy* and his poem of *Troilus and Criseyde* were both completed by about 1386, which gives an earliest date for this poem. At the end of *TC* (V.1793–8) Chaucer expresses a similar (but more serious) concern about the accurate transmission of his text.

3 **scalle**: a very nasty oozing scabbiness of the scalp. Adam is to be punished with a scratching that will somehow compensate Chaucer for having to scratch out the scribe's mistakes.

6 **rubbe and scrape**. Writing on parchment (vellum), commonly used for most MSS at this period (paper was coming in slowly), could be scraped out with a sharp knife and the surface of the parchment rubbed smooth and used again.

crowd (at court) Flee fro the prees and dwelle with sothfastnesse;
Match yourself to what you have Suffyce unto thy thing, though it be smal,
hoarding, instability For hord hath hate, and climbing tikelnesse,
(see n.) Prees hath envye, and wele blent overal.
Seek enjoyment Savour no more than thee bihove shal,
advise Reule wel thyself, that other folk canst rede,
doubt And trouthe thee shal delivere, it is no drede.

everything that's wrong Tempest thee noght al croked to redresse
(Fortune and her wheel) In trust of hir that turneth as a bal;
well-being Much wele stant in litel besinesse.
(see n.) Be war therfore to sporne ayeyns an al,
(see n.) Stryve not as doth the crokke with the wal.
Exert control over, deeds Daunte thyself, that dauntest otheres dede,
And trouthe thee shal delivere, it is no drede.

What, obedience That thee is sent, receyve in buxumnesse;
The wrastling for the world axeth a fal.
Her is non hoom, her nis but wildernesse:
Forth, pilgrim, forth! Forth, beste, out of thy stal!
Know thy contree, look up, thank God of al;
spirit Hold the heye wey and lat thy gost thee lede,
And trouthe thee shal delivere, it is no drede.

Envoy

Therfore, thou Vache, leve thyn old wrecchednesse;
cease Unto the world leve now to be thral.
Crye him mercy, that of his hy goodnesse
Made thee of noght, and in especial
Draw unto him, and pray in general
reward For thee, and eek for other, hevenlich mede,
And trouthe thee shal delivere, it is no drede.

The Envoy to Scogan

An occasional poem, in the form of a double 'balade' without refrain (see *Truth*), in which Chaucer playfully warns his friend Scogan of the dire consequences of his rash decision to give up love, just because his lady will not have him. Henry Scogan (d. 1407) was in service at court in the 1390s, and later tutor to the sons of the future Henry IV: Chaucer may hint in the envoy at some favour Scogan may do him at court in return for the amusement he gets from the poem. The *Envoy* is an extraordinarily precocious example in English of the urbane epistolary style of Horace and the Augustan poets (see J. Norton-Smith, *Geoffrey Chaucer* [London, 1974], pp. 213–25); it draws its vitality from the self-mocking spirit of male camaraderie which is present at a different level of authorial 'reality' in the imagining of the Wife of Bath. The poem survives in three MSS: the present text is from Bodl.MS Fairfax 16; study by J. Scattergood, *NMS* 35 (1991), 92–101.

Truth

4 'The crowd is full of malice, and prosperity is deceitful'.

7 From John 8:32: 'And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free'.

11 'Be careful therefore not to kick against a sharp awl' (because you'll do no good and only hurt yourself). Proverbial.

12 A crock (jug) only breaks if it is thrown against the wall. Proverbial.

17–18 The image of the world as a place of exile (for the soul), and the exhortation to man to abandon his lower nature (**Forth, beste, out of thy stal**) for his higher, are central to the Boethian inheritance of the poem (e.g. *Consolation* I, prose 5–6; II, prose 5; III, prose 12, etc.).

22 **thou Vache**. A punning reference to Sir Philip la Vache (1346–1408), a friend of Chaucer's who had perhaps fallen on hard times and to whom a Boethian remonstrance could be playfully directed.

To-broken been the statutz hye in hevene
That creat weren eternally to dure,
(the seven planets) Syth that I see the bryghte goddis sevene
May Mowe wepe and wayle and passion endure
As may in erthe a mortal creature.
Allas, fro whennes may thys thing procede,
sign of disorder Of which errour I deye almost for drede?

decreed By word eterne whilom was yshape
(see n.) That fro the fyfte sercle in no manere
Ne myghte a drope of teeres doun escape.
But now so wepith Venus in hir spere
That with hir teeres she wol drenche us here.
Allas! Scogan, this is for thyn offence:
Thow causest this diluge of pestilence.

goddess Hastow not seyd, in blaspheme of this goddis,
rashness Thurgh pride, or thrugh thy grete rakelnesse,
forbidden Swich thing as in the lawe of love forbode is –
That for thy lady saugh nat thy distresse
Therfore thow yave hir up at Michelmesse?
Allas, Scogan, of olde folk ne yonge
before Was never erst Scogan blamed for his tonge!

called upon, as a witness Thow drowe in skorn Cupide eke to record
Of thilke rebel word that thow hast spoken,
For which he wol no lenger be thy lord.
And, Scogan, though his bowe be nat broken,
revenged He wol nat with his arwes been ywroken
shape On the, ne me, ne noon of oure figure:
We shul of him have neyther hurt nor cure.

misfortune Now certes, frend, I dreed of thyn unhap,
vengeance Lest for thy gilt the wreche of Love procede
grey-haired On alle hem that ben hoor and rounde of shap,
That ben so lykly folk in love to spede.
reward Than shal we for oure labour have no mede;
But wel I wot thow wolt answere and saye,
'grey-beard loon' 'Lo, th'olde grisel lyst to ryme and playe!'

Nay, Scogan, say not so, for I m'excuse –
God helpe me so! In no rym, dowteles,
Ne thynke I never of slep to wake my muse,
That rusteth in my shethe stille in pees.
public While I was yong I put yt forth in prees,

The Envoy to Scogan

9 **fyfte sercle**: the sphere of Venus (counting from the outside inward).

14 **diluge of pestilence**: 'pestilential flood'. Venus's tears fall as a deluge of rain (a mock-heroic variation on the idea that the planets affect the weather).

19 Michaelmas is 29 September, the beginning of the autumn law-term.

31 **rounde of shap**. Chaucer often represents himself (as in the prologue to *Thopas*, *CT* VII.70) as tubby.

32 **folk** is the object of **spede**, the reference in **labour** being to the writing of love-poetry.

38–40 Thinking of his muse as a sword in its sheath (or a pen in its pen-case) allows Chaucer the salacious *double entendre*.

write in prose

But al shal passe that men prose or ryme;
Take every man hys turn as for his tyme.

Envoy

Scogan, that knelest at the stremes hed
Of grace, of alle honour and worthynesse,
In th'ende of which strem I am dul as ded,
Forgete in solytarie wildernesse –
Yet, Scogan, thenke on Tullius kyndenesse:
Remember Mynne thy frend there it may fructyfye!
again, defy Far-wel, and loke thow never eft Love dyffye.

The Complaint of Chaucer to his Purse

When Henry IV became king, after the deposition of Richard II, on 30 September 1399, Chaucer anticipated that his royal annuity (half-yearly instalment due 29 September) would be confirmed and continue to be paid. He was on good terms with Henry, to judge from his receipt from him of a handsome gift of a scarlet gown in 1395–6, and of course the new king's late father had been John of Gaunt, duke of Lancaster, Chaucer's patron in the 1360s and 1370s. The annuity was indeed confirmed, though not till 16 February 1400 (in a document antedated to 13 October), but no actual payment of any kind was made until 21 February. It may be presumed that in the interim Chaucer composed this witty and slightly salacious begging poem (or added a flattering envoy to an already existing poem) and sent it to the new king. The poem is in the form of a balade (see *Truth*) with independent envoy. It appears in 11 MSS: the present text is from Bodl.MS Fairfax 16.

creature To yow, my purse, and to noon other wight
Complayne I, for ye be my lady dere.
I am so sory now that ye been lyght,
(see n.) For certes but yf ye make me hevy chere
I would as rather Me were as leef be layd upon my bere;
For which unto your mercy thus I crye –
Be hevy ageyn, or elles mot I dye.

before Now voucheth sauf this day or hyt be nyght
That I of yow the blisful soun may here
Or see your colour lyk the sonne bryght
(of gold coins; of hair), equal That of yelownesse hadde never pere.
rudder Ye be my lyf, ye be myn hertes stere –
Quene of comfort and of good companye,
Beth hevy ageyn, or elles moot I dye.

Now purse that ben to me my lyves lyght
And saveour as doun in this world here,
Out of this toune helpe me thurgh your myght,

43–6 Chaucer imagines Scogan at the fountain-head of grace, that is, at the court at Windsor (the main royal residence) on the upper Thames, and himself in exile on the lower Thames at Greenwich (both Windsor and Greenwich are named in MS glosses).

47 Tullius: Cicero, with reference to his book on friendship, *De Amicitia*, cited in *Rom* 5286.

The Complaint of Chaucer to his Purse

3–4 lyght … hevy. The word-play throughout is on the lightness or heaviness of his purse and the wantonness or seriousness (or pregnancy) of his lady. He cannot be light except that she be heavy. The joke is a familiar one, and fits with Chaucer's familiar image of himself as an unsuccessful lover; but for a royal pensioner the public purse, if not his own, was indeed a difficult lady to be wooed.

4 'unless you behave seriously toward me' ('become heavy').

13 Quene of comfort: a phrase used of the Virgin Mary in Chaucer's *ABC* poem to the Virgin (cf. **lyves lyght**, 15; **saveour**, 16).

17 this toune. Puzzling: possibly Greenwich, where Chaucer was living at the time and which he wished to get out of, back to London (he leased a house in the precincts of Westminster Abbey on 24 December 1399). But what **myght** has his purse to help him to do this if it is not his **tresorere**?

Syn that ye wole nat ben my tresorere,
(see n.) For I am shave as nye as is a frere.
But yet I pray unto your curtesye,
Beth hevy ageyn, or elles moot I dye.

Envoy

O conquerour of Brutes Albyon,
lineage Which that by lyne and free eleccion
true Been verray kyng, this song to yow I sende,
may And ye that mowen alle oure harme amende
Have mynde upon my supplicacion.

19 shave as nye: 'shaven-headed (tonsured) as closely (i.e. as bare of money)'.

22–3 Chaucer alludes skilfully and unobtrusively to the three arguments with which Henry IV sought to buttress his claim to the throne: he had conquered England; he was descended from Edward III; he had been 'elected' by acclamation. See P. Strohm, *Hochon's Arrow: The Social Imagination of Fourteenth-Century Texts* (Princeton, 1992), pp. 75–94. **Brutes Albyon**: the Albion of Brutus, who first came from Troy, according to the *Historia regum Britanniae* of Geoffrey of Monmouth, and conquered the land and gave it his name ('Britain').