The Introduction

“Weeping and wailing, care and other sorwe
I knowe ynoogh, on even and amorwe,”
Quod the Marchant, “and so doon other mo
That wedded been. I trowe that it be so,
For wel I woot it farethe so with me.
I have a wif, the worshe that may be:
For though the feend to hire ycoupled were,
She wolde him overmacche, I dar wel swere.
What sholde I you reherce in special
Hir heigh malice? She is a shrewe at al.
There is a long and large difference
Bitwixe Grisildis grete pacience
And of my wif the passing crueltee.
Were I unbounden, also moote I thee,
I wolde nevere eft come in the snare.
We wedded men live in sorwe and care—
Assaye whoso wole and he shal finde
I saye sooth, by Saint Thomas of Inde,
As for the more part—I saye nat alle:

1. The last incident of the Merchant’s Tale is a common fabliau, but in preparing for the brief scene in which a wife climbs upon the shoulders of her blind husband into a pear tree in order to copulate with her lover there, Chaucer has shown a most un-fabliau-like expansiveness with his description of the old husband and how he got and treated his young wife: he thus turns a simple bawdy joke into an ample consideration of marriage and wives and of the narrator’s very masculine but un-understanding attitude toward them. The Merchant himself has recently been married to what he considers a dreadful shrew, and the Clerk’s just-finished story of Griselda, who suffered with extraordinary patience all sorts of abuse from her husband, has made the Merchant most indignant. Since he does not believe in Griselda, he tries to set the record straight by telling of the treachery of young May to old January. But if his intent is misogynistic, in his narrative he is so manipulated by Chaucer that one’s sympathies are, if anywhere, as much with the cheating wife as the deceived husband. January is the type of the senile lecher of whom May is the unwilling victim, and if her behavior does nothing to disprove a woman-hater’s prejudices, January’s behavior provides her with a good excuse for acting as she does. The tale is a wonderfully—indeed, outrageously—funny one, and many readers will be content to accept it as such; but other readers may be struck by Chaucer’s profound exploration of the teller, whose disappointment with marriage seems to stem from a puerile notion of what a woman is, and who consequently blames woman rather than himself for the disappointment. In his assessment of women there is no middle term: women, he finds, are not docile beasts ever ready to serve their husbands’ whims; therefore they are deceitful adulterers like May. There is nothing between Griselda and May. In his disillusionment the Merchant spews forth hatred—on May for her treachery, on January for his senile folly in believing what the Merchant himself once believed, and, perhaps most of all, on himself.

2. Evening and morning.

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

4. In every respect.

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

6. If I were freed, so might I thrive.
God shilde that it sholde so bifalle.
A, good sire Host, I have ywedded be
Thise monthes two, and more nat, pardee,7
And yet I trowe he that al his live
Wifles hath been, though that men wolde him rive8
Unto the herte, ne coude in no manere
Tellen so muchel sorwe as I now here
Coude tellen of my wives cursednesse.”
“Now,” quod our Host, “Marchant, so God you blesse,
Sin ye so muchel knownen of that art,
Ful hertely I praye you telle us part.”
“Gladly,” quod he, “but of myn owene sore
For sory herte I telle may namore.”

The Tale

Whilom ther was dwelling in Lombardye
A worthy knight that born was of Pavie,
In which he lived in greet prosperitee;
And sixty yeer a wifles man was he,
On women ther as was his appetit,
And whan that he was passed sixty yeer—
In which he lived in greet prosperitee;
And sixty yeer a wifles man was he,
On women ther as was his appetit,
As doon these fools that been seculer.
And whan that he was passed sixty yeer—
Were it for holinessse or for dotage
I can nat saye—but swich a greet corage
Hadde this knight to been a wedded man,
That day and night he dooth al that he can
To espuyen where he mighte wedded be,
Praying our Lord to graunten him that he
Mighte ones knowe of thilke blisful lif
That is bitwixe an housbonde and his wif,
And for to live under that holy bond
With which that first God man and womman boond.
“Now other lif,” saide he, “is worth a bene,
For wedlok is so esy and so clene
That in this world it is a Paradis.”
Thus saide this olde knight that was so wis.
And certainly, as sooth as God is king,
To take a wif, it is a glorious thing,
And namely whan a man is old and hoor:
Thanne is a wif the fruit of his tresor;
Thanne sholde he take a yong wif and a fair,
On which he mighte engendren him an heir,
And lede his lif in joye and in solas,
Wher as these bacheleres singe allas,
Whan that they finde any adversitee
In love, which nis but childish vanitee.
And trewely, it sit wel to be so
That bacheleres have ofte paine and wo:

7. From French par Dieu, “by God.”
8. I.e., not in clerical orders.
9. Once upon a time.
On brotel° ground they builde, and brotelnesse
They finde whan they weene° sikernese;°
They live but as a brid° or as a beest
In libertee and under noon arrest,°
Ther as a wedded man in his estat
Liveth a lif blissful and ordinat°
Under this yok of marriage ybounde:
Wel may his herte in joye and blisse habounde.°
For who can be so buxom° as a wif?
Who is so trewe and eek so ententif°
To keepe him, sik and hool, as is his make?1
For wele° or wo she wol him nat forsake.
She nis nat wery him to love and serve,
Though that he lie bedrede° til he sterve.°
And yit some clerkes sayn it is nat so,
Of whiche he Theofraste2 is oon of tho—
What fors° though Theofraste liste° lie?
“Ne taak no wif,” quod he, “for housbondrye°
As for to spare in household thy dispence.”°
A trewe servant dooth more diligence
Thy good to keepe than thyn owene wif,
For she wol claime half part al hir lif.
And if thou be sik, so God me save,
Thy verray° freendes or a trewe knave°
Wol keepe thee bet° than she that waiteth ay°
After thy good, and hath do many a day.
And if thou take a wif unto thyn hold,
Ful lightly° maistou been a cokewold.”°
This sentence° and an hundred thinges worse
Writeth this man, ther God his bones curse!
But take no keep° of al swich vanitee:
Defye Theofraste and herke me.
A wif is Goddes yifte verraily;
Alle othere manere yiftes hardly,°
As landes, rentes,° pasture, or commune,
Or moebles,° alle been yiftes of Fortune,
That passen as a shadwe upon a wal.
But drede nat, if plainly speke I shal,
A wif wol laste and in thyn hous endure
Wel lenger than thee list,° paraventure.
Mariage is a ful greet sacrament.
He which that hath no wif I holde him shent.°
He liveth helplees and al desolat—
I speke of folk in seculer estat.
And herke why I saye nat this for nought
That womman is for mannes help ywrought:
The hye God, whan he hadde Adam maked
And sawgh him allone, bely-naked,
God of his grete goodnesse saide than,

1. To watch over him, sick and healthy, as is his mate.
2. Theophrastus, author of an anti-feminist argument preserved in St. Jerome’s invective against Jovinian.
3. Lies in wait constantly.
4. I.e., may.
5. Pasturage rights.
“Lat us now make an help unto this man
Lik to himself.” And thanne he made him Eve.
Heer may ye see, and heerby may ye prove
That wif is mannes help and his confort,
His Paradis terrestré and his disport.
So buxom° and so vertuous is she
They moste° needes live in unitee:
Oo° fleshy thay been, and oo flessh, as I gessc,
Hath but oon herte in wele⁶ and in distresse.
A wif, a, Sainte Marye, benedicite,⁸
How mighte a man han any adversitee
That hath a wif? Certes, I can nat saye.
The blisse which that is bitwixe hem twaye,
Ther may no tonge telle or herte thinke.
If he be poore, she helpeth him to swinke.°
She keepeth his good and wasteth neveradeel.°
Al that hir housbonde lust° hire liketh° weel.
She saith nat ones “Nay” whan he saith “Ye.”
“Do this,” saith he. “Al redy, sire,” saith she.
O blisful ordre of wedlok precious,
Thou art so merye and eek° so vertuous,
And so commended and appreved° eek,
That any man that halt him worth a leek°
Upon his bare knees oughte al his lif
Thanken his God that him hath sent a wif,
Or elles praye to God him for to sende
A wif to laste unto his lives ende:
For thanne his lif is set in sikernesse.°
He may nat be deceived, as I gessc,
So that he werke after his wives reed;°
Thanne may be boldely keepen up his heed,°
They been so trewe and therwithal so wise;
For which, if thou wolt werken as the wise,
Do alway so as wommen wol thee rede.°
Lo how that Jacob, as thise clerkes rede,⁷
By good conseil of his moder Rebekke
Boond° the kides° skin aboute his nekke,
For which his fadres benison° he wan.°
Lo Judith, the storye eek telle can,
By good conseil she Goddes peple kepte,⁸
And slow° him Olofernus° whil he slepte.
Lo Abigail by good conseil how she⁹
Saved her housbonde Naball whan that he
Sholde han been slain. And looke Ester¹ also

6. Considers himself worth a leek.
7. See Genesis xxv, which tells how Jacob won
from his father the blessing that was properly his
brother Esau’s when, following his mother
Rebecca’s suggestion, he used a goatskin to simu-
late Esau’s hairiness, thus deceiving the blind
Isaac.
8. The Book of Judith tells how she saved her peo-
ple by decapitating the general of an attacking
army, Holofernes, while he was in a drunken sleep.
9. See I Samuel xxv, which tells how Abigail per-
suaded David not to kill her husband Nabal, who
had offended him; her action, however, was moti-
vated less by a desire to spare Nabal than by a
desire to prevent David from unnecessarily shed-
ding blood: after Abigail told Nabal what she had
done, he died, and Abigail became one of David’s
wives.
1. The Book of Esther tells how she saved her
kinsman Mordecai and all her people by charming
King Ahasuerus, whose concubine she had been
forced to become. She persuaded the king to put
By good conseil delivered out of wo
The peple of God, and made him Mardochee. Mordecai
Of Assuere exalted for to be. Ahasuerus
Ther is nothing in gree superlatif, degree
As saith Senek, above an humble wif.

Suffre thy wives tongue, as Caton bit. bids
She shal comande and thou shalt suffren it,
And yit she wol obeye of curteisye.
guardian / household
A wif is kepere of thyn housbondrye.

Theras ther is no wif the hous to keepe.
I warne thee, if wisely thou wilt wirche, work
Love wel thy wif as Crist loved his chirche;
If thou lovest thyself thou livest thy wif:
No man hateth his flessh, but in his lif

He fostereth it, and therefore bide I thee,
Cherisse thy wif or thou shalt nevere thee. prosper
Housbonde and wif, what so men jape or playe,
Of worldly folk holden the siker waye.
They been so knit ther may noon harm bitide,

And namely upon the wives side.— especially
For which this Januareye of whom I tolde
Considered hath inwith his dayes olde within
The lusty lif, the vertuous quiete
That is in mariage hony sweete,

And for his freendes on a day he sente
to tellen hem th'effect of his entente.

With face sad this tale he hath hem told: sober
He saide, "Freendes, I am hoor and old,
And almost, God woot, on my pittes brinke:
Blessed be God that it shal been amended.
For I wol be, certain, a wedded man,
And that anoon, in al the haste I can,
Unto som maide fair and tendre of age.

To whom I may be wedded hastily.
But for as muche as ye been mo than I,
Ye shullen rather swich a thing espyen sooner
Than I, and wher me best were to alyen.

But oo thing warne I you, my freendes dere:
I wol noon old wif han in no manere;

She shal nat passe twenty yeer certain—
Old fissh and young flessh wol I have fain. gladly
Bet is, "quod he, "a pik than a pikerel,

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160. By good conseil delivered out of wo
165. Suffre thy wives tongue, as Caton bit.
170. Theras ther is no wif the hous to keepe.
175. He fostreth it, and therefore bide I thee,
180. And namely upon the wives side.—
185. For which this Januareye of whom I tolde
190. Upon my soule somwhat moste I think.
195. Unto som maide fair and tendre of age.
200. But for as muche as ye been mo than I,
205. She shal nat passe twenty yeer certain—

3. I.e., the Cato Book, a school primer.
5. Grave’s edge.
6. A pike was considered to be an old pickerel.
And bet than old boef\textsuperscript{7} is the tendre veel.\textsuperscript{9} beef / veal
I wol\textsuperscript{9} no womman thitty yeer of age— wish

It is but bene-straw and greet forage.\textsuperscript{7} knows
And eek thise olde widwes, God it woot,\textsuperscript{9} knows
They conne so muche craft on Wades boot,\textsuperscript{6} guide
So muchel broken harm whan that hem leste,\textsuperscript{9} know
That with hem sholde I neve live in reste.

For sondry scoles maketh subtile clerkes: wax / mold
Womman of manye scoles half a clerk is.\textsuperscript{1}
guide
But certainly a yong thing may men gie,\textsuperscript{9} know
Right as men may warm wex\textsuperscript{9} with handes plye.\textsuperscript{9} know
Wherfore I saye you plainly in a clause,

I wol noon old wif han right for this cause: adultery
For if so were I hadde swich meschaunce
That I in hire ne coude han no plesaunce,
Thanne sholde I lede my lif in avoutrye,\textsuperscript{6}
And go straight to the deval when I die;

Ne children sholde I none upon hire geten,
Yit me were lever houndes hadde me eten
Than that myn heritage sholde falle
In straunge\textsuperscript{2} hand; and this I telle you alle:
I dote nat, I woot the cause why

Men sholde wedde, and fethermore woot I
That speketh many a man of mariage
That woot namore of it than woot my page
For whiche causes man sholde take a wif:
If he ne may nat live chast his lif,

Take him a wif with greet devocioun,
By cause of leveful\textsuperscript{9} procreacioun
Of children, to th’honour of God above,
And nat only for paramour\textsuperscript{9} or love;
And for they sholde lecherye eschue,\textsuperscript{9}

And yeele\textsuperscript{9} hir dette whan that it is due;
Or for that eech of hem sholde helpen other
In meschief, as a suster shal the brother,
And live in chastitie ful holily—
But sires, by youre leve, that am nat I.

For God be thanked, I dar make avaunt,
I feele my limes\textsuperscript{9} stark\textsuperscript{9} and suffisaunt\textsuperscript{9}
To do al that a man bilongeth to.
Though I be hoor, I fare as dooth a tree

That blosmeth er the fruit ywoxen\textsuperscript{9} be,
And blosmy tree nis neither drye ne deed:\textsuperscript{9}
I feele me nowher hoor but on myn heed;
Myn herte and alle my limes\textsuperscript{9} been as greene
As laurer\textsuperscript{9} thurgh\textsuperscript{9} the yeer is for to seene.

\textsuperscript{7} I.e., a thirty-year-old woman is only bean-straw (dried bean-stems) and coarse winter fodder.
\textsuperscript{8} They have so much skill in Wade’s boat: Wade was a legendary hero, but his relevance here is not clear.
\textsuperscript{9} I.e., (they can) traffic so much in injuries when they feel like it.

1. Women are part-time students in many schools.
2. I.e., unlineal.
3. Bodily love.
4. I.e., pay.
And sin that ye han herd al myn entente,  
I praye you to my wil ye wol assente.”

Diverse men diversely tolde  
Of mariage manye ensamples5 olde:  
Some blamed it, some praised it, certain;  
But at the laste, shortly for to sayn,  
As aldayº falleth altercacioun  
Bitwixe freendes in disputisoun,º  
Ther filº a strif bitwixe his bretheren two,  
Of whiche that oon was cleped Placebo;º  
Justinus soothe called was that other.  
Placebo saide, “O Januareye brother,  
Ful litel neede hadde ye, my lord so dere,  
Conseil to axeº of any that is here,  
Butº that ye been so ful of sapienceº  
That you ne liketh, for youre heigh prudence,  
To waivenº fro the word of Salomon;  
This word saide he unto us everichoon:  
‘Werk alle thing by conseil,’ thus saide he,  
‘And thanne shaltou nat repenten thee.”ºº  
But though that Salomon spak swich a word,  
Myn owene dere brother and my lord,  
So wislyº God my soule bringe at reste,  
I holde youre owene conseil is the beste.  
For brother myn, of me take this motif.ºº  
I have now been a court-man al my lif,  
And God it woot, though I unworthy be,  
I have stonden in ful greet degree  
Abouten lordes in ful greet estat,  
Yit hadde I nevere with noon of hem debat;  
I nevere hem contraried,º trewely;  
I woot wel that my lord canº more than I;  
What that he saith, I hold it fermº and stable;  
I saye the same or elles thing semblable.º  
A ful greet fool is any conseilour  
That serveth any lord of heigh honour  
That dar presume or elles thinkenº it  
That his conseil sholde passeº his lordes wit.  
Nay, lordes be nofooles, by my fay.º  
Ye han yourselven shewed heer today  
So heigh sentenceº so holily and weel,  
That I consente and conferme everydeel  
Youre wordes alle and your opinion.  
By God, ther nis no man in al this town,  
Ne in Itaile,º coude betº han ysaid.  
Crist halt himº of this conseil wel apaid.º  
And trewely it is an heigh corageº  

5. Illustrative stories.  
6. Placebo takes his name from the first word of the Latin of Psalm cxiv.9 (Vulgate), “I shall please (the Lord in the land of the living).” Justinus in the next line suggests a just man.  
7. The quotation is not from any of the works of Solomon but from Ecclesiasticus xxxii.19. Like Seneca, Solomon was often given credit for bits of sententious wisdom.  
8. Be superior to.  
Of any man that stapen\textsuperscript{o} is in age\textemdash advanced
To take a yong wif! By my fader kin,
Youre herte hangeth on a joly pin!\textemdash please
Dooth now in this matere right as you lestee,\textsuperscript{o} always
For finally, I holde it for the beste.\textsuperscript{v}

Justinus that ay\textsuperscript{o} stile sat and herde,
Right in this wise he to Placebo answerte:
"Now, brother myn, be pacient I praye,\textemdash since
Sin\textsuperscript{i} ye han said, and herkneth what I saye:\textemdash property
Senek\textsuperscript{j} amonges othere wordes wise
Saith that a man oughte him right wel avise\textemdash deliberation
To whom he yiveth his land or his catel;\textsuperscript{o}
And sin I oughte avisen me right wel\textemdash inquire / opinion
To whom I yive my good away fro me,
Wel muchel more I oughte avised be\textemdash whether
To whom I yive my body for alway.
I warne you wel, it is no childes play
To taken a wif withouten avisement.\textsuperscript{o}
Men moste enquere\textsuperscript{o}\textemdash this is myn assent\textsuperscript{o}\textemdash inquire / opinion
— Wher\textsuperscript{o} she be wis, or sobre, or dronkelewe,\textsuperscript{2}
Or proud, or elles otherways a shrewe,\textemdash chider
A chidestere,\textsuperscript{o} or wastour of thy good,
Or riche, or poore, or elles mannish wood\textsuperscript{3}\textemdash whole
Al be it so that no man vinden shal\textemdash imagine
Noon in this world that trotteth\textsuperscript{4} hool\textsuperscript{o} in al,
Ne man ne beest swich as men coude devise.\textsuperscript{o}
But nathelees, it oughte ynoughte suffise
With any wif, if so were that she hadde\textemdash requires
Mo\textsuperscript{o} goode thewes\textsuperscript{o} than hir vices badde.\textemdash more / characteristics
And al this axeth\textsuperscript{e} leiser for t'enquere.
For God it woot, I have wept many a tere\textemdash since
Ful privel ysin\textsuperscript{o} that I hadde a wif:\textemdash duties
Praise whoso wol a wedded mannis lif,
Certain I finde in it but cost and care,
And observances\textsuperscript{o} of alle blisses bare.\textemdash especially / group
And yit, God woot, my neighebores aboute,
And namely\textsuperscript{o} of wommen many a route,\textsuperscript{o}
Sayn that I have the moste stedefast wif,\textemdash meekest
And eek the mekest\textsuperscript{o} oon that bereth lif—
But I woot best where wringeth\textsuperscript{o} me my sho.\textsuperscript{o}
Ye mov\textsuperscript{o} for me right as you liketh do.
Aviseth you—ye been a man of age—\textemdash pinches / shoe
How that ye entren into mariage,
And namely\textsuperscript{o} with a yong wif and a fair.
By him that made water, erthe, and air,
The youngeste man that is in al this route\textemdash especially
Is bisy ynought to bringen it aboute
To han his wif allone. Trusteth me,
Ye shul nat plesen hire fully yeres three—

1. For Seneca, see note to line 164, above.
2. Given to drunkenness.
3. Unfemininely inclined to rage.
4. Trots, i.e., appears.
This is to sayn, to doon hire ful plesaunce:
A wif axeth ful many an observaunce.5
I praye you that ye be nat yvele apaid."6
"Wel," quod this Januarye, "and hastou said?
Straw for thy Senek and for thy proverbes!
I counte6 nat a panier value / basket
Of scole-termes.7 Wiser men than thou,
As thou hast herd, assented right now
To my purpos. Placebo, what saye ye?"
"I saye it is a cursed man," quod he
"That letteth hinderers / matrimony / certainly
And with that word they risen sodeinly,
And been assented fully that he sholde
Be wedded whan him liste and wher8 he wolde.
Heigh fantasye imagining / careful / attentiveness
Fro day to day gan in the soule impresse9
Of Januarey aboute his mariage:
Many fair shap and many a fair visage
Ther passeth thurgh his herte night by night;
As whoso tooke a mirour polisshed bright,
And sette it in a commune market-place,
Thanne sholde he see ful many a figure pace pass
By his mirour; and in the same wise
Gan Januarey inwith his thought devise within
Of maidens whiche that dwelten him beside.
He wiste knew / settle
For if that oon have beautee in hir face,
Another stant stands in the peples grace
For hir sadnesse constancy
And hir benignitee,
That of the peple grettest vois1 hath she;
And some were riche and hadde badde name.
But natheleses, bitwixe ernest and game,
He atte laste appointed him on2 oon,
And leet let / others from his herte goon,
And chees chose / authority hire of his owene auctoritee—
For Love is blind alday always and may nat see.
And whan that he was in his bed ybrought,
He portrayde in his herte and in his thought
Hir fresshe beautee and hir age tendre,
Hir middel smal, hir armes longe and sclendre,
Hir wise governance, hir gentillesse,
Hir womanly bering and hir sadnesse.
And whan that he on hire was condescended,
Him thoughte his chois mighte nat been amended;
For whan that he himself concluded4 hadde,
Him thoughte eech other mannnes wit so badde,
That impossible it were to replye5
Again his chois: this was his fantasye.

His frendes sente he to at his instaunce,

And prayed hem to doon him that plesaunce

That hastily they wolden to him come:
He wolde abregge hir labour alle and some;
Needeth namore for him to go ne ride;
He was appointed ther he wolde abide.

Placebo cam and eek his frendes soone,
And alderfirst he bad hem alle a boone,
That noon of hem none argumentes make
Again the purpos which that he hath take,
Which purpos was plesant to God, saide he,
And verry ground of his prosperitee.

He saide ther was a maiden in the town
Which that of beautee hadde greet renown;
Al were it so she were of smal degree,
Suffiseth hir youthe and hir beautee;
Which maide he saide he wolde han to his wif,
To lede in ese and holinesse his lif,
And thanked God that he mighte han hire al,
That no wight his blisse parten shal;
And prayde hem to labouren in this neede,
And shapen that he faile not to speede.

For thanne he saide his spirit was at ese.
"Thanne is," quod he, "no thing may me displese.
Save oo thing priketh in my conscience,
The which I wol reherce in youre presence.
I have," quod he, "herd said ful yore ago
Ther may no man han parfite blisses two—
This is to saye, in erthe and eek in hevene.
For though he keepe him fro the sinnes severe,
And eek from every braunch of that thilke tree,
That I shal han myn hevene in erthe here.
For sith that verray hevene is bought so dere
With tribulaciouns and greet penaunce,
How sholde I thanne, that live in swich plesaunce
As alle wedded men doon with hir wives,
Come to the blisse ther Crist eterne on live is?
This is my drede, and ye, my bretheren twaye,
Assoileth me this question, I praye."
Justinus, which that hated his folye,
Answerde anoonright in his japerye;
And for he wolde his longe tale abregge.
He wolde noon auctoritee allegge,°
But saide, “Sire, so there be noon obstacle
Other than this, God of his heigh miracle
And of his mercy may so for you wirche,°
That er ye have youre right 4 of holy chirche,
Ye may repente of wedded mannnes lif,
In which ye sayn ther is no wo ne strif.
And elles God forbode but° he sente
A wedded man him grace to repente
Wel ofte rather° than a sengle° man.
And thherefore, sire, the beste reed° I can:°
Despaire you nought, but have in youre memoreye
Paraunter° she may be youre purgatorye;
She may be Goddes mene° and Goddes whippe!
Thanne shal youre soule up to hevene skippe
Swifter than dooth an arwe out of a bowe.
I hope to God heerafter shul ye knowe
That ther nis noon so greet felicitee
In marriage, ne nevere mo° shall be,
That you shall lette° of youre savacioun,
So that ye use, as skile° is and resoun,
The lustes° of youre wif attenprely,°
And that ye plese hire nat too amorously,
And that ye keepe you eek from other sinne.
My tale is doon, for my wit is thinne.
Beeth nat agast heerof, my brother dere,
Fareth now wel. God have you in his grace.”
And with that word this Justin and his brother
Han take hir leve and eech of hem of other,
For whan they saw that it moste° needes be
They wroughten so by sly° and wis treetee°
That she, this maiden which that Mayus highte,°
As hastily as evere that she mighte,
Shal wedded be unto this Januarye.
I trowe it were too longe you to tarye
If I you tolde of every scrit° and bond
By which that she was feffed in® his lond,
Or for to herknen of hir riche array;
That to the chirche bothe be they went
For to receive the holy sacrament.
Forth comth the preest with stole aboute his nekke,
And bad hire be lik Sarra and Rebekke°
In wisdom and in trouthe° of mariage,
And saide his orisons as is usage,
And croucheth\(^9\) hem, and bad God sholde hem blesse,
And made al siker\(^9\) ynough with holiness.
Thus been they wedded with solemnitéee,
And at the laste sitteth he and she
With other worthy folk upon the daís.

Al ful of joye and blisse is the palais,
And ful of instruments\(^1\) and of vitaille,\(^0\)
The moste dainteuous\(^2\) of al Itaile.
Biforn hem stooede instruments of swich soun,\(^0\)
That Orpheus n’of Thebes Amphiouñ\(^2\)

Ne maden nevere swich a melodye.
At every cours thanne cam loud minstralcye,
That nevere tromped Joab\(^1\) for to heere,
Ne he Theodamas\(^4\) yit half so clere
At Thebes whan the citee was in doute.

Bacus\(^5\) the win hem shenketh\(^9\) al aboute,
And Venus laugheth upon every wight,
For Januarye was bcome hir knight,
And wolde bothe assayen his corage
In libertee and eek in mariage;

And with hir firbrand in hir hand aboute
Daunceth bFore the bride and al the route.\(^9\)
And certainly, I dar right wel saye this:
Ymeneus\(^6\) that God of Wedding is
Sawgh nevere his lif so merye a wedded man.

Hold thou thy pees, thou poete Marcian,\(^5\)
That writest us that ilke wedding murye\(^0\)
Of hire Philologye and him Mercurye,
And of the songs that the Muses songe—
Too smal is bothe thy penne and eek thy tonge
For to descriven\(^9\) of this mariage.

Whan tendre youthe hath wedded stouping\(^9\) age,
Ther is swich mirthe that it may nat be writen;
Assayeth it yourself, thanne may ye witen\(^9\)
If that I lie or noon in this matere.

Mayus, that sit\(^c\) with so benigne a cheere\(^9\)
Hire to biholde it seemed faı¨rye\(^5\)—
Queene Ester\(^6\) looked neevere with swich an yê
On Assuer, so meeke a look hath she—
I may you nat devise al hir beautee,
But thus muche of hir beautee telle I may,
That she was lik the brighte morwe of May,
Fulfild\(^7\) of alle beautee and plesaunce.
This Januarye is ravisshed in a traunce
At every time he looked on hir face,

But in his herte he gan hire to manace\(^9\)

---

9. Signs with the cross.
1. I.e., provisions.
2. Orpheus and Amphiouñ were legendary musicians of ancient Greece.
3. Joab, King David’s officer, on several occasions controlled the people with the sound of his trumpet.
4. Theodamas was a Theban seer whose auguries were announced with a trumpet.
5. Martianus Capella, author of a medieval Latin poem which describes the wedding of Philology and Mercury.
6. For Esther and Ahasuerus, see note to line 159, above.
7. Filled full.
That he that night in armes wolde hire straine⁰
Harder than evere Paris dide Elaine.⁸
But nathelesse yit hadde he greet pitee
That thilke night offenden hire moste⁰ he,
And thoughte, “Allas, O tendre creature,
Now wolde God ye mighte wel endure
Al my corage,⁹ it is so sharp and keene:
I am agast ye shul it nat sustene⁰—
But God forbede that I dide al my might!
Now wolde God that it were waxen⁰ night,
And that the night wolde lasten everemo.
I wolde that al this peple were ago.”
And finally he dooth al his labour,
As he best mighte, saving his honour,
To haste hem fro the mete in subtil wise.
The time cam that reson was to rise,
And after that men daunce and drinken faste,
And spices al aboute the hous they caste.
And ful of joye and blis is every man—
Al but a squier highte⁰ Damian,
Which carf⁰ biforn the knight ful many a day:
He was so ravisshed on his lady May
That for the verray paine he was neigh wood;
Almost he swelte⁰ and swouned⁰ ther he stood,
So sore hath Venus hurt him with hir brand,
As that she bar it dauncing in hir hand.
And to his bed he wente him hastily.
And finally he lette hem wepe ynough and plaine,⁰
Til fresshe May wol rewen¹ on his paine.

O perilous fir that in the bedstraw breedeth!²
O familier fo that his service bedeth!⁰
O servant traitour, false hoomly⁰ hewe,⁰
Lik to the naddre⁰ in bosom, sly, untrewe!⁰
God shilde⁰ us alle from youre aquaintaunce!
O Januarey, dronken in plesaunce
In mariage, see how thy Damian,
Thyn owene squier and thy boren⁰ man,
Entendeth for to do thee vilainye!⁰
God graunte thee thy hoomly fo espye,
For in this world nis worse pestilence
Than hoomly fo alday⁰ in thy presence.
Parfourned⁰ hath the sonne his ark diurne:⁴
No lenger may the body of him sojurne
On th’orisonte⁰ as in that latitude;
Night with his mantel that is derk and rude
Gan oversprede th’ hemisperye⁰ aboute,
For which departed is this lusty route,⁰
For Januarey with thank on every side.

8. Helen of Troy.
9. Spirit, but with the added sense of sexual prowess.
1. Have pity.
2. I.e., starts.
3. Diurnal arc.
590  Hoom to hir houses lustily they ride,
    Wher as they doon hir thinges as hem lestë, please
    And whan they sawgh hir time go to reste.
    Soone after that this hastif \footnote{Constantinus Afer, author of a treatise on copulation.} Januarye
    Wol go to bedde—he wol no longer tarye.
595  He drinketh ipocras, clarree and vernage\footnote{The beverages mentioned here were thought to be aphrodisiac.}
    Of spices hote t'encreessen\footnote{Increase} his corage,
    And many a letuare\footnote{Medicine / pure} hadde he ful fin,
    Swich as the cursed monk daun Constantin\footnote{Constantinus Afer, author of a treatise on copulation.}
    Hath writen in his book De Coitu:
600  To eten hem alle he nas no thing eschu.\footnote{Averse}
    And to his privee freendes thus saide he:
    “For Goddes love, as soone as it may be,
    Lat voiden\footnote{Empty} al this hous in curteis wise.”
    And they han doon right as he wol devise.
605  Men drinken and the travers\footnote{Curtains} drawe anoon.
    The bride was brought abedde as stille as stoon.
    And whan the bed was with\footnote{Turned} the preest yblessed,
    Out of the chambrere hath every wight him dressed.\footnote{Hath dressed}
    And Januare hath faste in armes take
610  His fresshe May, his Paradis, his make;\footnote{Mate}
    He lulleth hire, he kisseth hire ful ofte—
    With thikke bristles of his heerd unsofte,
    Lik to the skin of houndfissh,\footnote{Dogfish / briar} sharpe as brere,
    For he was shave al newe in his manere—
615  He rubbeth hire aboute hir tendre face,
    And saide thus, “Allas, I moot trespass\footnote{To trespass} To you, my spouse, and you greetly offende
    Er time come that I wol down descende.
    But nathelees, considereth this,” quod he,
620  “Ther nis no werkman, whatsoevere he be,
    That may bothe werke wel and hastily.
    This wol be doon at leiser parfitly.\footnote{Perfectly}
    It is no for\footnote{Matter} how longe that we playe:
    In trewe wedlok coupled be we twaye,
625  And blessed be the yok that we been inne,
    For in oure actes we move\footnote{May} do no sinne;
    A man may do no sinne with his wif,
    Ne hurte himselfen with his owene knif;
    For we han leve to playe us by the lawe.”
630  Thus laboureth he til that the day gan dawe,\footnote{Dawn}
    And thanne he taketh a sop in fin clarree,\footnote{Sang}
    And upright in his bed thanne sitteth he;
    And after that he soong\footnote{Magpie} ful loude and clere,
    And kiste his wif and made wantoune cheere:
635  He was al coltissh,\footnote{Frisky / flirtatiousness} ful of ragerye,\footnote{Frisky / flirtatiousness}
    And ful of jargon as a flekked pie.\footnote{Magpie}
    The slakke skin aboute his nekke shaketh
    Whil that he soong, so chaunteth he and craketh.\footnote{Caws}
But God woot what that May thoughte in hir herte
When she him saw up sitting in his sherte,\(^9\)
In his night-cappe and with his nekke lene—
She praiseth nat his playing worth a bene.\(^9\)
Thanne saide he thus, “My reste wol I take.
Now day is come I may no lenger wake.”

And down he laide his heed and sleep\(^8\) til prime,
And afterward when he saw his time
Up riseth Januare. But fresshe May
Heeld hir chambre unto the fourthe day,
As usage is of wives for the beste,
For every labour som time moot\(^8\) han reste,
Or elles lange may he nat endure—
This is to sayn, no lives\(^8\) creature,
Be it fissh or brid\(^8\) or beest or man.
Now wol I spake of woful Damian
That lenguisssheth for love, as ye shal heere.
Therfore I spake to him in this manere:
I saye, “O sely\(^8\) Damian, allas,
Answere to my demande as in this cas:
How shaltou to thy lady fresshe May
Telle thy wo? She wol away saye nay.
Eek if thou speke, she wol thy wo biwraye.\(^9\)
God be thyn help I can no bettre saye.”
This sike Damian in Venus fir
So brenneth\(^9\) that he dieth for desir,
For which he putte his life in aventure:
No lenger mighte he in this wise endure,
But prively a penner\(^9\) gan he borwe,
And in a lettre wroot he al his sorwe,
In manere of a complainte or a lay,
Unto his faire fresshe lady May;
And in a purs of silk heeng\(^1\) on his sherte
He hath it put and laid it at his herte.
The moone, that at noon was thilke\(^9\) day
That Januare hath wedded fresshe May
In two of Taur, was into Cancre gliden,\(^2\)
So longe hath Mayus in hir chambre abiden,
As custume is unto thise nobles alle:
A bride shal nat eten in the halle
Til dayes foure, or three dayes atte leeste,
Ypassed been—thanle lat hire go to feeste.
The fourthe day compleet fro noon to noon,
Whan that the hye masse was ydoon,
In halle sit\(^8\) this Januare and May,
As fressh as is the brighte someres day.
And so bifel how that this goode man
Remembred him upon this Damian,
And saide, “Sainte Marye, how may it be

---
8. 9 A.M.
9. Risked his life.
1. That hung.

2. In two degrees of Taurus (the sign of the Bull)
had moved into Cancer (the sign of the Crab).
That Damian entendeth nat to me? attends
Is he ay sik, or how may this bitide?"

His squiers whiche that stooned ther biseide
Excused him by cause of his siknesse, prevented
Which letted him to doon his bisesse:
Noon other cause mighte make him tarye.
“That me forthinketh,“ quod this Januarey.

“He is a gentil squier, by my trouthe.
If that he deide, it were harm and routh." pity
He is as wis, discreet, and eek seeree,
As any man I woot of his degree,
And therto manly and eek servisable,
And for to be a thrifty man right able.
But after mete as soone as evere I may,
I wol myself visithe him, and eek May,
To do him al the confort that I can."
And for that word him blessed every man

That of his bountee and his gentilesse
He wolde so conforten in siknesse
His squier—for it was a gentil deede.

“Dame,” quod this Januarey, “take good heede:
At after-mete ye with your wommen alle,
Whan ye han been in chambre out of this halle,
That alle ye go to this Damian.
Dooth him disport—he is a gentil man—
And telleth him that I wol him visite,
Have I no thing but rested me a lite.
And speede you faste, for I wol abide
Til that ye sleepe faste by my side."
And with that word he gan to him to calle
A squier that was marshale of his halle,
And tolde him certain things what he wolde.

This fresshe May hath straight hir way yholde
With alle hir wommen unto Damian:
Down by his beddes side sit she than,
Conforting him as goodly as she may.

This Damian, whan that his time he sey,
In seeree wise his purs and eek his bille,
In which that he ywriten hadde his wille,
Hath put into hir hande withoute more,
Save that he siketh wonder deepe and sore,
And softely to hire right thus saihe:

“Mercy, and that ye nat discovere me,
For I am deed if that this thing be kid." betray
The purs hath she inwith hir bosom hid,
And wente hir way—ye gete namore of me.
But unto Januarey ycomen is she,

That on his beddes side sit ful softe,
And taketh hire and kisseth hire ful ofte,
And laide him down to sleepe and that anoon. 
She feined hire\textsuperscript{a} as that she moste\textsuperscript{o} goon 
Ther as ye woot that every wight moot\textsuperscript{e} neede, 
And whan she of this bille hath taken heede, 
She rente\textsuperscript{o} it al to cloutes\textsuperscript{o} at the laste, 
And in the privee softly it caste. 
Who studieth now but faire fresshe May? 
Adown by olde Januareye she lay, 
That sleep\textsuperscript{o} til that the cougte hath him awaked. 
Anoon he prayde hire strepen\textsuperscript{o} hire al naked; 
He wolde of hire, he saide, han som plesaunce; 
He saide hire clothes dide hire encombraunce. 
And she obeyeth, be hire lief\textsuperscript{e} or loth. 
But lest that precious\textsuperscript{o} folk be with me wroth, 
How that he wroughte I dar nat to you telle— 
Or whethir hire thoughte\textsuperscript{e} Paradis or helte. 
But here I lete hem werken in hire wise 
Til evensong roong\textsuperscript{o} and that they moste arise. 
Were it by destinee or aventure,\textsuperscript{o} 
Were it by influence\textsuperscript{e} or by nature, 
Or constellacion that in swich estat 
The hevene stood that time fortunat 
As for to putte a bille of Venus werkes\textsuperscript{e}— 
For alle thing hath time, as sayn thysse clerkes— 
To any womman for to gete hire love, 
I can nat saye, but grete God above, 
That knoweth that noon act is causelees. 
He deeme\textsuperscript{e} of al, for I wol holde my pees. 
But sooth is this: how that this fresshe May 
Hath taken swich impression that day 
Of pitee on this sike Damian, 
That from hire herte she ne drive can 
The remembrance\textsuperscript{e} for to doon hire ese. 
“Certain,” thoughte she, “whom that this thing displese 
I rekke\textsuperscript{o} nat. For here I him assure 
To love him best of any creature, 
Though he namore hadde than his sherte.\textsuperscript{o} 
Lo, pitee rennet\textsuperscript{e} soone in gentil herte! 
Here may ye see how excellent franchise\textsuperscript{o} 
In wommen is whan they hem narwe avise.\textsuperscript{e} 
Som tyrant is, as ther be many oon, 
That hath an herte as hard as is a stoon, 
Which wolde han lete him sterven\textsuperscript{o} in the place, 
Wel rather than han graunted him hire grace, 
And hem rejoisen in hire cruel pride, 
This gentil May, fulfilled\textsuperscript{o} of pitee, 
Right of hire\textsuperscript{e} hand a lettre maked she,

8. Pretended.
9. It seemed.
1. I.e., occult interference.
2. Present a petition for Venus’s works.
3. Let him judge.
4. Consider closely.
5. Do not scruple.
6. Filled full.
7. In her own.
In which she graunteth him hir verray grace:
Ther lakketh nought only but day and place
Wher that she mighte unto his lust suffice;¹⁰
For it shal be right as he wol devise.
And when she saw hir time upon a day
To visite this Damian gooth May,
And subtillly this lettre down she threste¹⁰
Under his pilwe: rede it if him leste.
She taketh him by the hand and harde him twiste,¹⁰
So secreelly that no wight of it wiste,¹⁰
And bad him be al hool,⁸ and forth she weneth
To Januarey whan that he for hire senteth.
   Up riseth Damian the nexte morwe:¹⁰
Al passed was his siknesse and his sorwe.
He kembeth, he preineth⁹ and piketh,⁹
He dooth al that his lady lust⁹ and liketh.
And eek to Januarey he gooth as howe⁹
As evere dide a dogge for the bowe.⁹
He is so plesant unto every man—
For craft is al, whoso that do it can—
That every wight is fain⁹ to speke him good.
And fully in his lady grace he stood.
Thus lete⁹ I Damian aboute his neede,
And in my tale forth I wol proceede.
   Some clerkes holden that felicitee
Stant¹ in delit,¹ and therfore certain he,
This noble Januarye, with al his might
In honeste¹ wise as longeth¹ to a knight,
Shoop¹ him to live ful deliciously:
   His housing, his array as honestly
To his degree was maked as a kinges.
Amonges othere of his honeste thinges,
He made a gardin walled al of stoon—
So fair a gardin woot I nowher noon,
For out of doute I verraily suppose
That he that wrooth the Romance of the Rose²
Ne coude of it the beaute wel devise;
Ne Priapus¹ ne myghte nat suffise—
The beautee of the gardin, and the welle⁹
That stood under a laurer¹ alway greene.
Ful ofte time he Pluto⁴ and his queene
Disporten hem and maken melodye
Aboute that welle, and daunced, as men tolde.
This noble knight, this Januarey the olde,

8. I.e., get well.
9. The image is of a well-trained hunting dog.
1. Material delight.
2. Guillaume de Lorris’s French allegory, set in the garden of love.
3. A fertility god associated with the male sexual organ.
4. Pluto was the god of the underworld who kid-naped the young girl Proserpina and made her his mate. In this tale the two have lost their great mythic stature—though not their history—and have become king and queen of the medieval oth-erworld—“fairye.”
The Merchant's Tale

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

Deprived of.

Heart's desire.

Turtle-dove.

Constantly.

Swich daintee hath in it to walke and playe, delight
That he wol no wight suffre bere the keye, wicket-gate
Save he himself; for of the smale wiket, latch-key
He bar alway of silver a cliket,
With which whan that him leste he it unshettle.

And when he wolde paye his wif hir dette
In somer seson, thider wolde he go,
And May his wif, and no wight but they two.
And thinges whiche that were nat doon abedde,

He in the gardin parfourned hem and spedde. performed
And in this wise many a mereye day
Lived this Januarye and fresshe May.
But worldly joye may nat alway dure continue
to no creature.

O sodein hap, O thou Fortune unstable, unanticipated / change
Lik to the scorpion so deceivable, deceitful
That flaterest with thyn heed when thou wolt stinge,
head
Thy tail is deeth thurgh thyn enveniminge!

O brotel joye, O sweete venim quaint curious
Brittle / poison / curious
O monstre, that so subtilly canst painte
Thy yiftes under hewe of stedfastnesse,
That thou deceivest bothe more and lesse,

Why hastou Januarye thus deceived,
That haddest him for thy fulle freend received?

And now thou hast biraft him bothe his yên,
For sorwe of which desirieth he to dien.

Allas, this noble Januarye free,
generous
Amidde his lust and his prosperitee,
Is woxen blind, and that al sodeinly.

He weepeth and he waileth pitously,
And therwthal the fir of jalousye,
Lest that his wife sholde falle in som folye,

So brente his herte that he wolde fain
That som man bothe hire and him hadde slain;

For neither after his deeth ne in his lif,
Ne wolde he that she were love ne wif,
But evere live as widwe in clothes blake,

Soul as the turtle that hath lost hir make.
sole / mate
But atte laste, after a month or twaye,

His sorwe gan assuage, sooth to saye,
For when he wiste it may noon other be,
knew
He paciently took his adversitee—
Save out of doute he may nat forgoon
That he nas jalous everemore in oon.

Which jalousye it was so outrageous
That neither in halle ne in noon other hous,
Ne in noon other place neverthemo,
He nolde suffre hire for to ride or go,
But if that he hadde hand on hire alway:

5. Poisoning; the scorpion was popularly supposed to charm its victim by the innocent appearance of its head before stinging with its tail.
6. Deprived of.
7. Heart's desire.
8. Turtle-dove.
For which ful ofte weepeth fresshe May,
That loveth Damian so benignely
That she moote outher dien sodeinly,
Or elles she moote han him as hire leste.
She waiteth whan hir herte wolde breste.

Upon that other side Damian
Bicomen is the sorwefulleste man
That evere was, for neither night ne day
Ne mighte he speke a word to fresshe May,
As to his purpos of no swich matere,

But if that Januarye moste it heere,
That hadde an hand upon hire evermo;
But nathelees, by writing to and fro,
And prive signes, wiste what she mente,
And she knew eek the fin of his entente.

O Januarye, what mighte it thee availe
Though thou mightest see as fer as shippes saile?
For as good is blind deceived be,
As be deceived whan a man may see.
Lo Argus, which that hadde an hundred yën,

For al that evere be coude pourë or pryen,
Yit was he blent, and God woot so been mo
That weenen wisë that it be nat so.
Passe over is an ese, and saye namore.
This fresshe May that I spak of so yore,

In warm wex hath emprinted the cliket
That Januarye bar of that smale wiket,
By which into his gardin ofte he wente;
And Damian that knew al hir entente
The cliket countrefeted prively—

Ther nis namore to saye, but hastily
Som wonder by this cliket shal bitide,
Which ye shal heeren if ye wol abide.

O noble Ovide, sooth saistou, God woot,
What sleightë it is, though it be long and hoot,

That he nil finde it out in som manere!
By Pyramus and Thisbee may men lere:
Though they were kept ful longe straite overal,
They been accorded rouning thurgh a wal,
Ther no wight coude han founde out swich a sleighte.

But now to purpos: er that dayes eighte
Were passed, er the month of Juin, bifil
That Januarye hath caught so greet a wil—
Thurgh egging of his wif—hem for to playe
In his gardin, and no wight but they twaye,

That in a morwe unto his May saith he,
“Ris up, my wif, my love, my lady free;
The turtles vois is herd, my douve sweete;
The winter is goon with alle his raines wete.
Com forth now with thine yén columbin.※

How fairer been thy brestes than is win!
The garden is enclosed al aboute:
Com forth, my white spouse! out of doute,
Thou hast me wounded in myn herte. O wif,
No spot of thee ne knew I al my lif.

Com forth and lat us taken oure disport—
I chees⁹ thee for my wif and my confort.”
Swiche olde lewed⁶ wordes used he.
On Damian a signe made she
That he sholde go biforn with his cliket.
This Damian thanne hath opened the wiket,
And in he sterlte,⁰ and that in swich manere
That no wight mighte it see neither yeere,
And stille he sit⁹ under a busshe anoon.
This Januareye, as blind as is a stoon,
With Mayus in his hand and no wight mo,
Into his fresche gardin is ago,¹
And clapte to² the wiket sodeinly.
“Now wif,” quod he, “here nis but thou and I,
That art the creature that I best love,
For by that Lord that sit in hevene above,
Levere ich hadde to dien on a knif
Than thee offende, trewe dere wif.
For Goddes sake, thenk how I thee chees,
Nought for no coveitise,² douteless,
But only for the love I hadde to thee.
And though that I be old and may nat see,
Beeth to me trewe, and I wol telle why.
Three thinges, certes, shal ye winne therby:
First, love of Crist, and to yourself honour,
And al myn heritage, town and towr³—
I yive it you: maketh chartres as you lest.
This shal be doon tomorwe er sonne reste,
So wisly⁸ God my soule bringe in blisse.
I praye you first in covenant ye me kisse,
And though that I be jalous, wite⁰ me nought:
Ye been so deepe emprinted in my thought,
That whan that I considere youre beautee,
And therewithal the unlikly elde⁴ of me,
I may nought, certes, though I sholde die,
Forbere to been out of youre compaignye
For verray⁶ love. This is withouten doute.
Now kis me, wif, and lat us rome aboute.”
This fresche May, whan she thise wordes herde,
Benignely to Januareye answerdere,
“But first and forward⁴ she bigan to weepe.
“I have,” quod she, “a soule for to keepe⁰

9. Unskillful: the words are a paraphrase of several passages in the Song of Solomon.
1. Has gone.
2. Slammed shut.
3. I.e., castle.
4. Unsuitable old age.
As wel as ye, and also myn honour,  
And of my wifhood thilke tendre flowr,  
Which that I have assured in youre hond,  
pledged

980 Whan that the preest to you my body boond;  
Wherefore I wol answere in this manere,  
By the leve of you, my lord so dere:  
bound
I praye to God that nevere dawe the day  
That I ne sterwe as foule as womman may,  
die / shamefully
6. Have me drowned.
7. I.e., way of covering your own fault.
8. The Sign of the Twins.
9. I.e., position upon entering.

5. Have me stripped.
1. Of Cancer, the Sign of the Crab, which is Jupiter's exaltation, or position of dominant influence.
2. Claudian was the author of the late Latin poem The Rape of Proserpine, which describes Pluto's seizure of Proserpina in Aetna, in Sicily.

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“My wif,” quod he, “ther may no wight saye nay:
Th’ experience so preveth every day
The treson which that womman dooth to man.
Ten hundred thousand tales telleth I can
Notable of youre untrouthe and broltenesse.

O Salomon, wis and richest of richesse,
Full fol of sapience and of worldly glorye,
Ful worthy been thy wordes to memorye
To every wight that wit and reson can—
Thus praisteth he yit the bountee of man:

‘Amonges a thousand men yit found I oon,
But of wommen alle found I noon.’
Thus saith the king that knoweth youre wikkednesse.
And Jesus filius Syrak as I gesse,
Ne speketh of you but selde reverence—

A wilde fir and corrupt pestilence
So falle upon youre bodies yit tonight!
Ne see ye nought this honourable knight?
By cause, allas, that he is blind and old,
His owene man shal make him cokewold.

Lo wher he sit, the lechour in the tree!
Now wol I graunten of my majestee
Unto this olde, blinde, worthy knight
That he shal have ayain his yén-sight,
Whan that his wif wolde doon him vilainye.

Thanne shall he knowen al hir harlotrye,
Bothe in repreve of hire and othere mo.”
“Ye shal?” quod Proserpine. “Wol ye so?
Now by my modres sires soule I swere
That I shal yiven hire suffisant answeres,
And alle wommen after for hir sake,
That though they be in any gilt ytake,
With face bold they shul hemself excuse,
And bere hem down that wolde hem accuse:
For lak of answere noone of hem shal dien.

Al hadde men seen a thing with bothe his yén,
Yit shal we wommen visagen it hardly,
And wepe and swere and chide subtilly,
So that ye men shul been as lewed as gees—
What rekketh me of youre auctoritees?
I woot wel that this Jew, this Salomon,
Found of us wommen folies many oon,
But though that he ne found no good womman,
Yit hath ther founde many another man
Wommen ful trewe, ful goode and vertuous.

Witnesse on hem that dwelte in Cristes hous:
With martyrdom they preved hir constaunce.
The Romain geestes eek maken remembraunce
Of many a verray, trewe wif also.

3. Ecclesiastes vii.28.
5. Mother’s father’s.
6. Face out.
7. Do I care.
8. Stories, i.e., the Gesta Romanorum, a collection of pious tales.
But sire, ne be nat wroth, al be it so,
Though that he saide he fooned no good womman,
I praye you, take the sentence of the man:
He mente thus, that in sovereyn bountee
Nis noon but God, but neither he ne she.
Ey, for verray God that nis but oon,

What make ye so muche of Salomon?
What though he made a temple, Goddes hous?
What though he were riche and glorious?
So made he eek a temple of false goddes:
How mighte he do a thing that more forbynde is?

Pardee, as faire as ye his name emplastre,
He was a lechour and an idolastre,
And in his elde he verry God forsook.
And if God ne hadde, as saith the book,
Yspared him for his fadres sake, he sholdhe

Have lost his regne rather than he wolde.
I sette right nought of al the vilainye
That ye of wommen write a boterflye.
I am a womman, needes moot I speke,
Or elles swelle til myn herte breke.

For sithen he saide that we been jangleresses,
As evere hool I moote brouke my tresses,
I shal nat spare for no curteisye
To speke him harm that wolde us vilainye."
“Dame,” quod this Pluto, “be no lenger wroth.

I yive it up. But sith I swoor myn ooth
That I wolde graunten him his sighte ayain,
My word shal stonde, I warne you certain.
I am a king: it sit me nought to lie."
“And I,” quod she, “a queene of fairye:
Hir answere shal she have, I undertake.
Lat us namore wordes heerof make.
Forsoothe, I wol no lenger you contradicte.
Now lat us turne again to Januarye
That in the gardin with his faire May

Singeth ful merier than the papenjay,
“You love I best, and shal, and other noon.”
So longe aboute the aleyes is he goon
Til he was come ayains thilke pear tree
Wher as this Damian sitteth ful mirye

On heigh among the fresshe leves greene.
This fresshe May, that is so bright and sheene,
Gan for to sike and saide, “Allas, my side!
Now sire,” quod she, “for ought that may bitide,
I moste han of the peres that I see,

Or I moot die, so sore longeth me?
To eten of the smale peres greene.
Help for hir love that is of hevene queene!

1. I.e., care.
2. Idle talkers.
3. I.e., in health.
4. I.e., wished on.
5. Garden paths.
6. That same.
7. I long.
The Merchant’s Tale / 25

...I telle you wel, a womman in my plit\(^e\)
May han to fruit so greet an appetit
That she may dien but\(^o\) she of it have.”

“Allas,” quod he, “that I ne hadde heer a knave\(^o\)
That coude clime! Allas, allas,” quod he,
“For I am blind!” “Ye, sire, no fors,”\(^o\) quod she.
“But wolde ye vouche sauf, for Goddes sake,
The piriye inwith\(^o\) youre armes for to take—
For wel I woot that ye mistruste me—
Thanne sholde I clime wele ynoough,” quod she,
“So I my foot mighte sette upon youre bak.”

“Certes,” quod he, “theron shal be no lak,\(^o\)
Mighte I you helpen with myn herte blood.”
He stoupeth\(^o\) down, and on his bak she stood,
And caughte hire by a twiste,\(^o\) and up she gooth.
Ladies, I praye you that ye be nat wroth:
I can nat glose,\(^8\) I am a rude man.

And sodeinly anoon this Damian
Gan pullen up the smok and in he throong.\(^o\)
And whan that Pluto sawgh this grete wrong,
To Januareye he yaf again his sighte,
And made him see as wel as evere he mighte;
And whan that he hadde caught his sighte again,
Ne was ther nevere man of thing so fain.\(^o\)
But on his wif his thought was everemo:
Unto the tree he caste his ye¨n two,
And sawgh that Damian his wif had dressed\(^o\)
In swich manere it may nat been expressed,
But if\(^o\) I wolde spoken uncurteisly,
As dooth the moder whan the child shal die.

“Out! Help! Allas! Harrow!”\(^a\) he gan to crye.

“O stronge\(^o\) lady store,\(^o\) what doostou?”
And she answerde, “Sire, what aileth you?
Have pacience and reson in youre minde.
I have you holpe\(^o\) on bothe youre yœn blinde.
Up\(^o\) peril of my soule, I shal nat lienn,
As me was taught, to hele\(^o\) with youre yœn
Was no thing bet\(^o\) to make you to see
Than strugle with a man upon a tree:
God woot I dide it in ful good entente.”

“Strugle!” quod he. “Ye, algate\(^e\) in it wente!
God yive you bothe on shames deeth to dien!
He swived\(^2\) thee: I saw it with mine yœn,
And elles be I hanged by the hals.”\(^o\)

“Thanne is,” quod she, “my medicine al fals.
For certainly if that ye mighte see,
Ye wolde nat sayn thise wordes unto me.
Ye han som glimsing\(^o\) and no parfit\(^o\) sighte.”

“I see,” quod he, “as wel as evere I mighte,

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8. Speak circumspectly.  1. At any rate.
Thanked be God, with bothe mine yễn two,
And by my trouthe, me thoughte he dide thee so.”

“Ye maze,\(^3\) maze, goode sire,” quod she.
“This thank have I for I have maad you see.
Allas,” quod she, “that evere I was so kinde!”
“Now dame,” quod he, “lat al passe out of minde.
Com down, my lief,\(^6\) and if I have missaid, 

dear

God help me so as I am yvele apaid.\(^4\)
But by my fader soule, I wende have sein\(^5\)
How that this Damian hadde by thee lain,
And that thy smok hadde lain upon thy brest.”

“Ye, sire,” quod she, “ye may weene\(^5\) as you lest.

But sire, a man that waketh out of his sleep
He may nat sodeinly wel taken keep\(^9\)
Upon a thing, ne seen it parfitly,
Til that he be adawed\(^6\) verraily;
Right so a man that longe hath blind ybe

Ne may nat sodeinly so wel ysee,
First whan his sighte is newe come again,
As he that hath a day or two ysein.\(^9\)
Til that youre sighte ysatled\(^6\) be a while,
Ther may ful many a sighte you bigile.

Beeth war,\(^9\) I praye you, for, by hevene king,
Ful many a man weeneth to see a thing
And it is al another than it seemeth:
He that misconceiveth, he misdeemeth.”\(^o\)
And with that word she leep\(^5\) down fro the tree.

This Januareye, who is glad but he?
He kisseth hire and clippeth\(^5\) hire ful ofte,
And on hir wombe he stroketh hire ful softe,
And to his palais hoom he hath hire lad.\(^9\)
Now goode men, I praye you to be glad.

Thus endeth here my tale of Januareye.
God blesse us and moder, Sainte Marye.

Amen

The Epilogue

“Ey, Goddes mercy,” saide oure Hoste tho,
“Now swich a wif I praye God keepe me fro.\(^o\)

Lo whiche\(^o\) sleightes\(^5\) and subtilitez
In wommen been, for ay as bisy as bees
Been they us sely\(^5\) men for to deceive,
And from a sooth evere wol they waive.\(^o\)
By this Marchantes tale it preveth\(^6\) weel.

But, doutelees, as trewe as any steel
I have a wif, though that she poore be;
But of hir tonge a labbing\(^5\) shrew is she,
And yit she hath an heep of vices mo—
Therof no fors,\(^o\) lat alle swiche thinges go.

3. Are dazed.
4. Ill-pleased.
5. Thought I saw.
6. I.e., is proved.
1220 But wite° ye what? In conseil° be it said,  
Me reweth° sore I am unto hire teyd°—  
For and° I sholde rekenen every vice  
Which that she hath, ywis, I were too nice.°  
And cause why? it sholde reported be,  
1225 And told to hire of some of this minee.°  
Of whom? it needeth nat for to declare,  
Sin wommen connen oute swich chaffare.°  
And eek my wit suffiseth nat therto  
To tellen al; wherfore my tale is do.”