

Wife of Bath Quotation Bank

Wife's character

Housbondes at chirche dore I have had fyve, --

Yblessed be God that I have wedded fyve!
Welcome the sixte, whan that evere he shal.

Wolde leden al hir lyf in chastitee.
I graunte it wel, I have noon envie,

I wol bistowe the flour of al myn age
In the actes and in fruyt of mariage.

In wyfhod I wol use myn instrument
As frely as my makere hath it sent.

Myn housbonde shal it have bothe eve and morwe,

I have the power durynge al my lyf
Upon his propre body,

And whan that I have toold thee forth my tale
Of tribulacion in mariage,
Of which I am expert in al myn age,

I shal seye sooth, tho housbondes that I hadde,
As thre of hem were goode, and two were badde.
The thre were goode men, and riche, and olde;

They had me yeven hir lond and hir tresoor;
Me neded nat do lenger diligence

But it were for my profit and myn ese?

They were ful glad whan I spak to hem faire;
For, God it woot, I chidde hem spitously

For, certeyn, olde dotard, by youre leve,
Ye shul have queynte right ynogh at eve.

This is to seye, if I be gay, sire shrewe,
I wol renne out, my borel for to shewe.

Yet tikled I his herte, for that he

wolde no lenger in the bed abyde,

If that I felte his arm over my syde,
Til he had maad his raunson unto me;
Thanne wolde I suffre hym do his necetee

And yet in bacon hadde I nevere delit;

For if I wolde selle my bele chose,
I koude walke as fressh as is a rose;

My fourthe housbonde was a revelour;

But age, allas! that al wole envenyme,
Hath me biraft my beautee and my pith.

Now of my fifthe housbonde wol I telle.
God lete his soule nevere come in helle!
And yet was he to me the mooste shrewe;

I bar hym on honde he hadde enchanted me, --

:But yet I hadde alwey a coltes tooth.
Gat-tothed I was, and that bicam me weel;

I hadde the prente of seinte venus seel.

I hadde the beste quoniam myghte be.

That made me I koude noght withdrawe
My chambre of venus from a good felawe

And to hym yaf I al the lond and fee
That evere was me yeven therbifoore.

Stibourn I was as is a leonesse,

Main Ideas

Experience, though noon auctoritee
Were in this world, is right ynogh for me

For wel ye knowe, a lord in his houshold,
He nath nat every vessel al of gold;
Somme been of tree, and doon hir lord servyse

And yet with barly-breed, mark telle kan,
Oure lord jhesu refresshed many a man.

He shal have never the lasse light, pardee.

Allas! allas! that evere love was synne!

Who peyntede the leon, tel me who?
By god! if wommen hadde writen stories,...
They wolde han writen of men moore wikkednesse

I grante thee lyf, if thou kanst tellen me
What thyng is it that wommen moost desiren.

Wommen desiren to have sovereynetee
As wel over his housbond as hir love,

But, for ye speken of swich gentillesse
As is descended out of old richesse,

Eek every wight woot this as wel as I,
If gentillesse were planted naturelly

Heere may ye se wel how that genterye
Is nat annexed to possessioun,

That out of poverte roos to heigh noblesse

Nature of women

Swere and lyen, as a womman kan.
Til that she fynde som man hire to chepe.

We love no man that taketh kep or charge
Wher that we goon; we wol ben at oure large

Deceite, wepyng, spynnyng God hath yive
To wommen kyndely, whil that they may lyve

And sith a man is moore resonable
Than womman is, ye moste been suffrable.

Yet out it moot; we kan no conseil hyde

Marriage

Of bigamy, or of octogamy;
Why sholde men thanne speke of it vileynye?

God bad us for to wexe and multiplye;

th' apostle seith that I am free ...
He seith that to be wedded is no synne;

Bet is to be wedded than to brynne

Or where comanded he virginitee?

Virginitee is greet perfeccion

They been assayed at diverse stoundes;...
But folk of wyves maken noon assay

That it is fair to have a wyf in pees.
Oon of us two moste bowen, doutelees;

The flour is goon, ther is namoore to telle;
The bren, as I best kan, now moste I selle;

But atte laste, with muchel care and wo,
We fille acorded by us selven two.
He yaf me al the bridel in myn hond,
To han the governance of hous and lond,
And of his tonge, and of his hond also;

Humour

Lo, heere the wise kyng, daun salomon; ...
To be refreshed half so ofte as he!

For hadde God comanded maydenhede,
Thanne hadde he dampned weddyng with the dede.
And certes, if ther were no seed ysowe,
Virginitee, thanne wherof sholde it growe?

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The dart is set up for birginitee:
Cacche whoso may, who renneth best lat see.

Were membres maad of generacion,...
That they were maked for purgacioun

This is to seye, for office, and for ese
Of engendrure,

Now wherwith sholde he make his paiement,
If he ne used his sely instrument?

How pitously a-nyght I made hem swynke!

But in oure bed he was so fressh and gay,
509: And therwithal so wel koude he me glose,
Whan that he wolde han my bele chose

After the beere, me thoughte he hadde a paire
Of legges and of feet so clene and faire
That al myn herte I yaf unto his hoold.

For filthe and eelde, also moot I thee,
Been grete wardeyns upon chastitee.

Housbondes meeke, yonge, and fressh abedde,
And grace t' overbyde hem that we wedde;
And eek I praye jhesu shorte hir lyves
That wol nat be governed by hir wyves;
And olde and angry nygardes of dispence,
God sende hem soone verray pestilence

Janekin

Why that I rente out of his book a leef,
For which he smoot me so that I was deaf.

He hadde a book that gladly, nyght and day,

To reden on this book of wikked wyves.
He knew of hem mo legendes and lyves

And whan I saugh he wolde nevere fyne
To reden on this cursed book al nyght,
Al sodeynly thre leves have I plyght
Out of his book,

By maistrie, al the soveraynette,
And that he seyde, -- myn owene trewe wyf,

Pardoner's Comment

Telle forth youre tale, spareth for no man,
And teche us yonge men of youre praktike.

Old Crone/ Loathly Lady

Save on the grene he saugh sittyng a wyf –
A fouler wight ther may no man devyse.

Plight me thy trouthe heere in myn hand, quod she,
The nexte thyng that I requere thee,
Thou shalt it do, if it lye in thy might

Bifore the court thanne preye I thee, sir knyght,
Quod she, that thou me take unto thy wyf;

I seye ther nas no joye ne feeste at al;
Ther nas but hevynesse and mucche sorwe.

I am youre owene love and eek youre wyf;

Thou art so loothly, and so oold also,
And therto comen of so lough a kynde,
That litel wonder is thogh I walwe and wynde.

Grante me grace to lyven vertuously.

To han me foul and old til that I deye,
And be to yow a trewe, humble wyf,

Or elles ye wol han me yong and fair,
And take youre aventure of the repair

Knight

In th' olde dayes of the kyng arthour,

And so bifel it that this kyng arthour
Hadde in his hous a lusty bacheler,

By verray force, he rafte hire maydenhed;

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,

In al the court ne was ther wyf, ne mayde,
Ne wydwe, that contraried that he sayde

Taak al my good, and lat my body go.

Whan he was with his wyf abedde ybrought;
He walweth and he turneth to and fro.

My lady and my love, and wyf so deere,
I put me in youre wise governance;
Cheseth youreself which may be moost plesance

Thanne have I gete of yow maistrie, quod she,

For, by my trouthe, I wol be to yow bothe,
This is to seyn, ye, bothe fair and good.

For joye he hente hire in his armes two,
His herte bathed in a bath of blisse.

And thys they lyve unto hir lyves ende
In parfit joye; and jhesu crist us sende