

But if thy wif I were, and eek thy love."^o
 "My love?" quod he, "nay, my dampnacioun!
 Allas, that any of my nacioun
 Sholde evere so foule disparaged be."
 1070 But all for noght; th'ende is this, that he
 Constreynd was, he nedes moste her wedde,
 And taketh his olde wif, and gooth to bedde.
 Now wolden some men seye, paraventure,
 That for my negligence I do no cure
 1075 To tellen you the joye and all th'array
 That at the feeste was that ilke day.
 To which thing shortly answer I shall.
 I seye there nas no joye ne feeste at all.
 There nas but hevinesse and mucche sorwe,
 1080 For prively he wedded her on morwe.
 And all day after hidde him as an owle,^o
 So wo was him, his wif looked so foule.
 Greet was the wo the knight hadde in his thoght
 Whan he was with his wif abedde ybroght.
 1085 He walweth and he turneth to and fro.
 His olde wif lay smilinge everemo,
 And seyde, "O deere housbonde, benedicitee,
 Fareth every knight thus with his wif as ye?
 Is this the lawe of king Arthures hous?
 1090 Is every knight of his thus daungerous?
 I am your owene love and eek your wif.
 I am she which that saved hath your lif,
 And certes yet ne dide I you nevere unright.
 Why fare ye thus with me this firste night?
 1095 Ye faren like a man had lost his wit.
 What is my gilt? For Goddes love, tell it,
 And it shall been amended, if I may."
 "Amended?" quod this knight. "Allas. Nay, nay.
 It wol not been amended nevere mo.
 1100 Thou art so loothly, and so oold also,
 And therto comen of so lough a kinde,
 That litel wonder is thogh I walwe and winde.

damnation
family

be so foully degraded
But his complaining was in vain
Had no choice

perhaps
out of negligence I don't bother

feast that very day

was only dreaminess
the next day

woeful

wallows, tosses to and fro

bless you
Behaves

so standoffish

any wrong
do you behave this way
who has gone crazy
What have I done wrong?
corrected

loathsome
such a low class
twist and turn

1062-66. **Nay, thanne . . . love:** No, then, she said. I would curse us both to hell in that case. Even though I am ugly and old and poor, I would not, for all the gold and jewels on earth or buried under it, accept anything else than your taking me as your wife and your love.

1081. **hidde him as an owle:** Hid like an owl. Owls, of course, are nocturnal birds, seldom seen. The knight is so ashamed of his new bride that he refuses to be seen in public with her.

So wolde God mine herte wolde breste."^o
 "Is this," quod she, "the cause of your unreste?"
 1105 "Ye, certainly," quod he, "no wonder is."
 "Now, sire," quod she, "I koude amende all this,
 If that me liste, er it were dayes three,
 So well ye mighte bere you unto me.
 But, for ye speken of swich gentillesse^o
 1110 As is descended out of old richesse,
 That therfore sholden ye be gentil men —
 Swich arrougaunce is not worth an hen.^o
 "Looke who that is moost vertuouus alway,
 Privee and apert, and moost entendeth ay
 1115 To do the gentil dedes that he kan.^o
 Taak him for the grettest gentil man —
 Crist. Wole we clayme of him oure gentillesse,
 Not of oure eldres for hir old richesse.
 For thogh they yeve us all her heritage,
 1120 For which we claime to been of heigh parage,
 Yet may they not biquethe for no thing
 To noon of us hir vertuouus living,
 That made hem gentil men ycalled be,^o
 And bad us folwen hem in swich degree.^o
 1125 "Well kan the wise poeté of Florence
 That highte Dant^o speken in this sentence.
 Lo, in swich maner rym is Dantes tale:
 'Ful selde up riseth by his branches smale^o

correct
If I wanted
If you behave well

wealth

We should

parentage
bequeath

bade us / in their gentility

was called / this moral

seldom

1103. **So wolde . . . breste:** I wish to God my heart would burst open (so I would be out of this situation).

1109. **gentillesse:** Gentility. Here begins the old wife's long disquisition on the nature of true gentility. It may derive in part from Dante's *Convivio* and in part from the *Roman de la Rose*. The Wife of Bath challenges the usual definition that gentility is a matter of birth or wealth. Even an ugly old peasant, she says, can be noble in demeanor and action. This whole speech is both an education for the young knight and an advertisement for herself as an appropriate wife.

1111-12. **That therefore . . . hen:** That, because you are rich, you are therefore gentle — such arrogance is not worth so much as a hen.

1113-15. **Looke who . . . kan:** Look at the man who is most virtuous, both in public and privately, and tries to do all the gentle deeds he can.

1119-23. **For thogh . . . be:** Though our ancestors may give us their worldly heritage, for which we *claim* a high nobility, they can in no way bequeath to us any of the virtues that made them known as truly gentle.

1118-24. **Not of . . . degree:** Compare *Roman de la Rose*, lines 18620-34.

1126. **Dant:** Dante Alighieri (1265-1321), Italian poet and author of the *Divine Comedy*. The lines quoted are from the *Purgatorio* 7, 121-23.

1128. **by his branches smale:** The higher branches of the family tree. The idea here is that our immediate ancestors can give us little. Rather, our important characteristics come from the ultimate or root ancestor, God.