

- 'Freletee,' clepe I, but if that he and she
 Wolde leden all hir lif in chastitee.^o
- 95 I graunte it well: I have noon envye
 Thogh maidenhede, preferre bigamye.^o
 It liketh hem to be clene in body and goost.
 Of mine estaat I nil not make no boost.^o
 For well ye know, a lord in his houshold,
- 100 He hath not every vessel all of gold.
 Somme been of tree, and doon hir lord servise.^o
 God clepeth folk to him in sondry wise,
 And everich hath of God a propre yifte:
 Some this, some that, as him liketh shifte.^o
- 105 "Virginitie is greet perfeccioun,
 And continence eek, with devocioun.
 But Crist, that of perfeccioun is welle,
 Bad not every wight he sholde go selle
 All that he hadde and give it to the poore,^o
- 110 And in swich wise folwe him and his foore.
 He spak to hem that wol live parfitly,
 And lordinges, by your leve, that am not I!
 I wol bistowe the flour of all mine age
 In th'actes and in fruit of mariage.
- 115 "Tell me also, to what conclusioun
 Were membres maad of generacioun,
 And of so parfit wis a wight ywroght?^o
 Trusteth right well, they were not maad for noght.
 Glose whoso wole and seye both up and down
- say I, unless*
no argument
virginity is preferred to
It pleases them / spirit
container, bowl
wood
calls / various ways
abstinence
the well of all perfection
Bade
his path, footsteps
the flower of my life
for what purpose
Were sexual organs made
nothing
interpret any way you will

93-94. **'Freletee,' clepe . . . chastitee:** I call it "frailty" unless the partners desire not to have sex. The Wife of Bath here makes reference to the idea that there are several degrees of chastity: virginity, celibacy, and "chastity" in marriage. This last degree could mean abstinence from sex in marriage, but could also refer merely to sexual fidelity to one's spouse (as in line 155). The Wife has no objection to this last degree of chastity — although there are hints (see lines 227-34 and 333-34) that she may not always have been entirely faithful herself.

95-96. **I have . . . bigamye:** I have no quarrel with women who prefer to keep chaste rather than submit to bigamy. "Bigamy" here may refer to a widow's having sex with successive husbands.

98. **Of mine . . . boost:** For myself I will make no such boast — that is, no boast that I prefer virginity.

100-01. **He hath . . . servise:** Not every utensil is made of gold; even wooden utensils can be of service. See 2 Timothy 20.

103-04. **And everich . . . shifte:** Some are given one talent or task in life, some another. For the notion that each of us has a certain "gift," see 1 Corinthians 7:7.

108-09. **Bad not . . . poore:** See Matthew 19:21.

117. **And of . . . ywroght:** And made by so perfect a creator.

- 120 That they were maked for purgacioun
 Of urine, and oure bothe thinges smale
 Were eek to knowe a femele from a male,
 And for noon oother cause. Say ye no?
 Th'experience woot well it is noght so.
- 125 "So that the clerkes be not with me wrothe
 I sey this, that they beth maked for bothe,
 This is to seye, for office and for ese
 Of engendrure, there we not God displese.^o
 "Why sholde men elles in her bookes sette
- 130 That man shal yelde to his wif her dette?^o
 Now wherwith sholde he make his paiement,
 If he ne used his sely instrument?
 Thanne were they maad upon a creature
 To purge urine and eek for engendrure.
- 135 "But I seye noght that every wight is holde
 That hath swich harneys as I to you tolde,
 To goon and usen hem in engendrure.
 Thanne sholde men take of chastitee no cure.
 Crist was a maide and shapen as a man,
 And many a seint sith that the world bigan.
- 140 Yet lived they evere in parfit chastitee.
 I nil envye no virginitiee.
 Lat hem be breed of pured whete-seed,
 And lat us wives hoten barly-breed.^o
- 145 And yet with barly-breed, Mark telle kan,
 Oure Lord Jhesu refreshed many a man.^o
 "In swich estaat as God hath cleped us
 I wol persevere^o — I nam not precius.
 In wifhode I wol use mine instrument
- 150 As frely as my makere hath it sent.
 If I be daungerous, God yeve me sorwe.
 Mine housbonde shal it have both eve and morwe,
 Whan that him list com forth and paye his dette.
 An housbonde wol I have, I wol not lette,
- sexual organs*
tell the difference between
proves conclusively
angry
were made
his foolish organ
Therefore
sexual equipment
pay no heed to chastity
virgin
since
will not argue against chastity
wheat grains
be called barley-bread
rank as God has called us to
fastidious
stingy with it, God give
I'll never quit

127-28. **for office . . . displese:** For function (in eliminating urine) as well as for the joy of procreation, so long as we do not displease God.

130. **dette:** Debt, referring to sexual services. See 1 Corinthians 7:3.

143-44. **Lat hem . . . barly-breed:** From Jerome 7.

145-46. **And yet . . . man:** The biblical reference to Christ's multiplication of the loaves and fishes is probably to John 6:9-11, not to Mark 6:38-41. Note the Wife's sexual use of "refreshed" at line 38 above.

147-48. **In swich . . . persevere:** See 1 Corinthians 7:20.