

155 Which shall be both my dettour and my thral,
 And have his tribulacioun withal
 Upon his flessch^o whil that I am his wif.
 "I have the power duringe all my lif
 Upon his propre body, and noght he.^o
 160 Right thus th'apostel tolde it unto me
 And bad oure housbondes for to love us weel.^o
 All this sentence me liketh every deel!"^o

*my slave
 troubles*

physical body

Up stirte the Pardoner,^o and that anon.
 "Now dame," quod he, "by God and by Seint John,
 165 Ye been a noble prechour in this cas.
 I was aboute to wedde a wif.^o Allas!
 What sholde I bye it on my flessch so deere?
 Yet hadde I levere wedde no wif to-yeere."^o
 "Abide," quod she, "my tale^o is not bigonne.
 170 Nay, thou shalt drinken of another tonne
 Er that I go, shall savoure wors than ale.
 And whan that I have toold thee forth my tale
 Of tribulacioun in mariage,
 Of which I am expert in all mine age —
 175 This is to saye, myself have been the whippe —
 Than maystow chese wheither that thou wolt sippe

*Why
 been wiser to*

cask

*pain-giver
 choose whether*

156–57. *tribulacioun withal . . . flessch*: See 1 Corinthians 7:28.

158–59. *I have . . . he*: See 1 Corinthians 7:4.

161. *And bad . . . weel*: See Ephesians 5:25.

162. *All this . . . deel*: This message — that our husbands should love us well — pleases me very well indeed!

163. *Pardoner*: The Pardoner is another of the Canterbury pilgrims. His interruption here serves as a kind of interlude and transition in the Wife's performance. Before this interruption Alisoun has been talking about the relative merits of multiple versus single marriages, and of active sexuality versus abstinence. After her exchange with the Pardoner she moves into straight autobiography, focusing first on her three old husbands and then, individually, on her fourth and fifth ones.

166. *aboute to wedde a wif*: This is not the place to discuss the Pardoner at length, but it is interesting that Chaucer in the General Prologue describes him as "a gelding" (castrated male horse) or a "mare" (female horse). If there is, indeed, something ambiguous about the Pardoner's sexuality, it is curious that he brags here of being nearly ready to get married.

167–68. *What sholde . . . to-yeere*: Why should my flesh pay so heavily for marriage? I would rather not marry this year.

169. *tale*: The reference here is not to her fictional Arthurian tale, which starts at line 857, but to the factual account of her own life story, which she insists she has barely begun. Compare line 193, where the Wife uses the term *tale* to refer to the factual account of her five marriages.

Of thilke tonne that I shall abroche.^o
 Be war of it, er thou to neigh approche,
 For I shall telle ensamples mo than ten.
 180 'Whoso that nil be war by othere men,
 By him shal othere men corrected be.'^o
 The same wordes writeth Protholome.
 Rede in his Almageste and take it there."
 "Dame, I wolde praye you, if your will it were,"
 185 Seyde this Pardoner, "as ye bigan,
 Telle forth your tale. Spareth for no man,
 And techeth us yonge men of your praktike."
 "Gladly," quod she, "syn it may you like.
 But yet I praye to all this compaignye
 190 If that I speke after my fantasye
 As taketh not agrief of that I seye,
 For mine entente nis but for to pleye.
 Now, sire, now wol I tell you forth my tale.

*From that cask / open
 approach too near
 stories (of marriage)*

if it pleases you

practices

since it pleases you

according to my whim

don't take me wrong

intention is only

"As evere moote I drinken wine or ale,
 195 I shall seye sooth.^o Tho housbondes that I hadde,
 As three of hem were goode and two were badde.
 The three men were goode, and riche, and olde.
 Unnethe mighte they the statut^o holde
 In which that they were bounden unto me.
 200 Ye woot well what I meene of this, pardee.
 "As help me God, I laughe whan I thinke
 How pitously a-night I made hem swinke!
 And, by my fey, I tolde of it no stoor.
 They had me given hir lond and hir tresoor.

Those

Scarcely

work

by my faith, I was unpytyng

given

176–77. *Than maystow . . . abroche*: After (you hear my account of marital tribulation) you can decide whether you will sip from the barrel I am opening. In the metaphor of marriage as a cask of wine, the Wife may be alluding to the story of one cask filled with sweet wine, one with vinegar.

180–81. *Whoso that . . . be*: He who will not learn from other men's mistakes will serve as an example to other men of how not to behave. As the next lines suggest, Chaucer probably read the proverb in some version of Ptolemy's *Almagest*, a treatise on astrology. The proverb (and the proverb in lines 326–27) is found in a medieval preface to a Latin translation of Ptolemy's work. Ptolemy was a second-century mathematician and geographer.

194–95. *As evere . . . sooth*: I will tell the truth, or may I never drink wine or ale again.

198. *statut*: Law. The reference is almost certainly to the Wife's "legal" right to have her husband pay the "marital debt" of sex (see lines 130–31). As the following lines show, the three old husbands had their "work" cut out for them, partly because of their age, partly because of the Wife of Bath's sexual appetite — real or feigned.