

- 205 Me neded not do lenger diligence  
 To winne hir love or doon hem reverence.<sup>o</sup>  
 They loved me so well, by God above,  
 That I ne tolde no deyntee of hir love.  
 "A wis womman wol bisye her evere in oon  
 210 To gete her love, ye, there as she hath noon.  
 But sith I hadde hem hoolly in mine hond,  
 And sith they hadde yiven me all hir lond,  
 What sholde I take kepe hem for to plesse  
 But it were for my profit and mine ese?  
 215 I sette hem so a-werke, by my fey,  
 That many a night they songen 'weilawey.'  
 The bacon was not fet for hem, I trowe,  
 That some men han in Essex at Dunmowe.<sup>o</sup>  
 "I governed hem so well, after my lawe,  
 220 That ech of hem ful blisful was and fawe  
 To bringe me gay thinges fro the faire.  
 They were ful glad when I spak to hem faire,  
 For, God it woot, I chidde hem spitously.<sup>o</sup>  
 "Now herkneth hou I baar me proprely.  
 225 Ye wise wives,<sup>o</sup> that kan understonde,  
 Thus shul ye speke and bere hem wrong on honde,  
 For half so boldely kan there no man  
 Swere and lyen as a womman kan.<sup>o</sup>  
 I sey not this by wives that been wise,  
 230 But if it be whan they hem misavise.  
 A wis wif, if that she kan her good,
- did not value their love  
 busy herself continually  
 herself love  
 in my power  
 Why / bother to  
 Unless  
 'woe is me'  
 happy and willing  
 fair  
 kindly  
 behaved so well  
 accuse them falsely  
 Swear and lie  
 are misguided  
 knows her worth*

**205-06. Me neded . . . reverence:** I had neither to show them respect nor to win their love (because I already had their land and money).

**217-18. The bacon . . . Dunmowe:** At Dunmowe, a town in Essex, a side of bacon was offered as a prize to any couple that could swear, after a year and a day of marriage, that they had neither quarreled nor regretted getting married. The Wife of Bath's husbands, of course, could not claim the bacon because she made them so miserable.

**219-23. I governed . . . spitously:** I managed things so well, after my custom, by chiding them so angrily that, God knows, they were glad to bring me anything just to put me in a better temper.

**225. Ye wise wives:** A curious statement, since there are no other wives on the pilgrimage to Canterbury. Perhaps Chaucer has in mind a wider court or reading audience for the Wife of Bath's bragging performance, or perhaps he means to have the Wife of Bath offer to the men on the pilgrimage a dramatic display of the way clever wives trick them. Compare line 524.

**227-28. For half . . . kan:** Compare *Roman de la Rose*, lines 18136-37. There are many echoes in the Wife of Bath's performance of this long allegorical poem by Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun. I mention in these notes only a half-dozen or so of the most prominent ones.

- Shall beren him on hond the cow is wood,<sup>o</sup>  
 And take wisse of her owene maide  
 Of her assent.<sup>o</sup> But herkneth how I sayde:<sup>o</sup>  
 235 "Sire olde kaynard, is this thine array?  
 Why is my neighebores wif so gay?<sup>o</sup>  
 She is honoured over all there she gooth.  
 I sitte at hoom. I have no thrifty clooth.  
 What dostow at my neighebores hous?  
 240 Is she so fair? Artow so amorous?  
 What rowne ye with oure maide, benedicite?  
 "Sire olde lecchour, lat thy japes be.  
 And if I have a gossib or a freend  
 Withouten gilt, thou chidest as a feend  
 245 If that I walke or pleye unto his hous.  
 Thou comest hoom as dronken as a mous  
 And prechest on thy bench. With yvel preef,  
 Thou seist<sup>o</sup> to me it is a greet meschief  
 To wedde a poure womman, for costage.  
 250 And if that she be riche, of heigh parage,  
 Thanne seistow that it is a tormentrie  
 To suffre her pride and her malencolie.  
 And if that she be fair, thou verray knave,  
 Thou seyst that every holour wol her have.<sup>o</sup>  
 255 "She may no while in chastitee abide<sup>o</sup>
- listen  
 grouch, dotard  
 wherever she goes  
 decent clothing  
 whisper / by God  
 forget your tricks  
 companion  
 complain like a devil  
 With a rotten attitude  
 because of the cost  
 high birth  
 thou sayest / torment  
 true villain  
 lecher  
 stay chaste*

**232. Shall beren . . . wood:** Shall browbeat them into believing that the chough, or crow, is crazy, an allusion to the traditional fable of the tattle-tale bird. The Wife of Bath is suggesting that a wise wife will convince her husband that the bird that reports her indiscretions is mad.

**233-34. And take . . . assent:** And shall arrange for her maid to corroborate her stories.

**234. how I sayde:** The following 144 lines are the Wife of Bath's self-quoting recital of the typical speeches she gave to her husbands. This long speech is all part of her advice to the would-be "wise wives" she imagines as her pupils.

**235-36. is this . . . gay:** Is this your clothing? Why is the wife of my neighbor so finely dressed (when I have nothing decent to wear)? Much of the material in lines 235-302 comes from Theophrastus as summarized in Jerome 47. For more on Theophrastus, see the note to line 671.

**248. Thou seist:** You say. Alisoun pretends to quote back at her husband things he says when he comes home drunk. What she says he says is a catalog of misogynist commonplaces that men, especially clerics, often *did* say about women. The implication is that her husbands did not really say them, but are so cowed by her that they do not defend themselves against her accusations. An alternative explanation is that, since they did not seem to defend themselves, they really were guilty of saying — or at least believing — these things.

**253-54. And if . . . have:** There are close parallels in these and the next 16 lines to *Roman de la Rose*, lines 8587-8600.

**255. in chastitee abide:** Remain chaste. Here "chastity" clearly refers not to virginity or celibacy but to faithfulness in marriage. See note to lines 93-94.