

Wives, Widows and Wimples **Theme 7: Education and Accomplishments**

Document 1

WLC/LM/4, f. 57r: Robert of Gretham, 'Mirur', lines 1-36 (composed c.1250, Anglo-Norman)

Transcription by Kathryn Summerwill. Translation by Theresa Tyers

A sa trechere dame aline.
Saluz en lauertu diuine.
Ma dame bien lai oi dire.
Ke mult amez oir e lire.
Chancon de geste e destoire
E mult i metez la memoire.
M ais bien uoil que vus sachez.
Q ue co est plus ke uanitez.
Kar co nest rien fors **controuure**.
E folie de uaine cure.
S i lom i troue vn bon respit.
T ut li altre ualdras petit.
C o est en uair le tripot.
D e chescun ki mentir uolt.
P ur plus sourement mentir.
A lcune rien dist apleisir.
E dist alcune uerite.
P ur feire oir sa falsete.
E co nest pas chose creiable.
Q ue tut seit uair kest dit en fable.
N un est co uair quant kest escrit.
D estoire ke lem en chancun dist.
Kar cil ki chancuns controuerent.
S ulum lur quidiers les furmerent.
E lom dist en respit pur uair.
K e quidance nest pas sauair.
V eez si co pot estre uair.
Q ue vns enfes oust poair.
C um dist la chancun de mainet.
V del orfanin sanssunnet.
V de la geste dan tristram.
V del bon messenger balam.
V eez les autres ensemment
N i ad celui ki trop ni ment.
N e sunt pas forstrait descripture.
M ais chascun fait sa **controuure**.

To his much beloved Lady Aline, greetings in Divine Grace. My Lady, I have heard it said, is someone who loves to read and listen to epic poems and romances and commits many of them to memory. But I would like to you know that this is no more than empty vanity¹, because these tales are nothing more than fiction and the foolishness of wasted occupation. If a man could find in them a good moral story then all others would be of little worth. These are, truthfully, trickery - as each one is a lie. For, by more plainly lying to make these tales more attractive to the listener, anything is said which pleases and says nothing truthful. Indeed, to hear his lies it is not believable that everything said in a fable is true, that all is truth which is in the fables; none is truth when it is written down. Nothing turns out to be true that is written down in the tales of the ballads because they are themselves a mere fabrication, as the writers concoct these tales in accordance with their imaginations. Indeed, as the man said in the moral tale, those who dream things up are not wise. Observe if this can be the truth when you see what some young nobles, still in training to become knights, have been able to do. As in the ballad of Mainet², or of the orphan Sanssunnet, or in the ballad of Tristram³ or of the good messenger of Balam⁴ and likewise there are others which recount similar tales. Amongst those you will not find any that have been drawn from scripture (the only source of truth), rather each one is produced from his imagination.

1. Could also mean 'foolishness'
2. The Mainet Geste exists only in a late 12th century fragment. The story is based on the youth of Charlemagne (Mainet the diminutive form of Magne). Bertha, daughter of a Hungarian King, wife of Pepin, is the mother of Charlemagne. She is poisoned by a servant whose daughter resembles Bertha so much that she takes the place of her mother in the marital

bed. She conceives Hendri and Ronfroi (who later poisons Pepin). Forced to flee, the young Charlemagne changes his name to Mainet and enters the service of the pagan king Galatre of Toledo. After helping him win a decisive battle he obtains the hand of the King's daughter who is baptised and becomes his wife.

3. Of Tristram and Iseult fame. They take a love potion intended for the King of Cornwall, Mark. In one version Tristram dies due to trickery on the part of his wife who confusingly is also called Iseult.
4. This could read also read 'angel' according to the Chanson.

Document 2

WLC/LM/7, f. 2v: 'L'estoire del Saint Graal' (The History of the Holy Grail) (early 13th century, Anglo-Norman)

Transcription and translation by Theresa Tyers

Quant ilot lespee garnie del pont . e
del fuerre eini come uos oez . il mi
. st lespee el fuerre . e **commenca** a
regarder le
fuerre . e lespee . **et** a paumoier . si uit
cele
espee sibeles e si riche quil ni li estoit pas
auis que onques por .i. **chevalier** . fust
fez a pa
relz . si riches . e si uertueus come cist
esto
it . si dift quil uoldroit molt se il pooit
estre que iames hom ne la tresist fors del
fuerre . dusqa tant que li bons **chevaliers**
por
qui ele estoit apareilliee imeist la main.
e lors vint la uoiz qui autre foiz auoit
par le alui e li dist Salemons\$ ia nus ne
la trera qui ne sen repente\$ dusqa tant
que li bons **chevaliers** por qui ele estoit
apare
illie la tendra.

Quant Salemons oi ceste parole si en
fu **mult** liez . e maintenant escrist
de sa main letres teles come li contes a
a deusees . equant il ot ce fet il i uolt
mettre renges . teles a son escient come
lespee couenist . mes sa feme ne vult.
ainz en iaporta unes si ledes e si poures
co
me de chanure . si foibles par senblant
queles ne poissent par lespee sostenir.
que est ce fet salemons iuoler uos ce
mettre. oil fet ele . ia auostre tens ni
aura autres . . mes encore se deu plest
uen
dra une heure que une damoisele les
changera . e imetra porcestes unes si

When he had made the pommel and
attached it to the sword he created a
scabbard, as you hear, he put the sword
into the scabbard and looking at them
both he began to caress them. Thus, he
saw the sword so beautiful and
magnificent that it seemed that never had
a sword as worthy and noble as this
sword been made for one knight. So, he
said, he would like very much that a man
should not draw the sword until such a
time came that the honourable knight for
whom it was made put his hand to it. And
then the voice that had spoken to him
before came again and said, 'Solomon,
never will anyone draw this sword without
repenting it until such time that the good
and loyal knight for whom it was created
takes possession of it'.

When Solomon heard these words he was
delighted and happy and now he himself
wrote the words that recounted the story
that had been told. When he had done
this he wanted to attach a sword belt,
one which he felt would be worthy of it
but his wife did not want this. Thus, she
brought him one that was so ugly and
flimsy, such as one (that could be) made
of hemp. It was of such an inferior quality
it appeared that it would not hold the
sword. 'What is this?' Solomon asked. 'Do
you want me to put this on?' 'Yes', she
replied. 'In your time there will be no
other. But still, if it pleases God, there will
come a time when a young maiden will
change it and put, in place of this one,
one which is so beautiful and so splendid

beles
e si riches que ce sera merueilles auooir
Si poez en ceste espee conoistre la
senblan
ce des .ii. femes dont ge uos ai oi parler
quar tot ausi come la virge qui est a
uenir si come uos medites . doit amen
der ce que nostre premiere mere meffi
st . tot ausi amemdera cele pucele ce **que**
ge meffaz en ceste espee quar ele i me
tra renges beles e riches . e de la chose
de
sus soi quele plus amera.

that it will be wonderful to see. Thus,
(she said) you can see in this sword the
image of the two women of whom I have
heard you speak. For as much like the
virgin who is to come, as you told me,
and put to right what our first mother did
wrong, just like that this maiden will put
right what I have done wrong with this
sword: for she will fix a sword belt so
beautiful and magnificent and of a kind
that she herself loves best'.

Document 3

WLC/LM/8, f. 190v : John Gower, 'Confessio Amantis', Book 8, lines 1477-1497, The Tale of Apollonius (composed c.1393, English)

Transcription and translation by Pamela Doohan

[H]e hap hir fro þe bordel take
Bot **þat** was noght for goddes sake
But for þe lucre as she **him** tolde
Now comen to hir **þat** comen wolde
Of women **in** hir lusty zouþe
To hir **and** se what þinge she kouþe
She can þe wisdom of a clerke
She can of eny lusty werke
Which to a gentil woman longeþ
And **somme** of hem she vndrefongeþ
To þe Citol **and** to þe herpe
And whom it likeþ for to carpe
Prouerbes **and** demaudes slighe
A noþere suche neuer þei sighe
Which þat science so wele taught
Wher of she grete ȝiftes caught
þat sche to leonyn hap woune
And þus hir name is so be gone
Of sondry þinges þat she techep
þat all þe londe vn to hir secheþ
Of ȝonge women for to lere

He had her taken from the brothel, not
for the sake of God, but for profit, as she
told him (in her tale). Now, women in
their youthful prime would come to her to
see what she knew. She had the
knowledge and learning of a scholar, and
all the admirable skills that noble ladies
required. And some of them she
accepted (as students), and taught them
to play the citol and harp, and those who
liked to tell proverbs and clever riddles
learnt new ones. She taught these
sciences so well that she received great
gifts which she acquired for Leonyn's
gain. And her name was established from
the variety of things she taught, so that
all the young women in the land wanted
to learn from her.

Document 4

WLC/LM/6, f. 203r: Heldris de Cornuälle, 'Le Roman de Silence', lines 2859-2869 (early 13th century, French)

Transcription by Kathryn Summerwill. Translation by Theresa Tyers

Auoec ces iogleors . iras
Por cho **que** biel les seruiras
Et que tu painne i uoelles rendre
Poras des estrumens aprendre
Selens ies encheualerie
Si te ualra laioglerie
Et sil auient **que** lirois muire
Es cambres ten poras **de**duire

You will go with these jongleurs
And because you will serve them well
And strive to be of service,
You will learn how to play instruments.
If it takes time for you to master knightly
skills
(Then) minstrelsy will serve you well,
And in the future when the King should

Ta harpe . **et** ta viele auras
Enliv decho **que** ne sauras
Orfrois ne fresials manoier

die
In the (bed)-chamber you will, with your
music, be able to entertain.
You will have (with you) your harp and
your viol,
(And) these will take the place of the
skills you will lack,
Of how to embroider with golden thread¹
or embellish woven braids and ribbons².

1. *Orfrey*, very high class embroidery using gold thread
2. Galloons, braids or decorative ribbons would fit with the style of clothes of the period.

Document 5

**WLC/LM/8, f. 53v: John Gower, 'Confessio Amantis', Book 3, lines 783-817,
The tale of Phebus and Cornide (composed c.1393, English)
Transcription and translation by Pamela Doohan**

%%hebus which makeþ þe daies light
A loue had which þo hight
Cornide whome a boue all
He pleseþ. Bot what shal fall
Of loue **þer** is no man knoweþ
But as fortune hir happes þroweþ
So it befell vpon a chance
A 3onge knyght toke hir aquiantance
And had of hir al þat he wold
But a fals brid which she hap hold
And kepte **in** chambre of pure 3ouþe
Discouereþ all þat euer he couþe
þis briddes name was as þo
Coruus þe which was þan also
Wele more white þan eny swanne
And he þat shrewe all þat he canne
Of his lady to Phebus seide
And he for wrape his swerde out breide
Wiþ which Cornide anon he sloghe
But after . him was wo ynoghe
And toke a full grete repentance
Wher of **in** token **and** remembrance
Of hem which vsen wicke speche
Vpon þis bridde he toke þis wreche
þat **þer** he was snowe white to fore
Euer afterward col blak **þerfore**
He was **transformed** as itt sheweþ
And many a man 3it him beshreweþ
And clepen him in to þis day
A rauen be whom 3it men may
Take euidence whan he croyeþ
þat som mishappe it signifieþ
Be wer **þerfore and** sei þe beste
If þou wolt be þi self in reste
My gude sonne **as** I þe rede

Phebus, who makes the days light, had a
love called Cornide, whom he loved above
all others. But what will happen in love
no man knows, as Fortune casts lots. So
it befell upon a chance that a young
knight took her acquaintance and had of
her all that he desired. But a deceitful
bird, that she had and kept in her
chamber since it was very young,
revealed everything that he knew [to
Phebus]. This bird, whose name was
Corvus, was also then much whiter than
any swan. And he, that scoundrel, told
Phebus all that he knew of his lady. And
he [Phebus] unsheathed his sword in
anger, with which he soon killed Cornide.

But afterwards he was extremely woeful
and repented of his actions. As a
reminder to those who use wicked
speech, he took vengeance on this bird.
He that was snow-white before, was
transformed for ever afterwards to coal-
black, as can be seen.

And many men still curse him and call
him to this day a raven, by whom men
may take as evidence, when he crows,
that it signifies some misfortune. Beware,
therefore, and speak only the best if you
would be yourself¹, my good son, as I
advise you.

1. possibly meaning 'at peace with yourself', or, 'want a peaceful or quiet life'