

Wives, Widows and Wimples **Theme 1: Nature or Nurture**

Document 1

WLC/LM/6, f. 201r: Heldris de Cornuälle, 'Le Roman de Silence', lines 2500-2530 (early 13th century, French)

Transcription by Gavin Cole. Translation by Theresa Tyers

Apries xii . ans
si uint nature
Ki le blasme forment **et** coze
Distli chi a estrange coze
Ki te deduis al fuer demalle
Et uas sialuent **et** al halle
Car une special forme ai
Dont a mes . ii . mains te formai
Et labialte quai tant cele
Ai tolte entoi amoncele
. M . gens me tienent **por** escarse
Por labialte dont tu ies farse
Car io ai de . M . gens retraite
Labialte dont tu ies refaite
. M . femes a enceste uie
Ki detoi ont **moult grant** en vie
Por lebialtet **queles** i uoient
Car puet scelestre eles i croient
Tel cose **quen** toi nen a mie
Et tels est ore **moult** tamie
Qui te haroit detolt lecuer
Seil detoi sauoit lefuer
Quele sen tenroit amalballie
Que sesperance estroit fallie
Tu me fais certes **grant** laidure
Quant tu maintiens tel noreture
Nedois pas enbos **conuerser**
Lancier . netraire . ne berser
Tol toi de chi cho dist nature
Va enlacambre a la costure
Cho uiolt de nature lius
Tu ne nes pas sicilentius

After twelve years Nature came along
Who accused Silence harshly and scolded
her.
She said, 'This is a strange thing
That you amuse yourself like a man,
Going out in the wind and the scorching sun
When I had a special image of you,
When, with my own two hands, I formed
you
And with all the beauty I had in store
I have drawn so much of it together in you.
One thousand people accuse me of being
miserly
For the beauty with which you are filled to
the brim.
I have taken away from one thousand
people
The beauty of which you were also made.
There are one thousand women today
Who desire you very much
For the beauty that they see there
For in you being so convincing (as a man)
they believe
That you have something that, indeed, you
have not.
And because of this they who now love you
greatly,
Those (same women) who would hate you
with all their hearts
If they really knew how you were made -
They would feel themselves to be
maltreated
In that all their hopes and expectations
came to an end.
You certainly insult me and do me a great
wrong
In leading your life in such a way.
You must not go into the woods to meet
with others
Jousting, hawking or hunting with a bow,
Away with you from all of this, said Nature.
Go to the (bed)-chamber and stitch a seam
That is what Nature wishes you to do
You are not Silentius.

Document 2

WLC/LM/6, f. 215r: Heldris de Cornuälle, 'Le Roman de Silence', lines 5145-5164 (early 13th century, French)

Transcription by Gavin Cole. Translation by Theresa Tyers

Moult lefist bien ens en larainne
Entre . ii . rens ala**quintainne**
Ainc feme nefu mains laniere
Decontoier entel maniere
Kil ueist ioster sans mantel
Et lescu porter encantiel
Et faire don**ques** lademise
Lalance sor lefaltre mise
Dire peust **que** noreture
Puet **moult** ourer **contre** nature
Quant ele aprent si **et** escolte
Atel us . feme . **et** tendre . **et** mole
Tels **chevaliers** **par** li i uierse
Que seil letenist enuierse
Et il peust lafin sauoir
Que **grant** honte enpeust auoir
Que feme **tendre** fainte **et** malle
Kirien na dome fors lehalle
Et fors les dras **et** **contenance**
Leust abatu desa lance

He did well in the tournament out on the lists
Between the two runs and the *quintain*.¹
Never had there been a woman less reluctant
To mix and converse in such a manner.
Whoever saw him jousting, out there without his cloak,
His shield held *en cantiel* just before his sword hilt and such his scabbard was protected²
And then at the unseating (of his opponent)
The lance he sets at rest upon the *falter*³,
They may well say that Nurture
Can do much work to overcome Nature
When she can teach such accomplishments
To such a soft and tender woman.
Many a knight who was thrown by him [Silence],
Had he only been aware
And may at last have known the truth,
What dreadful shame he would have felt
That a woman (so) tender, weak and soft
And who, except complexion, possessed nothing of being a male,
With the clothing and the bearing of a man,
Could have struck him down with her lance.

1. The Oxford English Dictionary gives *quintain* (1440) a similar meaning to a target. However, *quintaine* (1180) in the *Dictionnaire de l'Ancien Français* gives a jousting dummy serving as a target when practising with a lance. The names probably dates back to the traditions of the Roman army who used 'dummies' made up of five pieces of armour.
2. The shield thus worn appears to have been termed '*ecu en cantiel*'. 'The shield which is large and hollow and charged with ermine ... is suspended from a very long *guige* in front of the left thigh, immediately behind the sword hilt, thus covering the upper part of the scabbard'. Rev. W. Bramston, *A History of the Abbey Church of Minster, Isle of Sheppey, Kent*. (1896).
3. *faltre*: a piece of felt on the saddle where the lance is placed when at rest.

Document 3

MS 66/1: Extract from an extent of the manor of Langar and Barnstone, Nottinghamshire (c.1340, Latin)

Transcription by Kathryn Summerwill. Translation by Professor L.V.D. Owen, in 'Three Nottinghamshire Manorial Records', *Thoroton Society Record Series* Vol XI, Pt. II (1946)

Tenentes tofftorum in
bondagio

[Cottars]

Bondage tenants of tofts.

¶ Matilda de Herdeby tenet j toftum in
bondagio et reddit per annum . ij .
solidos . vj denarios . terminis ut supra
Et dabit auxilium secundum numerum
animalium suorum
Et debet meterium in Autumpno ad Magna
precaria domini cum tota familia excepta .
uxore domus Et valet operis illius diei per
estimacione ij denarios
et habebit j repastum et valet j denarius
et sic valet opus illius diei ultra repastam j
. denarius. Et dabit pro quolibet pullano
masculino . iij . denarios . pro tolleneto
Et valet tollenetum per annum . [...] Et
dabit pannagium porcorum bis per annum
. ut supra et valet pannagium per annum
[...] Et dabit Merchet
tum et LeyrWytum pro filiis suis.

Matilda de Herdeby has 1 toft in
bondage and pays 2s 6d per annum at
the terms as above [Christmas, Lent,
Pentecost and Michaelmas]. And she
owes an aid of the above mentioned
number of her animals [not specifically
mentioned, a sum of money in
proportion to the number of animals
she owns]. And she owes harvest work
in autumn at the chief service of the
lord with her whole family except the
housewife. And the value of the work of
that day shall be assessed at 2d. And
she shall have one meal to be valued at
1d. And the afternoon's work shall be
valued at 1d. And she shall give as toll
for every male foal 4d. The value of
this toll per annum is [blank]. And she
shall provide pannage for swine twice
in the year as stated and the pannage
shall be valued at [blank]. And she
shall pay merchet and leywrite for her
daughters.

Document 4

WLC/LM/8, ff. 31v-32r : John Gower, 'Confessio Amantis', Book 2, lines 644-652 and 678-713, The Tale of Constance (composed c.1393, English)

Transcription and translation by Pamela Doohan

þe moder which þe saudan bare
Was þan a lyue **and** þoght þis
Vnto hir selue . if so it is
My son hir wedd **in** þis manere
þan haue I lost my ioyes here
For myn astate shal so be lassed
þenkend þus she haþ compassed
Be sleight how **þat** she may begile
Hir sone . **and** fell wiþinne a while ...

The mother of the sultan was still alive
then, and thought this to herself: 'If it is
so, that my son would marry her in this
manner, then I have lost my joy here, for
my estate [both socially and politically]
shall thus be lessened.'

Thus thinking, she contrived how she
might deceive and beguile her son. And
within a while fell ...

She made so þat whan Constance
Was come forþ wiþ þe romeynes

... When Constance came forth with the
Romans, their clerics and citizens, the

Of clerkes **and** of Citegeins
A riche feste she hem made
And most when **þat** þei weren glade
Wiþ fals couyne which she hadd
Hir clos envie þer she spradd
And alpo **þat** hadden be
Or in aperte or in **priuete**
Of conseil to þe mariage
She sloghe hem **in** a sodein rage
Endlonge **and** brode as þei ben sett
So **þat** it myght nocht be lett
Hir owen sone was nocht quite
Bot diede upon þe same plite
Bot what þe **hihe** godd wol spare
It may for no **perill** mysfare
þis worþi maiden which was þere
Stode þan as who seiþ dede for fere
To se þe feste how **þat** it stode
Which all was torned **in** to blode
þe disshe forþ wiþ the copp **and** all
Bebled þei weren ouer all
She seihe hem die on euery side
No wondre þogh she wept **and** cried
Makend many a woful mone
Whan al was sleyn bot she allone
þis olde fende þis sarazaine
Lete take anone þis Constantine
Wiþ al þe gode she þidire brought
And hap ordeined as she þoght
A naked ship wiþ out stiere
In which þe gude **and** she in fere
Vitailed ful for ȝeres fyue
Wher **þat** þe wynde it wold dryue
She putt vpon þe wawes wylde

mother had made them a rich feast. And when they were at their most joyful, she spread her secret envy with false conspiracy, and she slaughtered those that had been in agreement to the marriage, either openly or in private, everyone along the table as they were seated, in a sudden rage; her own son was not unpunished, but died in the same way as the others.

But what the high God will spare will not come to any peril. This worthy maiden [Constance] stood then, as they say, scared to death. [It was awful] to see how the feast was before, which was now all turned to blood. The dishes, the cups, together with everything, were covered with blood. She saw them die on every side - no wonder that she wept and cried, making many a woeful moan.

When all but her alone were slain, this old devil, the Saracen [the mother], commanded her men to take the maiden, this Constantine [Constance], with all the goods she had brought there. She arranged and devised, as she thought, a bare ship without a rudder, to put the girl and enough possessions and provisions for five years together, to wherever the wind would drive it, and she put it upon the wild waves.