

Wives, Widows and Wimples **Theme 4: Marriage**

Document 1

WLC/LM/8, ff. 201r-v: John Gower, 'Traitié...pour essamplier les amantz marietz' (composed late 14th century, French)

Transcript and translation by Theresa Tyers

Ovesque amour qant loialte sequeinte
lors sont les noeces bones et ioieuses
mais lui guilers qant il se fait plus queint
Par falssemblant les fait souent
doubtouses

A loial qant plus ressemblont amerouses
Cest en cy come de stoupes vn corde
Qant le penser a son semblant descorde

Celle espousaile est assetz forte et seinte
Damour v . sont les causes vertouses
Si lespousaile est dauarice enceint
Et qe les causes soient trucherouses
Ja ne serront les noeces **graciuses**
Car conscience toutdis se remorde
Qant le penser a son semblant discorde

Honeste amour gone loialte sa queinte
Fait qe les noeces serront gloieuses
Et qui son coer ad mys **par** tiel empeinte
Nestoet doubter les chainiges **perilouses**
Om dit qe noeces sont aenturouses
Car la fortune en tiel lien ne sacorde
Qant le penser a son semblant discorde

With love great faithfulness [will] follow,
Then, at that time, the wedding is good
and joyful.

But when he, the deceiver, is knowingly
more malicious,
[Then] by his cunning these unions are
often made into something to be feared
When, to the eye, [it may seem] a loving
[union].

It is, thus, like [the difference between]
tow and a piece of cord¹
When thought and its image are opposed.

This union is strong and holy,
Where made of love², the reasons are
virtuous.

If [however] the marriage is girded with
avarice
The reasons may be based on trickery
and lies.

[Then] never will the union be favoured
or be blessed,
Because conscience always torments
itself,
When thought and its image are opposed.

When pure and virtuous love are brought
together with fidelity
Then the union will be blessed with grace,
And he who, in his heart, accepts such a
commitment
Will not be afraid of threatening changes.
They say that marriages are full of
chance,
As [indeed] Fortune does not [act in]
harmony in such a union
When thought and its image are opposed.

1. Tow = a strand. Cord = a number of strands twisted or woven together
2. An alternative translation is 'Of love five are the causes/reasons for marriage'.

Document 2

WLC/LM/9, ff. 169r-v: 'Speculum Vitae', lines 10991-11032 (composed mid-14th century, English)

Transcript and translation by Pamela Doohan

De Statu Coniugatorum

[On the state of marriage]

¶ For spousayle is as men may se
A state of gret autorite
Of dignite **and** of holynes
þorow þese þre spousayle stabled es
¶ Of gret autorite is it
As bereth witnes holy writ
For whi oure lord god rightwise
Hit stabled first in paradyse
In the state of obedience
Or euer man synned þorow neclygence
þerfore men schuld þorow al her myght
þat state kepe clene bothe day **and** nyght
As techeth **and** biddeth holy writ
Be resoun of god þat stabled hit
And be resoun of þe stede clene
þer it was first stabled sene
¶ Also spousayle is an hey state
Of gret dignite as clerkes wate
¶ For whi oure lord wold borne be
Of a wedded womman þat was fre
þat was blestful mary mayden clene
þat Joseph wedded hir to mayntene
Gods sone before þe hey message
Made hir þe mantel of mariage
And wold be vnder þe mantel hem
Conceyued **and** borne **with** oute wem
¶ Vnder þe mantel as clerkes kan telle
Was hid fro þe fend of helle
þe conseile of oure saluacioun
And þe priuite of oure ransoun
þerfore men schold þat state worschepe
And honestly **and** clene it kepe
¶ Hit is also þer it is wemles
A state of gret holynes
For it is on of þe sacramentes
þat holy chirche myche tentes
And betokenep þe spousayle
þat is knyht **and** neuer schal fayle
Betwene ihesu crist **and** holy chirche
þorow whos counseile vs behoueth wirche
And betwene god on þe same manere
And mannes soule þat boght dere

The sacrament of marriage is, as men say, a state of excellent authority, of spiritual worth, and of holiness. Through these three things marriage is permanently ordained. It is of excellent authority, as Holy Writ bears witness, because our good Lord God established it in Paradise first, in that state of obedience, before man sinned through negligence.

Therefore, man should try to remain in a pure state, both day and night, as is taught and required in Holy Writ, by God's reason, who established it, and because of the holy place [Paradise, the Garden of Eden] where it was first established and seen.

Also, marriage is a high state, of great dignity, as learned men know, because our Lord was born of a married woman who was not in sin. She was the blessed Mary, a maiden, whom Joseph married to maintain her purity. Under the mantle of that marriage, God ordained that his Son would be conceived and born without blemish. Under that mantle's disguise, as learned men can tell, He was protected from the Fiend of Hell, he was the counsel of our salvation, and the sacred mystery of our redemption.

Therefore man should worship that state and keep it respectable and pure. It is also blemish-free, a state of great holiness, because it is one of the sacraments that the Holy Church observes greatly. And it is a sign of the marriage that unites, and never shall be broken, between Jesus Christ and the Holy Church – through whose instruction we are bidden to work – and in the same way between God and man's souls that he redeemed at a high price.

Document 3

**WLC/LM/4, ff. 71v-72r: Robert of Gretham, 'Mirur', lines 2474-2517
(composed c.1250, Anglo-Norman)**

Transcript by Kathryn Summerwill. Translation by Theresa Tyers

A s espusailles fu marie.
E iesus e sa compaignie.
S achez grant est li sacremenz.
V tant sunt de si seinte genz.
E vus deuez tenir cher.
L a rien ki deus uont tant amer.
K **ar** tut ni seit il charnelment.
V ncore est il en present.
K **ar** quantquen seinte iglise est fait.
E n sa presence tut esteit.
E ki ken seit le seruitur.
S ue est la force e le uigur.
T ut ausi cum est de baptistire.
E de espusaille est il sire.
A s espusailles uin faillit.
K **ar** la uielz lei nert pas parfit.
D espuser nest perfectiun.
K i nest fait si pur faute nun.
K i ne se poet pucelle garder.
S aluer se poet par espuser.
P ur saluer charnel corrupture.
F ist deus i ceste seinte cure.
E lewe bien co signefie.
K e en uin i fut **conuertie**.
K **ar** ewe est chose esculuriable.
E ia par sei nen ert estable.
N un est la char **kar** ia ne fine.
M ais tut dis en pis se decline.
¶ I esus fist lewe mettre en pere.
Q uant il estrainst tele manere.
Q uant il estrainst nos charneltez.
Q ue ne seium trop des-laiz.
K e dur seium **contre** le mal.
E ne seium trop comunal.
¶ Mais nuls nen auerat guarisun.
S en part fait bien . e en part nun.
P ur co fist deus del ewe uin.
P ur demustrer le dreit chemin.
L i uin eschaufe si en yuere.
E de cures le quor deliuere.
S i fait la lei del espuser.
L es quors eschauffe par amer.
E en yure pur mals leisser.
E cures tolt de fol penser.

[The sermon alternates lines from scripture with commentaries by the author Robert of Gretham]

Scripture: At the marriage feast were Mary, Jesus and his companions.

Robert of Gretham: Know well that so great is the Sacrament of marriage that there were many saintly men there and that you must cherish and hold dear this thing that God loves so much. Although he is not there in the flesh he is, nevertheless, always present because when something is done in the Holy Church everything is known to him as he is always present. To him who is there as a servant, he [God] is the power and strength of all that there is. As he is also at baptism, and of marriage he is Lord.

Scripture: At the wedding feast the wine ran out.

Robert of Gretham: 'For the old Law¹ was not perfect', for marriage is not the way to 'perfection'. However, for those who are unable to keep their maidenhood and would otherwise be corrupted by desires of the flesh, for them, God has made this holy work². And the water which was turned into wine symbolises well this state. For water is always flowing and moving and (because of its nature) can never remain stable by itself. Such is the flesh that is never satisfied and thus, all say, it continues to degenerate, always going from bad to worse.

Scripture: Jesus put the water into stone.

Robert of Gretham: When he restrained it in that manner (it is like) when he restrains our desires of the flesh, so that we are not overcome with evil and can stand firm against it. And this means that all men will be helped and none will be set apart: all will recover their health if he is in part good but in part is not. This is the reason that God changed the water into wine, to show man the true road and

the right way. The wine heats in this manner to intoxicate and by doing so the cares and worries (carnal desire) of the heart are released. If the law of marriage is kept, the hearts are heated by love and the intoxication of evil caused by such desires are left behind and the heart is cured of all misguided thoughts.

- 1 'la viele lei' can also have the meaning of 'The Old Testament'.
2. This could also translate as 'cure'.

Document 4

**WLC/LM/4, f. 34v: William of Waddington, 'Le Manuel des Péchés'. The sixth Sacrament, of Marriage (composed c.1220-1240, Anglo-Norman)
Transcript and translation by Theresa Tyers**

¶ N e matrimoigne ne deit desturber
K i uoldra estre sanz blamer.
¶ Q uant home fiet pur uerite.
K e a tort sunt alcuns espusee.
S e il nel mustre a seint eglise.
Q uite ne pot estre en nule guise.
K i co ne fait est consentant.
E malement pot peccher par tant.
Kar ki a larrun ad consenti.
V ele peine deit auer od li.

Neither should anyone interfere with marriage which is contracted sincerely and truthfully if they themselves wish to be without reproach. (It is said) that some are illegally married in supposing that he or she do not meet together at the church, but if this does happen they cannot in any way be discharged from their legal obligation. Even so, if entering into a marriage is not freely done then it is evil and they sin. And, if the marriage takes place in secret but nevertheless it is freely done, they will suffer equally for this.