

Wives, Widows and Wimples Theme 6: Mistreatment of women

Document 1

WLC/LM/8, f. 190r: John Gower, 'Confessio Amantis', Book 8, lines 1373-1423
(composed c.1393, English)

Transcription by Gavin Cole. Translation by Pamela Doohan

So fell it þat þis Chirles knape
Haþ leide þis maiden wher he wold
Vpon þe stronde **and** what she shold
She was a drade **and** he oute breide
A rusty swerde . **and** to hir seide
þou shalt be dede . allas quop she
Why shal I so \$ lo þus quop he
My lady Dyonise haþ bede
þou shalt be morþred **in** þis stede
þis maiden þo for fere stright
And for þe loue of god almyght
She **preieþ þat** for a litell stounde
She might knele upon þe grounde
Towerte þe heuen for to craue
Hir wofull saule þat she may saue
And wiþ þis noise **and** wiþ þis crie
Out of a barge faste bye
Which hid was þer on scomer fare
Men sterten oute **and** weren ware
Of þis felon **and** he to go
And she began to crie þo
Ha mercy helpe for goddes sake
In to þe barge þei her take
As theues shulde **and** forþe þei went
Vpon þe see þe wynde hem hent
And malgre wher þei wold or none
To fore þe wedir forþe þei gone
þer halpe no seile **þer** halpe non ore
For storme **and** for blowen sore
In grete **perill** so forþe þei dryue
Til ate laste þei aryue
At Mitelene þe Citee
In hauen sauffe whan **þat** þei be
þe maister shipmann made **him** bovne
And goþe **him** oute in to þe tovne
And profereþ Thaise for to selle
One leonin it herde tell
Which maister of þe bordel was
And bad hym go a redy pas
To fechen hir **and** forþe he wente
And Thaise oute of his barge he hente.
And to þis bordelere he solde
And he þat be hir body wolde
Take avauntage . lete do crie
þat what man wolde his lecherie
Attempt vpon hir maydenhede
Ley doune þe golde **and** he shal spede
And **þus** whan he haþ cried it oute

So it happened that this churlish servant (Theophilus) led the maiden (Thaise) to the shore intending to kill her, and she was afraid of what would happen to her. He drew out a rusty sword and said to her, 'You must die.' 'Alas,' she said. 'Why must I?' 'Because,' he said, 'My lady Dyonise has commanded that you shall be murdered here.' Then the maiden screamed in fear. She prayed that, for the love of God Almighty, she be allowed a little more time. She knelt on the ground, and begged towards heaven that her woeful soul may be saved. This noise and crying was heard on a piracy barge hidden nearby. Men leapt off it and they saw the criminal (Theophilus), who ran away. Then she cried out, 'For God's sake have mercy on me!' and they took her onto the barge, as thieves would, and off they went.

Once on the sea the wind took them, in spite of where they wanted to go. They were at the mercy of bad weather as they had no sails, and no oars, and were driven by storms and blown about severely. They endured such great perils until at last they arrived at the city of Mitelene. When they were in that safe haven, the master-shipman concocted a plan: he went into the town and offered Thaise for sale. A certain Leonin, who was master of the brothel, urged him to go quickly and fetch her. The master-shipman returned to the barge, seized Thaise, and sold her to the brothel-keeper, who intended to exploit her body. He shouted out that any man who wanted to take her virginity must lay down his gold before he would succeed. And when he had announced this to the people all around [Latin gloss, summarising the story], he led her then to the brothel.

In sight of all þe peple aboute
Qualiter leoninus Thaisim ad lupanar de
stinavit . vbi dei **gracia preuenta ipsius** vir
ginitatem nullus violare potuit.
He lad hir **in** to þe bordel þo

Document 2

Mi 5/168/23/1: Extract from bill of complaint relating to the abduction and forced marriage of Jane Sacheverell (1485, English)

Middleton Collection, Mi 5/168/23/1

Transcript and translation by Kathryn Summerwill

... to the nombre of an C **persones and** moo
Riotously **and** disensibily arraied in Maner of
Warre the seid xj day
of nouembre felonously ley in a wayte in a
wode called Boroweswode bytwene the seid
Manoures of Hopwell
and Morley to Ræuysse and to Robbe the
seid Jane ayenst oure seid soueraine lordes
lawes **and** his peace
then and there Made assaute vppon the seid
Jane **and** her toke **and** bound her fast vnto a
man on
horsbake **and with** grete violence **and** force
led her by nygth tyme in to the Shire of
Nottingham vnto a place
of Sir Robert Markham knyght and from thens
to leycester Shire **and** from thens to a place
of the seid Herry
Willoughby called Middelton in the Shire of
Warrwick **and** putt her in Suche fere **and**
manase that
she was in poynte to haue perished and
dystroied **and** then and ther toke from her a
pece prece of
xl **shillings** and vj Spones of syluer prece
xxvj **shillings** viij **pence** of the goodes of the
seid Jane and ouere that the
seid Richard Willoughby violently and
greuously manasseth and yete doth the same
Jane to Cary her
in to Straunge Contrey to her vtter vndoing
and distruction **and** ther to do his plesure
with her as his owen
will **withoute** that she well consent and be
aggreable vnto his unsatiabie **and** riotouse
entent

[On the 11th day of November last, Jane then
being at the manor of Hopwell, intended to go
to the manor of Morley, but Henry Willoughby
of Middleton, Richard Curson of Wollaton,
Richard Willoughby of Wollaton, Henry Boson
of Nottinghamshire, Hugh Willoughby of
Risley, and others,] to the number of 100
persons and more, riotously and ostensibly
clothed as if for war, feloniously lay waiting in
a wood called Boroweswode [Burrow Wood,
Spondon] between the said manor of Hopwell
and Morley, to ravish and rob the said Jane
[Sacheverell] against our said sovereign lord
[the King's] laws and his peace. Then and
there they made assault upon the said Jane,
and took her and bound her fast to a man on
horseback, and with great violence and force
led her by night time into Nottinghamshire, to
a place belonging to Sir Robert Markham,
knight, and from thence to Leicestershire, and
from thence to a place belonging to the said
Henry Willoughby called Middleton in
Warwickshire. They put her in such fear and
menace that she was in a situation to have
perished and been destroyed, and then and
there they took from her a peace price of 40
shillings and 6 spoons of silver, priced at 26
shillings 8 pence, from the goods of the said
Jane. And more than that, the said Richard
Willoughby violently and greuously menaced
and yet caused the said Jane to be carried into
an unknown country, to her utter undoing and
destruction, and there to do his pleasure with
her at his own will, without her consenting and
being agreeable to his insatiable and riotous
intent.

Document 3

Special Collection JN147.T4: Extract from Magna Carta (1215, Latin)

**From Richard Thomson, *An historical essay on the Magna charta of King John ...*
(London : Printed for John Major ... and Robert Jennings ..., 1829), 68-71**

No transcript or translation, because it is a printed item in English

Document 4

WLC/LM/9, f. 142r: 'Speculum Vitae', lines 9259-9276 (composed mid 14th century, English)

Transcript and translation by Pamela Doohan

Secundus gradus inter solutum et meretricem

E secunde degre may þis dede be
Betwene a syngle man þat is fre
And a comoun womman of bordelle
þat biddeþ hir body ofte to selle
þat is a synne þat is more grete
And to þe fend of helle more lefe
For þis is holden more vyle
And more it may þe soule fyle
For whi siche wymmen of lif vnclene
Parchaunce ben wedded as ofte is sene
Or ben wymmen of religioun
þat han forsaken her **professioun**
And soiornen in gode **tounnes** namely
þer þei vse þat **craft** of bordelry
And forsaken noon of al a kyn
þat haþ wille **with** hem to syn
Fader ne sone cosyn ne broþer
þis synne is more gref þan þe toþer

The second degree, between a free man and a prostitute.

The second degree may be that deed between a single man who is free to do as he pleases, and a common woman in a brothel who regularly sells her body. That is a sin that is more serious, and to the Devil in Hell more pleasing, because it is considered more vile and it renders the soul more foul [than a single man sinning with a single woman].

Therefore such women of unclean living are sometimes married, as often is seen, or are women of religion who have forsaken their religious vows and dwell in towns with good reputations. There they ply the trade of prostitution, and reject no one from the many kinds who wish to sin with them: father, son, cousin or brother.

This sin is more trouble than the previous one [a single man sinning with a single woman].