

## 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 gronde  
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  
distroied **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 11<sup>th</sup> 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 wymmnen of lif vnclene  
**Parchaunce ben** wedded as ofte is sene  
Or ben wymmnen of religioun  
þat han forsaken her **professioun**  
And soioernen 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].