

Wives, Widows and Wimples **Theme 8: Advice on Behaviour and Dress**

Document 1

WLC/LM/9, ff. 141r-141v: 'Speculum Vitae', lines 9191-9232 (composed mid 14th century, English)

Transcription by Gavin Cole. Translation by Pamela Doohan

Quartus gradus

The fourth degree.

¶ þe ferþe degre after consentyng
þat is to say a brennyng ʒernyng
þat a man hæþ to a lechorous dede
Is dedely synne þat men schuld Drede
Al ʒif he faile of þat lecchory
ʒit gret ʒernyng is synne dedely
And þorow sich ʒernyng many men may
Syn dedely ofte sithes on a day
Paraventure nyne sithes or ten
þorow þe sight of **sum** wymmen
Lauedys or **oþer** quayntly dight
þat dighten hem quayntly to **mennes**
sight
Sich queynt tyffyng þei ofte vse
To make foles on hem muse
And þei trowe þei do not ille
For þei assenten not to siche foles wille
Bot **certes** ful greuously synne þay
As men may here wise clerkes say
For þorow þe enchesoun of hem þan
þe soules **ben** lorne of many a man
þat ʒernen to synne fleschly **with** sight
With hem þat **ben** so queyntly Dight
For þe **womman** þat Dighteþ hir
queyntly
Ouþer on heued or on bodi
To make men ofte **hire** to be halde
þe fendes gilder sche may be calde
¶ Many a man in þat gilder bonde
Is taken **and** broght to þe fendes
honde
And salamon spekeþ **and** seiþ ʒit mare
þat eche lyme of hir is þe deuels snare
Wharefore at þe laste day of dome
When alle men schal before **cris**t come
And gret drede schal sche answeþe þan
And **resoun** ʒilde of eche a man
Of whom þe soule dampned es
þorow **hire** dightyng **and** **hire** gaynes
Al ʒif sche seme of good condicioun
ʒif sich be **hire** entencioun
þat I **þat** be held hir heued **and** body
Had ʒernyng **with** **hire** to do foly
Sche schal not be excused bi **resoun**
þat sche ne is þat synne enchesoun

The fourth degree after consenting, that is to say, is a burning desire that a man has towards a lecherous deed [the sexual act] and is a deadly sin that men should fear.

If he entirely fails to avoid that lechery, that great desire is a deadly sin. Even if he fails to commit the lechery completely, the great desire is itself a deadly sin.

And because of such desire, many men may commit this deadly sin, perhaps nine or ten times a day, through the sight of those elegantly dressed women who are pleasing to men's sight.

These women often use such elaborate adornment to make foolish men look upon them, and they believe that they do no evil just because they do not agree to the foolish men's desires, as we may hear learned men say.

Because of this, many men, who yearn for fleshly sin by the sight of those who are so elegantly dressed, lose their souls.

For the woman who dresses herself elaborately, either her head or body, to tempt men, may be called a snare of the Devil. Many men in that spiritual pitfall are taken and brought before the Devil's hand.

Solomon speaks, and says further that each of their limbs is the Devil's snare. For this reason, they will answer at Judgment Day, when all men come before Christ in great fear, and the reason given for each man whose soul is damned is the elaborate women's dress and rich decoration.

Although the women seem to be of good social standing, if their intentions are for men to admire them and wish to commit lechery with them, the women shall not be excused by the argument that they are not the cause of that sin.

Document 2

WLC/LM/9, ff. 254r-v: John Gaytridge, 'The Lay Folks' Catechism'
(composed mid 14th century, English)

Transcription and translation by Pamela Doohan

*Þe sixte techinge and þe laste of þoo
þat I first touched
Bep seuen heued synnes men kalleþ
dedly synnes
pat ilch oweþ to knowen to fleu and to
forsaken
For man may not fleu hem but ȝef he
knowe hem
bryde and enuye wrathe and glotonye
slouthe and lecherye
And þey ben called seuen hed synnes
For þey fylen gostly ilk mannes soule*

The sixth teaching, and the last of those that I first mentioned, are the seven cardinal sins that men call Deadly Sins. Every man ought to know about these to avoid them and abstain from them, because if he does not know about them, he cannot avoid them.

Pride, envy, wrath, gluttony, sloth and lechery¹ are the seven cardinal sins, because they all spiritually corrupt each man's soul.

1. Avarice or covetousness is missing from this list

Document 3

WLC/LM/6, f. 339v: Gautier le Leu, 'La Veuve' (early 13th century, French)

Transcription by Gavin Cole. Translation by Theresa Tyers

*Dont na ele soing dereponre
Il nelestuet mie semonre
Son fait nueces quele ni soit
Ele na mais ne fain ne soit
Or ne li faut plus que li rains
Qui lemal li cache des rains
Celui porquiert bien et porcace
Ses enfans ensus deli cace
Et beke ausi con li geline
Qui dales le coc sa geline
Nuituns deuint sis escaucire
Souent fait candelles decire
Quele ofre par us et par nonbre
Que dex des enfans les descombre
Et que li male mors les prenge
Ie ne truis qui por aus me prenge
Nus nesi oseroit embatre
Puis se reua aels combatre
Ses hurte et fiert et grate et mort
Et maudist de le male mort
Adont faut li amors del pere
Puis que li enfes le conpere*

Now, she has no worries nor anyone to answer to. She feasts and celebrates wherever and whenever she likes and so suffers from neither hunger nor thirst. Now, there is only one thing that she needs: the rod¹ (that) searched out the pain and ache in her loins, which is why she persists in chasing after what she desires. As for her children, she drives them away and pecks at them just like a hen when it's ready to crouch down for the cock. At night she became one of those creatures of the dark (or hobgoblin) and once again chases the children away. She often makes beeswax candles that she offers up, not just once but again and again, (asking) that God should rid her of the children and that a plague² should descend upon them. 'I can find no-one that will take me. No-one would dare to throw themselves in with me'.³ Then she

turned upon her own children once more. She slaps them and whacks them and scratches and bites and curses to bring down a scourge upon them, and all because of the lack of the attentions⁴ of a lover the children pay the price.

1. An alternative here could be 'shaft'.
2. *Mort mal* is usually glossed as a type of skin disease, sometimes perhaps allied to leprosy. It could be something like 'gangrene', which would no doubt have resulted in death. Skin disease could be considered to be a plague or scourge, which 'came out of nowhere' or was brought about by divine power.
3. A variation *esbatre*, in the Anglo-Norman Dictionary, means to have sexual intercourse.
4. *Amours* can mean 'sexual attentions'; however it can also mean 'regards or compliments'.

Document 4

**WLC/LM/4, f. 8v: William of Waddington, 'Le Manuel des Péchés'
(composed c.1220-1240, Anglo-Norman)
Transcription and translation by Theresa Tyers**

¶ D e dames dium nus auant.
K e trop lunges uunt trainant.
M ielz ualdreit en almosne dune.
Q uantes traine suz le pe.
¶ L es guymples alsı ensaffronez.
P lus malement les auent dassez.
M eins sunt beles comest auis.
L eissent co dunc a tut dis.
¶ S i en les rues uet gigant.
H ome u fem~~m~~e sei demustrant.
S i co feit pur estre desire.
E n sun quor ad dunc pecche.

We will now speak of women, who go about with their trains too long. They would be much better giving the money spent [in indulging in this fashion] in alms to the poor, than trail it beneath their feet. In addition [this fashion of wearing] wimples dyed golden yellow with saffron will only add to the suffering that they will have.¹ In my opinion, it does not seem beautiful at all. These actions allow all [the church authorities or teachings] to say that, if in the streets they go dancing, and make merry and in doing so show themselves off to men or women, if all of this is done in order that they make themselves desirable, then in that case they themselves have sin in their hearts.

1. 'auent' has the sense of 'coming' as in Advent. The line refers to the idea of suffering in Purgatory or Hell.

Document 5

Special Collection PR1105.P4/30: Verses 10-13 of *Pleasant Quippes for Upstart Newfangled Gentlewomen: A Glasse to Viewe the Pride of Vaineglorious Women* by Stephen Gosson (1596, English) (London: Reprinted by T. Richards, for the executors of the late C. Richards, 1841)
Printed item in English, no transcription or translation available.

Document 6

WLC/LM/6, f. 198v: Heldris de Cornuälle, 'Le Roman de Silence', lines 2051-2056 (early 13th century, French)

Transcription by Kathryn Summerwill. Translation by Theresa Tyers

Et senos falons a oir Malle
Ceste ira aluent . **et** al halle
Ala froidure . **et** alabize
Moult bone garde . i aura mize
Deuant leferai estalcier
Fendre ses dras . braies calcier

But if we fail to have a male heir
This girl will go out in the wind and
burning sun,
In the cold and north-east wind.
We will protect and look after her well,
We will cut her hair short at the front,
Provide splits in her clothing, (put her)
in breeches, and provide her with
shoes.