

## **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 ȝernyng  
þat a man hæþ to a lechorous dede  
Is dedely synne þat men schuld Drede  
Al ȝif he faile of þat lecchory  
ȝit gret ȝernyng is synne dedely  
And þorow sich ȝernyng many men may  
Syn dedely ofte sithes on a day  
**Paraventure** nyne sithes or ten  
þorow þe sight of **sum** wymmen  
Lauedys or **oper** 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 ȝernen 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 ȝit mare  
þat eche lyme of hir is þe deuels snare  
Wharefore at þe laste day of dome  
When alle men schal before **rist** come  
And gret drede schal sche answeþe þan  
And **resoun** ȝilde of eche a man  
Of whom þe soule dampned es  
þorow **hire** dightyng **and** **hire** gaynes  
Al ȝif sche seme of good condicioun  
ȝif sich be **hire** entencioun  
þat I **þat** be held hir heued **and** body  
Had ȝernyng **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 lechery<sup>1</sup> 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 rod<sup>1</sup> (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 plague<sup>2</sup> should descend upon them. 'I can find no-one that will take me. No-one would dare to throw themselves in with me'.<sup>3</sup> 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 attentions<sup>4</sup> 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 femme sei demustrant.  
S i co fait 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.<sup>1</sup> 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.