



## Concerning the Wicked Woman | De Muliere Mala

### Text Information

Author | Petrus Pictor

Language | Latin

Period | 11th Century, 12th Century

Genre | Didactic poetry

Source |

URL | <https://sourcebook.stanford.edu/text/pictor-wicked-woman/>

Translation by Astrid Khoo.

### Introduction to the Text

Petrus Pictor, a canon (resident clergyman) at Saint-Omer in northern France, composed *De Muliere Mala* ('The Wicked Woman') in the late eleventh or early twelfth century. In his poem, Pictor first cites a litany of historical and biblical examples on the evil of womankind before detailing the fatal vengeance of a rebuffed mother-seducer who falsely accuses her own son of rape. *De Muliere Mala* thus participates in a long tradition of misogynistic Christian writing as embodied by Tertullian, a pioneering theologian from the second and third centuries AD, who interpreted Eve's fall from grace as a warning that women are 'the Devil's gateway' (*De Habitu Mulierum* 1.1). Nevertheless, it is far more than a mere moralising text, for its explicit treatment of incestuous lust looks to Classical models: Pictor accords a literary status to his verses by referencing ancient erotic writers such as Ovid (43BC-17/18AD) and Apuleius (c. 124-170 AD). The rhetoric of the poem is reinforced by its aggressive anaphoras (repeated phrases at the beginnings of certain lines) and pounding polysyndetons (lists of words linked only by conjunctions, typically 'and...and'), which simultaneously drive home the notion that all women are malicious and evoke the eponymous Wicked Woman's uncontrollable frenzy. Owing to these complex layers, this rarely-studied poem has the potential to please a diverse crowd. It is especially interesting to consider its portrayal of sexual aggression in the light of current debates on this topic, and to question its support of gender essentialism, that is, the notion that all women share the same malevolent characteristics. The poem is, moreover, an enjoyable read as it constitutes a thrilling psychological portrait on the extremities to which lust and pride can lead.

### Introduction to the Source

The *De Muliere Mala* was first compiled in the *Liber Floridus*, an 1120 encyclopedia containing what Lambert, a later canon of Saint Omer, considered to be the most important knowledge in his possession. The 'autograph copy', written in Lambert's own hand, is currently stored in the Ghent University Library as MS 92. The manuscript includes other Pictor poems, for example a satire on money narrated by the personified *Denarius* ('Dollar'). The fact that Pictor's work was deliberately excerpted for inclusion in this collection, alongside more well-known texts such as Isidore's *Etymologiae*, indicates that contemporaries appreciated its literary and moral value. While there are no exact duplicates, dozens of partial copies survive, including the twelfth-century French manuscript upon which this edition is based. Their proliferation suggests that Petrus Pictor, and by extension the *De Muliere Mala*, were frequently read in medieval European monasteries.

### Further Reading

Carver, Robert H. F. "Apuleius in the High Middle Ages", *The Protean Ass: The Metamorphoses of Apuleius from Antiquity to the Renaissance*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2007, pp. 61-107.

- Elaborates on how Pictor borrowed specific elements of his *De Muliere Mala* from Apuleius' descriptions of lustful women.

Derolez, Albert. *The Making and Meaning of the Liber Floridus: A Study of the Original Manuscript*, Ghent, University Library, MS 92. Turnhout: Brepols, 2015.

- A comprehensive introduction to the manuscript in which Pictor's poems were first transmitted.



Muir Tyler, Elizabeth. "Reading through the Conquest", *England in Europe: English Royal Women and Literary Patronage, c. 1000-1150*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2017, pp. 260-301.

- Describes the link between Pictor's life experiences (e.g. his travels outside Flanders) and his poetic style, while also highlighting key contemporaries.

Van Acker, Lieven, ed. *Petri Pictoris Carmina. Nec Non Petri de Sancto Audemaro Librum de Coloribus Faciendis*. CCCM 25. Turnhout: Brepols, 1972, pp. 103-116.

- Most recent Latin edition of Pictor's complete works, including the *De Muliere Mala*.

Wieser, Marie T. "Zu Petrus Pictors misogynem Carmen 14." *Wiener Studien*, vol. 115, 2002, pp. 315-20.

- The best introduction to this text is in German. This article discusses the structure and misogynistic themes of the *De Muliere Mala*, and demonstrates that Pictor borrowed heavily from Roman declamation.



## Concerning the Wicked Woman | De Muliere Mala

Quisquis male mulieris artes malas scire queris,  
Que subscripsi coacerua, lege disce, mente serua.  
Si uis tandem felix esse, haec ut legas est necesse.  
Hic addisces, hic uidebis, quid dimittes, quid tenebis.  
Hic Caribdis atque Sille patent antra, Syrtes mille,  
Hic describo Cyrcen lenam, absorbentemque bale-  
nam.  
Que ne formides in mari, nauis uectus salutari,  
Deum ama, fuge scortum. Castitatis tene portum.  
Uersus et euersus in me, dum fabrico uersus,  
Non ualeo fari, non scribere, non meditari,  
Ut fatear uerum, que sit feritas mulierum.  
Sed licet ad uotum nequeam describere totum,  
Quicquid de Scilla feritatis habundat in illa,  
Dicam pauca tamen, si det michi Musa iuuamen  
Prestat in orbe feris cunctis feritas mulieris,  
Tygri predoni prestat, rapidoque leoni;  
Uincitur istarum feritas, rabiesque ferarum,  
Hae\*que pati discunt homines illosque tremiscunt.  
Femina uero feris truculencior una seueris,  
Numquam pacatur, nulla ratione domatur,  
Non homini cedit, non sponte fauet nec obedit,  
Non ad iter recti ualet ullo uerbere flecti.  
Quo uexata magis fuerit mala femina plagis,  
Tanto maiorem studet exercere furorem.  
Nec mala desistit fieri, stimuloque resistit.  
Quisquis Samsonem considerat et Salomonem,  
Et reliquos multos mulieris amore sopitos  
Discet et intendet, mirabitur et reprehendet  
Exemplis ueris portenta male mulieris.  
Femina flamma furens, sed flammis acius urens  
Totum concussit mundum, succendit, et ussit.  
Hec est cunctorum caput, et scintilla malorum,  
Orbis que metas semper facit inquietas.  
O mala scintilla: quisquis succenditur illa,  
Ille nec indigne misero consumitur igne,

May you, who seek to know the wicked tricks of Woman,  
Read, learn, and keep in mind the verses written below.  
Indeed, if you wish to be happy, it is necessary that you read these words.  
Here you will learn and see what you will dismiss and what you will remember.  
Here lie open the caves of Scylla and Charybdis, along with a thousand Syrtes\*:  
Here I describe whorish Circe and the all-consuming whale\*.  
So that you will not fear these threats at sea, while you sail in a salutary ship,  
You should love God, flee harlotry, and seek the port of chastity.  
While I compose my verses, I twist and turn within my mind.  
I can barely speak, write, and think:  
10 How can I ever tell the entire truth about the savagery of women?  
Nevertheless, although I cannot describe it all, as I wish to,  
I shall speak a little – if the Muses come to my aid –  
About that Scyllan\* beastliness that abounds in Woman.  
The savagery of Woman exceeds that of all the beasts in the world;  
15 It puts to shame\* the preying tiger and swift-footed lion.  
On the one hand, the savagery of these creatures and the madness of all other beasts  
can be conquered,  
As they learn to bear the yoke and tremble at men.  
On the other hand, Woman alone is more ferocious than the fiercest beasts:  
20 She is never appeased, and can in no way be tamed.  
She does not yield to Man, nor favour him, nor obey him.  
She cannot be led to the right path with beatings;  
In fact, the more a wicked woman is harried by blows,  
The greater fury she strives to exhibit.  
25 Moreover, she does not cease becoming evil, but instead resists the spur.  
Whoever considers the cases of Samson and Solomon,  
And the many others brought to eternal rest by love of a woman,  
Will learn, notice, criticise and marvel at  
The real-life precursors of my 'wicked woman'.  
30 Woman, flaming mad, is singed all the more sharply by her own flames.  
She shakes up the whole world, lights it on fire, and burns it down.  
She is the beginning and spark of all evils,  
For she troubles the ends of the earth for eternity.  
O wicked spark: whoever is set alight by Woman  
35 is deservedly consumed by a wretched fire,



Nec nisi diuina ualet extingui medicina.  
Haec hominem primum de celso trusit in imum,  
Intulit et penam mundo, mortisque catenam.  
Sponsum, serpentem, uitam, genus, Omnipotentem,  
Prodidit, admisit, spreuit, uiciauit, omisit.  
Et quis eam laudet? Quicquid male cogitat audet,  
Et cupit expleri rem, qua rea possit haberi.  
Nil fugit incestum, cupit omne quod est inhonestum,  
Quicquid agit secum, fas siue nefas, putat equum.  
Femina terrarum confusio, mors animarum,  
Ut mundo late resonet scelerum nouitate,  
Nil dubium dubitat, nichil euitabile uitat,  
Nil intemptatum sinit, it scelus omne patratum,  
Ad causas quasque confundens fasque nefasque.  
Quo magis obscenum scelus est, magis huic fit  
amenum,  
Quo magis horrendum, magis hoc putat esse colen-  
dum.  
Imperium, sensum, uires, fastidia, censum,  
Optinet, emollit, minuit, generat, male tollit.  
Femina tormentum iuuenum, mortis monimentum,  
Mortem Samsoni dedit, interitum Salomoni.  
Femina priuauit pietatis robore Dauid,  
Quando per inuidiam iugulari fecit Uriam  
Coniuge pro pulchra multi subiere sepulcra.  
Femina plena malis, faera, pessima, demonialis,  
Priuauit uita Naboth, pro uitae cupita:  
Causa necis subitae sunt res plerumque cupite.  
Femina mors mundi, mala femina fabula mundi.  
Exicium, reges, insontes, federa, leges,  
Attulit, orbauit, strauit, soluit, uiolauit.  
Illa Ioseph iustum Veneris non ignibus ustum,  
Carcere dampnari fecit ferroque ligari.  
Hec etiam plena rabie truculenta leena  
Rex ferus artaret uinclis, gladioque necaret,  
Fecit ut athletam Domini magnumque prophetam  
Et tulit in disco caput illius, unde tremisco.

is deservedly consumed by a wretched fire,  
which cannot be extinguished unless by some divine remedy.  
It was Woman who first cast Man down from up high,  
bringing punishment and the chain of death to the world.  
40 She betrayed her husband, welcomed the serpent, spurned life,  
injured mankind, and lost the All-Powerful.\*  
And who shall praise her? She dares to perform whatever evil she thinks up,  
and yearns to commit some act, so that she will be perceived as guilty.  
She considers all her plans to be just, whether they be right or wrong.  
45 Woman is the disorder of lands and the death of souls:  
she is heard far and wide throughout the world due to the strangeness of her sins.  
She does not doubt that which is doubtful, nor avoid that which is avoidable,  
but leaves nothing untried, and commits every sin,  
confusing right and wrong for her own purposes.  
50 The more obscene a crime is, the more pleasant it seems to her;  
the more terrible a sin, the greater the glory she places upon it.  
She obtains power, weakens perception, diminishes strength,  
creates annoyance, and exhausts wealth.\*  
Indeed, Woman is a torment for young men and a reminder of death:  
she brought about Samson's demise and Solomon's end.  
55 She also deprived David of the strength of his piety,  
when he ordered Uriah's murder out of lustful envy.\*  
Many have gone to their graves due to their beautiful wives.  
Woman is full of evils, wild, demonic, the worst of all creatures.  
She took away Naboth's life to obtain his vineyard;\*  
60 she murders on sudden impulses, and especially out of greed.  
Indeed, Woman is the death of the world, and a wicked woman is its scandal.  
She brings destruction, murders kings, slaughters innocents,  
unbinds treaties, and violates laws.\*  
She saw to it that Joseph, who remained unburnt by the fires of Venus,  
65 was condemned to prison and bound in iron chains.  
Similarly, that aggressive whore\*, filled with madness,  
persuaded the savage king to bind in chains  
and kill the champion of the Lord, that great prophet:  
then she carried his head on a platter. How I tremble at this!\*

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Fabula Grecorum de libris promit eorum  
 Quomodo regina Cretensis, lege ferina,  
 Carnis ob ardorem nimium, mentisque furorem,  
 Taurum decipit niueum, coituque recepit  
 Et peperit natum, taurumque uirumque c[r]eatum:  
 Turpi nempe nota res est, per secula nota.  
 Quis non horrescat, quis non horrenda pauescat,  
 Dum contra legem nature, faemina regem,  
 Regem formosum, prudentem, deliciosum  
 Despiciat, atque fere succumbit plus muliere?  
 Femina, res fragilis, precio conducta monilis  
 In populo Danaum, male prodidit Amphiarum.  
 Sic quoque priuignum uita non funere dignum,  
 Usque renitentem patriumque cubile uerentem,  
 Prodidit Ypolitum, contra ius Phedra cupitum.  
 Naso suis libris inscribit quomodo Biblis  
 Igne sit illicito male saucia fratre cupito.  
 Fraude quidem mira Cynare coiit sua Myrra,  
 Inque loco [matris] concepit semine [patris].\*  
 Scylla patri Niso, fatali crine reciso,  
 Pretulit externum regem, regnumque paternum,  
 Moinos, concedit tibi, dum fieri tua credit,  
 Sed detestatus tam diri monstra reatus,  
 Et scelus et Scillam metuens, fugis hoc fugis illam.  
 De multis quandam referam per saecula notandam,  
 Ut relique discant mulieres, atque tremiscant,  
 Ne possint supra naturam turpia stupra.  
 Huic fuerat natus, uultu formaque beatus,  
 Si non obstaret mala sors, miserumque necaret.  
 Sed serpens ille, qui nos per carmina mille  
 Temptat, et intentat, mouet, incitat, atque cruentat,  
 Hunc infelicem mox fecit per genetricem.  
 Inquid enim genito genetrix, cupiensque cupito,  
 Inquid Adae seua mulier, simul anguis et Eua:  
 "Te uideo, fili, forma prestare uirili,

The books of the Greeks tell of  
 How the Cretan queen\*, following the customs of beasts,  
 Driven by mental madness and an excess of carnal lust,  
 Deceived a snow-white bull and copulated with him,  
 Eventually giving birth to a son who was half man and half bull.  
 This foul deed, which has been passed down through the centuries, is certainly infamous.  
 After all, who does not shrink in horror, and fear this repulsive act?  
 That a woman, against the law of nature, should spurn a king  
 – And no mere king, but handsome, prudent, and pleasant –  
 Only to have sex with a wild beast!  
 Woman, a fragile creature, bribed with the price of a necklace,  
 Betrayed Amphiarus to the Greek people.\*  
 Thus also did Phaedra betray Hippolytus, whom she desired unjustly,  
 And who was worthy of life and not of death,  
 All because he showed reverence for his father's bed by resisting her advances.\*  
 Similarly, Naso writes in his books about how Biblis  
 Was badly burnt by an illicit flame while she lusted after her brother.\*  
 Deceived in an astounding manner, Cinyras slept with his daughter,  
 Who, taking her mother's place, conceived by the seed of her father.\*  
 In the same vein, Scylla preferred you, Minos, to her father Nisus\*; having cut off that  
 fatal lock of hair,  
 She handed her father's kingdom over to you,  
 As she believed that she would be yours.  
 You avoid both Scylla and her crime, fearing them both.\*  
 I shall tell of one woman out of many, who must remain infamous throughout the centu-  
 ries,  
 So that other women might tremble at her example and learn  
 Not to seek foul sex which exceeds the bounds of nature.  
 This woman would have had a son, blessed in face and figure,  
 Had evil fate not gotten in the way and killed the poor youth:  
 Yet that serpent, who, through a thousand songs,  
 Tempts, attacks, moves, incites, and pollutes us,  
 Soon brought ruin upon the son through his own mother.  
 Thus she spoke to him\*, as a lover does to her beloved,  
 As the wild woman spoke to Adam, simultaneously both Eve and serpent:  
 "I see that you, my son, stand out with your manly looks:



Exornat uultum sua gratia, gloria cultum.  
De puero tali, tam pulchro, tam speciali  
Multum gauderem, tibi si plus matre placerem,  
Aut plus quam natus faceres michi consociatus.  
Visus formosus, ridens et luxuriosus  
Et bene pressa foris labra, dulcis plena saporis,  
Que te condecorant penitus, penitusque decorant,  
Me nimis incendunt, et me, si uis, tibi uendunt.  
Quapropter, fili, dum flore nites iuuenili,  
Dummodo pubescis, primoque calore rigescis,  
Ne perdas florem tenerum, tantumque decorem.  
Immo sit ad cunctas ueneres tua prona uoluntas:  
Canis confaecta celer aduolat, ecce senecta.  
Tecum non ludemus, sed tristia cuncta feremus.  
Et quia tiro rudis nescis his ludere ludis  
Quos amat ipsa Venus et Amor persuadet amenus,  
Tantum consenti michi, tantum crede docenti:  
Illos complebo tecum, iamiamque docebo.  
Ergo meis pare uotis, michi consociare,  
Quicquid agis meum celabo, con[s]cia tecum."  
Tandem turbatus materno famine natus,  
Heret, miratur, stupet, et quid agat meditatur,  
Speque bona fortis lacrimis ita fatur abortis:  
"Cara parens, pietate carens, miranda fateris,  
Criminibus mirabilibus nos perdere queris.  
Quod loqueris suadet Venus puer ipse Cupido  
Quo regitur, quo dirigitur mala cuique libido.  
Non ualeo, prohibente Deo, tibi consociari  
Coniugio, sed amore pio uolo castus amari.  
Cognita namque satis series cumsanguinitatis  
Hoc scelus accusat graviter, fierique recusat.  
Hinc gladius regis furit, hinc sententia legis,  
Cui nichil occultum, cui nullum crimen inultum.  
Mater amabilis, insuperabilis, ad meliora  
Te precor erige factaque corrige deteriora.

Your face is graceful and your dress does you honour.  
However, I would rejoice more greatly in such a boy – so beautiful and so special –  
If I brought you more pleasure than a mother does,  
Or if you became more than my son, having joined yourself to me.  
110 Your lovely face, smiling and luxuriant,  
And your lips, so suited to the shape of your mouth, full of sweet flavour –  
All these wholly adorn you, indeed they do\*,  
And set me exceedingly aflame: if you want me, you can have me.  
Therefore, my son, while you are in the flower of your youth,  
115 While you go through puberty and harden with the first flush of passion,  
Do not waste your tender prime and all this beauty.  
Instead, incline yourself towards all forms of sexual pleasure,  
For soon grey old age will come upon you.  
I am not joking with you, but rather suffering great sorrow at this prospect.  
120 Moreover, since you are but a young initiate, and do not know how to play the games  
Which Venus herself loves and pleasant Love suggests,  
Simply agree to my proposition and trust in my teaching.  
I will explore these games with you, teaching you to play again and again.  
Hence, obey my wishes, join yourself to me:  
125 As your accomplice, I shall keep secret all that you do with me."  
Disturbed by his mother's speech, the son  
Was lost for words. Flabbergasted and shocked, he thought of what he should do in  
response.  
Eventually, he spoke thus, shedding wasted tears in good faith:  
130 "Dear mother, you lack piety in speaking of such unusual matters:  
You seek to destroy us with these astounding crimes.  
What you said must have been inspired by Cupid himself, Venus' son,  
Who controls and directs each person's wicked lust.  
I am not able to join myself to you in marriage, since God prohibits it;  
135 Instead, I wish to love you chastely, with a pious love.  
Our biological bond  
Heavily condemns this crime and forbids it from happening;  
For if it were to take place, the sword of the King would rage against us, as would the  
sentence of His law:  
Nothing is hidden from Him, and no crime goes unpunished.  
140 My beloved and irreplaceable mother,  
I beg you to devote yourself to better deeds and correct your mistakes.





<p>Te Venus horrida flammaque torrida ledit amoris,  Vince uiriliter et iace fortiter arma pudoris.  Tela cupidinis atque libidinis ignea frange,  Percute pectora, perdita tempora, uel modo plange.  Stupra, negocia carnis, et ocia uana tremisce,  Spiritualia, perpetua, cuncta cupisce.  Suspice sidera, mater, et infera sperne deorsum,  Queque labencia uel moriencia linque retrorsum.  Scilicet omnia, sunt quasi somnia sunt fugitiva,  Lapsaque tempore, sunt sine robore, non rediuiua.”  Mater ad haec dicta, uelut ictu fulminis icta  Pallet, tabescit, quasi cera sub igne liquescit.  Defectu mentis, penitus ratione carentis,  Quod uidet offensam se, quod grauitur reprehensam,  Quod castigatur, quod casta manere rogatur.  Et, licet ingratum sibi senciatur hac uice natum,  Non tamen errori caedit, ceptoque furori,  Hunc sed in occulto male saucia tempore multo  Impetit, insequitur, nec eo pro uelle potitur,  Fertque graues penas, Veneris nec stringit habenas,  Dumque reluctatur Veneri, luctando grauatur.  Nec sua compescit mala, sed magis acta calescit,  At postquam cernit quia filius hanc male spernit,  Quod pereunt uerba, perit et sua messis in herba,  Fraudibus armatur, studet ut iuuenis perimatur.  Hac igitur causa, maius scelus ob scelus ausa,  Iudicis ad sedem currit, flens introit edem.  Accusat natum, iacit in quem dira reatum,  Dicens: “Huc, patres, oculos huc uertite, matres,  Vosque, pii nati, patribus bene semper amati,  Quos non incestus Veneris contaminat aestus,  Currite, deflete mecum, dampnate, dolete.  Dedecus illatum michi, monstriferumque reatum.  Rem referam fedam, pudet edere, sed tamen edam,  Vnde querar refero, minor est, querimonia uero.</p>	<p>Although terrible Venus has struck you with the torrid flame of desire  Nevertheless conquer it bravely and fight back strongly with the weapons of modesty.  Break down the spears of desire and the fires of lust:  Beat your breast and your wretched face*, or simply weep.  145 You should tremble at illicit sex, carnal intercourse, and vain leisure,  And instead long for things which are spiritual, perpetual, and whole.  Look at the stars, mother, and spurn whatever is below:  Leave behind all these earthly impulses while they fall and die.  All of these are like fleeting dreams;  150 Lacking strength, they melt away with time and do not return again.”  Upon hearing these words, the mother was as if struck by a bolt of lightning:  She grew pale, drooped, and melted like wax under a flame.  Due to her weakness of mind and complete lack of reason,  She felt offended and saw that she had been severely reprehended  155 And criticised. Moreover, she perceived that she was being asked to remain chaste.  Although this outcome diminished her affection towards her son,  She did not give in to error and carry out her insane plan.  Instead, she spent a long time nursing her wounds in secret,  All the while seeking her son and making advances on him, whom she was nevertheless  unable to obtain according to her wishes.  She suffered heavy penalties and failed to control her desire,  But rather felt herself to be all the more burdened while fighting against it.  Moreover, she did not put an end to her evils, but rather grew hotter as she acted:  After she saw that her son wholly despised her lust,  165 As evidenced by her wasted words and her inability to harvest the fruits of her labour,  She girt herself with treachery and tried to destroy the young man.  Consequently, driven to greater audacity by her existing crimes,  She ran into the courthouse and entered it while weeping.  She accused her son and brought dreadful charges against him,  170 Saying: “Look here, fathers, mothers,  And you, good beloved sons,  Whom the incestuous heat* of Venus has not contaminated:  Run to my side, cry with me, curse my son, and feel my pain.  I am the victim of an indignity and a monstrous crime.  175 It shames me to tell you about this sordid matter, but nevertheless I shall speak.  I barely know how to begin my complaint, but here it is.</p>
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Est puer insanus michi, lubricus, atque prophanus,  
Quem peperisse pudet me, cum mea turpia nudet,  
Quem doleo natum, male cum uideam fatuatum.  
Hic pecudum more, materno captus amore,  
Cum male seuiret nuper, matremque nequiret  
Donis oblatis, precibus quoque multiplicatis,  
Vincere, luctantis contra, stuprumque negantis  
Ora, cruentauit manibus, uestes lacerauit,  
Sic et sic egit, sic me ferus ille subegit,  
Non tamen oppressit, quia me clamante recessit.  
Ergo Deo gratus iudex prudensque senatus,  
Pertractent secum quid sit de talibus aequum.  
Quorum censura pollent ciuilia iura,  
Per quos maiorem res publica sumpsit honorem.  
Patrum magestas uilescit et urbis honestas,  
Ni melioratae fuerint cause uiciate.  
Non uni tantum fit dedecus hoc michi: quantum  
Innumeris turbis, que presunt menibus urbis.  
Nulla mei pietas nati, non forma, uel etas.  
Quamlibet aetatem moueat, precor, ad pietatem,  
Stupra sed obscena compescant uindice pena,  
Parui, maiores, iuuenes simul, et seniores."  
Sic accusatus puer, et mox ante uocatus  
Audit clamorem matris, lesumque pudorem.  
Stat, silet ad uerba nec acerbis reddit acerba,  
Immo uerecundus, lacrimabilis et pudibundus  
Vultum preclarum riuus rorat lacrimarum,  
Seque reum pingit, et vultum crimine tinguat,  
Malens torqueri, quam matris probra fateri,  
Malens dampnari, quam crimine commaculari.  
Cumque diu fleret suspirans, atque doleret  
Tam matris sortem, quam uicinam sibi mortem,  
Protinus, allatis annalibus et recitatis,  
Pena reperta datur, ut in amnem proiciatur.  
Ergo miser tandem mortem subiturus eandem,

I have a demented son who is lustful and profane.  
I am ashamed of having given birth to him, since he strips me naked;  
Oh, how I regret that he was born, since I see that he has gone thoroughly mad.  
He is a beast; captured by love for his own mother,  
180 He has been acting savagely towards me. Since he could not win his mother over  
Through gifts and unceasing entreaties,  
While I fought against him and turned my face from his lust  
He befouled me with his hands, tore my clothes apart,  
Did this and that, and pushed me down – the beast! – like this,  
185 But he did not possess me, for I shouted and forced him to retreat.  
May the judge, upon whom God smiles, and the wise assembly  
Determine among themselves a proportionate penalty for these acts:  
After all, it is their judgement which grants the law its power,  
And it is through them that the city gains greater honour.  
190 The majesty of the elders and the honour of the city  
Will be cheapened, unless injured parties receive amends.  
This disgrace does not affect me alone, but  
Taints all the uncountable crowds who flock to the walls of this city.  
My son has neither piety nor good looks, nor does his age excuse him.  
195 Even though he might use that excuse to win your mercy,\*  
I urge you all, whether great or small, whether young or old,  
To check these foul crimes of lust with a vengeful penalty."  
Thus the youth, who had been summoned a short while ago, found himself accused.  
He heard his mother's cries and perceived her lack of modesty.\*  
200 He stood in silence, and did not counter her bitter words with his own.  
Instead, he behaved in a reverent, doleful, and modest manner,  
Inundating his most handsome face with rivers of tears.  
He portrayed himself as the guilty party and tainted his own face with the charge,  
For he preferred to undergo torture rather than to speak ill of his mother,  
205 And to suffer condemnation rather than to be stained with such an offence.  
He wept for a long time, sighing all the while, equally troubled  
By his mother's eternal fate and his own approaching death.  
The legal records of the city were brought in and read out loud.  
A suitable punishment was found for the crime: the offender was to be thrown into the  
210 river.  
As both the judge and the mother urged the crowd on,





ludicis urgente monitu, genetrice petente,  
Vndique raptatur, trahitur, premitur, laceratur.  
Et sic dampnatus, postremo precipitatus  
Gurgitis in fundum, subiit baptismum secundum.  
At scelus occultum tandem non cessit inultum.  
Nam scelus uindex Dominus, iusti pius index,  
Vt foret incaestus matris populo manifestus,  
Fulminibus crebris missis, ortisque tenebris,  
Vrbem, carnificem, puerum, pueri genetricem,  
Vssit, turbauit, saluauit, dilacerauit.  
O nimium fortis mala femina, femina mortis,  
Eligit ante mori, quam stulto cedat amori.  
Mauult sectari stuprum, quam casta bear, i,  
Mauult ulcisci male, quam mater pia dici.  
225 Infelix mater, mala mater, nec modo mater,  
Quam, quoniam natum male perdidit amne necatum,  
Supplicii dignis, celestis torruit ignis.  
Femina terribilis draco, trux lupa, bestia uilis.  
Cum tristis diram leuiter prorumpit in iram,  
Non cito pacatur, non ante reconciliatur  
Quam paena multa, sibi uis illata, sit ulta.  
Hanc si ludentem male, uerbaque uana loquentem  
Eius uir uerbis aliquando coercesceret acerbis,  
Sive leui terret uirga, ne turpiter erret,  
Ilico facta dolens, et ei succumbere nolens,  
Plorat, tristatur, suspiria dat, meditatur,  
Qualiter ut uita careat, paret huic achonita.  
Tandem serpentum quesita uenena nocentum  
Necnon herbarum uirus graue mortiferarum  
Conficit in potum, complens de coniuge uotum.  
Hoc ita sublato sponso, uix et tumulto,  
Post malefactorum teneros questus lacrimarum,  
Coniunx quesiti subito cupit esse mariti,  
Et uelut inuita negat hoc prius, usque petita.  
Ast ubi suadentur rem, perstat cura parentum,

They seized, dragged, grabbed, and scratched  
The poor youth who was about to suffer this very death.  
Thus condemned, he was finally thrown  
Into the bottom of the river and underwent a second baptism.  
215 However, the mother's hidden crime did not go unpunished.  
The Lord, who takes vengeance for sins and bears pious witness on behalf of the just,  
Revealed her incest to the people.  
Sending down torrents of lightning and raising up the shadows,  
He incinerated the city, thwarted the executioner,  
220 Saved the youth, and tore the mother into pieces.\*  
O wicked and over-impudent woman – woman of death indeed –  
Who chose to die instead of giving up her fatuous love!  
She preferred to seek out illicit sex rather than to be praised for chastity,  
And to be punished severely instead of being praised as a pious mother.  
225 Wretched mother, wicked mother, and not even a true mother:\*  
Having drowned her own son,  
She burned with the just punishment of celestial fire.  
Woman is a terrible serpent\*, an aggressive she-wolf, a vile beast.  
That miserable creature bursts into fatal rage at the smallest provocation,  
230 And cannot be appeased quickly; on the contrary, she is never reconciled  
Until she has avenged herself through violence.  
If her husband should, on some occasion, restrain her with a sharp scolding  
From clowning around and babbling vain words,  
Or even deter her from committing foul misdeeds with a stick,  
235 She will henceforth take offence and refuse to sleep with him\*.  
She will cry, upset herself, sigh, and think of  
How to deprive him of his life. To this end she will prepare him some monkshood.\*  
Indeed, having obtained the venom of poisonous snakes  
And the deadly toxin of death-bringing plants,  
240 She will mix them into a drink and thus fulfill her plan against her husband.  
Even while he is still warm in his grave,  
She will put on tender displays of crocodile tears,  
And seek to become another man's wife.  
However, she will feign unwillingness until she obtains a strong suit;  
245 Then, when her parents insist on the marriage



Nec contradici debere fatentur amici,  
Laeticiae plenas uotorum laxat habenas,  
Menteque iocunda, sponso sit sponsa secula.  
Quodque propinauit primo, quem perfida strauit,  
Si sit uir durus, erit alter idem bibiturus.  
Femina formosa nimis esset res preciosa,  
Si male nil cuperet, si sponso fida maneret.  
Sed, quod abhorrendum nimis est cunctisque pudendum,  
Vix habet ulla fidem, qua credi possit eidem.  
Que quo diligitur magis, hoc grauior reperitur,  
Quo magis ornatur, magis inde superba notatur.  
Nescit maiorem, nescit se ferre minorem,  
Par\* quoque iuncta pari, cupit impariter dominari.  
Res optatiua nimis est, animeque nociua.  
Illius uultus, bene conditus, et bene cultus,  
Allicit, innectit iuuenes, sua sub iuga flectit  
Apte ludendo, psallendo, uana loquendo.  
Que dum spectari, dum se presentit amari,  
Querit maiorem membris augere decorem.  
Tunc pingit uisum gratum, format bene risum,  
Vestibus ornatur nitidis, gemmis honeratur,  
Floribus innectit crines, et se bene pectit,  
Stricta succiungit se zona, basia fingit  
Qualia uelle putat iuuenes, iuuenesque salutat,  
Fertque manu flores, et dulces cantat amores.  
Si uero nescit cantare, loquendo capescit  
Cor auditoris, quod uulnere languet amoris,  
Factaque uenalis, uenatio demonialis,  
Prostat, ut incaestum querat de corpore questum.  
Iupiter\* hanc aliquis oculis dum cernit iniquis  
Sic incedentem, iuuenes sic allicientem,  
Vultu candenti nitidam, cultuque decenti,  
Eius uexatur mox ignibus, et meditatur:  
Qualiter hanc Ledam celerem faciat sibi predam,  
Quam prece pretemptat, donis persepe frequentat,

And her friends persuade her not to refuse him,  
She will gladly give in to happiness  
And transform herself into a worldly wife for her new husband  
Yet if he proves difficult, he will drink the same potion  
250 That she served her first husband, whom she treacherously murdered.  
A beautiful woman is precious beyond all description  
If she has no bad intentions and remains faithful to her husband,  
But it should be a source of horror and shame to all women  
That none of them can be trusted.  
The more a woman is loved, the more troublesome she becomes;  
255 Similarly, she grows all the more arrogant as a result of rich ornaments.  
As a result, she does not recognise her superior, nor does she fulfill her inferior role in an appropriate manner.  
Although she is joined to an equal in marriage, she wants to take an unequal share of power.  
Woman is too desirable and thus harms the soul.  
260 Through her well-formed and well-groomed face,  
She attracts and ensnares young men; she enslaves them  
By playing games, performing music, and chatting about empty matters.  
When she perceives that she is being watched and admired,  
She seeks to enhance her physical beauty:  
265 Consequently, she paints her face beautifully, sets her mouth into a smile,  
Dresses herself in shining garments, and weighs herself down with jewels  
She weaves flowers into her hair and arranges it in a becoming manner,  
And also girds herself with a tightened belt. She performs the sort of kisses  
Which she expects will please young men\*, greets them warmly,  
270 Carries flowers in her hands, and sings about sweet romance.  
However, even if she cannot sing, she uses her speech  
To capture her listener's heart, which throbs with the wound of love.  
Selling herself to him, hunting him like a demon,  
She incites him into seeking illicit pleasure from her body.  
275 Some Jupiter, armed with his impure gaze,  
Sees her behaving in this manner and attracting young men;  
He notices the shine of her pale face and her decorous dress.  
Immediately, he feels himself singed by fire, and considers  
How he should quickly take possession of this new Leda.  
280 He seduces her with entreaties and showers her in gifts,



Vt sua postposito uelit esse puella marito.  
Sed male securus coniuncx de coniuge durus,  
Quam sic prostantem, sic cernit ubique uagantem,  
Arguit etatem teneram, puerae leuitatem,  
Inque domo, tenere flentem cogit residere,  
Vallatamque seris, custodibus atque seueris,  
Non sinit exire thalamis, ludosque subire.  
Quam quia custodit, non diligit ille sed odit,  
Odit et infestat, et ut hec sit adultera prestat.  
Cui custos durus nequid aut obsistere murus,  
Non iugis pena, sed nec sera, siue catena,  
Quin faciat secum, si uult, colludere mechum.  
O male seruatus thesaurus sic uiolatus,  
Qui dum seruatur, furem uocat ut rapiatur.  
Atque quod obscenum nimis est, querens alienum,  
Sponsa suum prodit sponsum, contempnit et odit.  
Ergo monstrierae metuens, homo, dampna Chimere,  
Sis exemplorum memor hic tibi propositorum;  
Nuptas matronas, ad plurima crimina pronas  
Donaque prebentes uiduas, in amore furentes,  
Necnon uirgineas uitare memento choreas,  
Illarum mammas teneras fugiens quasi flammas.  
Hostibus his ternis, ut prescriptum bene cernis,  
Incentiuorum crescunt fomenta malorum.  
Has fuge serpentes uirus letale uomentes,  
Has hostes uita, ne te fugiat tua uita.  
Claustra tue mentis signato meis documentis,  
Ne liget illecebris uariis te fraus muliebris.  
Quem semel illa ligat, curis sine fine fatigat,  
Quem sub se flectit, seruili compede nectit.  
Res ita plena dolis non est sub sidere solis  
Rebus in innumeris, uelut est animus mulieris.  
O quam fallaci modulo studioque sagaci,  
Stultos comprehendit iuuenes ubi retia tendit!  
Fraudis multimodos uersuto pectore nodos

So that she might give herself to him behind her husband's back.  
Nevertheless, her strict husband begins to feel insecure,  
As he sees her offering herself freely and wandering all about.  
On account of her young age and her youthful levity,  
285 He forces his tearful wife to stay at home.  
He walls her in with lock and key and assigns her care to austere guards,  
Forbidding her from leaving the marital home and entering into her usual games.  
However, because he guards her, he ceases to love her:  
Instead he hates her and attacks her, treating her as an adulteress.  
290 In any case, nothing - not a strict guard, not walls,  
Not punishments, bars, or chains -  
Can stop her from taking on a lover:  
O badly-preserved treasure, thus violated,  
Which encourages a thief to steal it even while it is being guarded!  
295 What is more, it is extremely obscene that a wife, while seeking another man,  
Should betray, despise, and hate her own husband.  
Therefore, reader, fearing the injuries of that monstrous Chimera\*,  
Keep the aforementioned examples in mind.  
Remember to avoid married women, who are given to many offences,  
300 As well as love-crazed widows offering gifts\*.  
Leave dancing maidens alone,  
And flee their tender breasts as if they were made of flame.  
These three types of foes – as the preceding verses indicate –  
Incite and encourage the growth of many evils.  
305 Avoid therefore these serpents who spit out fatal venom,  
And flee these enemies, lest you should lose your life.  
Seal the gates of your mind with my examples,  
So that you will not find yourself entangled by the various traps of female deceit.  
Once a woman has trapped a man, she will harass him with unending cares;  
310 Once she has forced him into subservience, she will shackle him into servitude.  
There is nothing at all under the sun which is more filled with tricks  
Than the soul of Woman.  
O, with such cunning means and keen enthusiasm  
Does she seize foolish youths and scoop them up in her net!  
315 In her trickery, she twists knots of all kinds within her chest,



Voluit, et euoluit, soluit, ligat atque resoluit,  
Vt male seducat miseros, et ad infera ducat.  
Quisquis ei cedit, nec ab eius amore recedit,  
Tandem falletur, tandem laqueo capietur;  
Cuius amor, uisus, caro mollis, basia, risus,  
Alloquium, tactus, uariique libidinis actus,  
Vox etiam lena, laqueus sunt atque catena,  
Et graue tormentum quorumlibet insipientum.  
Felix est supere quisquis ualet ista cauere,  
Quem non haec tangit contagio, non furor angit.  
Hic infelicem probo quisquis amat meretricem,  
Cuius amor dirus, tandem pungens quasi uirus,  
Sub specie mellis distillat pocula fellis,  
Cuius amor nex est, caro uermis, gloria fex est,  
Verba, lenis uentus, fumus decor, umbra iuuentus.  
Iam calamo fesso, que sit mala femina cesso  
Scribere. Quod scripsi minus est quam congruit ipsi.  
Si michi Nasonis, si detur lingua Catonis,  
Claraque linguarum facundia magniloquarum,  
Non tamen exsoluo uerbis, scriptisque reuoluo,  
Quam sit uersuta, quam perfida, quam sit acuta,  
Quam sit dampnosa mala femina, quamue dolosa.  
Nesciat hoc nemo, quod carmine signo supremo:  
Femina rara bona, sed que bona digna corona.

Untwists them, unties them, ties them again, then once more unties them:  
She does all this in order to seduce wretched souls and lead them to Hell.  
Therefore, whoever yields to Woman and does not give up his love  
Will find himself deceived and caught in a noose\*.  
320 The love, sight, soft flesh, kisses, smiles,  
Conversation, touch, lustful acts,  
And whorish voice of Woman are all nooses, chains,  
And heavy torments for the unwise.  
He who can avoid these things is truly fortunate;  
325 For madness does not disturb the man who remains uncontaminated by Woman.  
I say truly, whoever loves a whore is most unfortunate indeed;  
For her love is fatal and stings like venom,  
And she prepares a cup of bitterness in the guise of honey.  
Her love is a chain, her flesh is vermin, her glory comprises the dregs of the earth;  
330 Her words are a soft breeze, and yet her smokescreen of beauty is but the shadow of youth.  
My pen is exhausted\*; I shall now stop writing about the wicked Woman.  
Nevertheless, what I have managed to set down falls far short of Woman's fair share of censure.  
Even if I should receive the tongue of Ovid or that of Cato,  
335 And the famed skill of linguistic eloquence,  
I would not be able to outline in words or describe in my verses  
How wily, treacherous, keen,  
Dangerous, and sneaky a wicked woman is.  
Let no one be unaware of the following truth, with which I shall round off my poem:  
'Rarely is a woman good, but a good woman is worthy of a crown.'



## Critical Notes

### Translation

- Line 5** The Gulf of Sirte, infamous for its hazardous sandbanks, is located on the northern coast of Libya.
- Line 6** This is perhaps a reference to Jonah 1.17.
- Line 14** There are two Scyllas mentioned in the poem – the aquatic monster Scylla (Hom. *Od.*) and Scylla, princess of Megara. In this case, the term *feritatis* ('[of] beastliness') evokes the former rather than the latter.
- Line 16** 'Puts to shame' is an idiomatic translation of '*prestat*' and its dative object; more literally, 'The savagery of Woman exceeds that of the preying tiger and the swift-footed lion'.
- Line 18** As is expected with medieval manuscripts, the 'ae' digraph is confused with the letter 'e' throughout. I have preserved the [mis]spellings of the manuscript. In this case 'ae' is used correctly, but often it is not (cf. line 78).
- Line 40** In the original Latin, this sentence is constructed using two asyndetic verses: 'Her husband, the serpent, life, mankind, and the All-Powerful / she betrayed, welcomed, spurned, injured, and lost.'
- Line 53** The original Latin is constructed in the same way as the note suggested on line 40.
- Line 57** This refers to 2 Samuel 11:5-27. David places Uriah at the front lines of a dangerous battle so as to eliminate him, as he was enamoured with Uriah's wife, Bathsheba.
- Line 60** This refers to 1 Kings 21:2-15. Jezebel has Naboth killed so that her husband, King Ahab, can have Naboth's vineyard.
- Line 64** The original Latin is constructed in the same way as the note suggested on line 40.
- Line 67** The aggressive whore refers to Salome.
- Line 70** The original Latin literally means 'at which I tremble'.
- Line 72** This refers to Pasiphaë.
- Line 82** This refers to Eriphyle, Amphiarus' wife, persuaded him to join a fatal raid. See Ps.-Apollodorus *Bibliotheca* 3.8.2.
- Line 85** Cf., among others, Euripides' *Hippolytus*
- Line 87** This refers to Ov. *Met.* 9.
- Line 89** BnF Ms. Lat. 16699, f. 176v reads: 'Inque loco patris concepit semine matris.' However this is illogical and likely the result of scribal error. My reading is supported by the critical edition, Van Acker, L. (ed.) (1972). *Petri Pictoris Carmina. Nec Non Petri de Sancto Audemaro Librum de Coloribus Faciendis*. CCCM 25. Turnhout (Brepols): 103-116, which is mainly derived from BnF Ms. Lat. 13768.
- Line 89** Ibid., 10.300ff. Cinyras' daughter was named Myrrha.
- Line 90** This is different from the note in line 14. In this case, this is Scylla, princess of Megara.
- Line 94** The abrupt shift to second-person from the original third-person omniscient viewpoint is noteworthy; in so doing, Petrus Pictor does not only address Minos, Scylla's love interest, but also involves the reader. He therefore rounds off his long invective against women, which has been building up in an increasingly emotional crescendo, by breaking the fourth wall. Moreover, lines 90 to 94 are especially noteworthy as they include a sliding scale of tenses – the ablative absolute (*reciso*, 'having cut off') gives way to the perfect indicative (*pretulit...credit*, 'preferred...believed'), and then to a perfect participle (*detestatus*, 'detesting'), which in turn yields to a present participle (*metuens*, 'fearing'), culminating finally in the present indicative (*fugis*, 'you avoid').



This gradual rise from the past into the present parallels the aforementioned shift in perspective, and underscores Petrus Pictor's message about the constant danger which women pose. He suggests that his warnings should not be dismissed as historical and biblical examples from the distant past, but as mere 'precursors' (line 29, *portenta*) to female wickedness in the reader's present life.

- Line 103* While present-tense verbs are used throughout the following narrative, I have translated it using past-tense verbs for two key reasons. Firstly, the historic present is commonly used for narratives involving a series of events, which applies to this case. Secondly, by translating the story of the wicked woman in the past tense, I distinguish it from the frame narrative which takes place in the author's present time.
- Line 112* Instead of 'indeed they do', the Latin (line 112) simply repeats the previous phrase with an inverted word order, which cannot be expressed in English: 'All these wholly adorn you, adorn you.'
- Line 144* '*Perdita tempora*', literally 'lost temples' (i.e. sides of forehead), is a metonymic construction, here used to mean 'wretched face'.
- Line 171* '*Incestus...aestus*' would typically be translated as 'impure heat', but due to the specific context in which this phrase is uttered – an accusation of incest – I have chosen the adjective 'incestuous'.
- Line 195* It is tempting to translate '*pietatem*' as 'your piety', but '*pietas*' really means '*miser cordia*' ('mercy') in this case.
- Line 199* This is more literally expressed as 'her broken modesty', or 'her damaged modesty'.
- Line 220* The original Latin is constructed in the same way as the note suggested on line 40.
- Line 225* '*Nec modo mater*' literally means 'and not only a mother' or even 'no mere mother', but these translations do not convey Pictor's negative tone.
- Line 228* In Classical Latin, '*draco*' denotes a large snake; in Medieval Latin it may well mean 'dragon'. However, as Petrus Pictor has utilised snake metaphors throughout to describe women – which corresponds to Biblical imagery – I would rather err on the safe side and translate '*draco*' as 'serpent'.
- Line 235* Petrus Pictor utilises the present tense throughout; nevertheless, I have employed the future tense to preserve the emphasis on cause-and-effect in this passage, the cause being the punishment (stick, scolding) and the effect being murder (by poisoning).
- Line 237* This sentence might seem incongruous with the following one, which describes other sources of poison; therefore it is best to take *achonita*, 'monkshood', as an umbrella term for all poisons.
- Line 258* BnF Ms. Lat. 16699, f. 177v reads: '*Pars quoque vincta pari*', but this is illogical and should read 'par', which is the preferred reading of Van Acker (1972).
- Line 269* '*Fingere*' here translated as 'perform', has a dual meaning which is also applicable to these verses on the trickery which accompanies seduction: it can also mean 'to invent'.
- Line 275* The scribe glosses '*amator*', 'lover', for '*Iupiter*'.
- Line 297* In Greek mythology, the Chimera is a fire-breathing hybrid creature. '*Monstrifera*' is more literally translated as 'monster-bringing' but the Chimera, which symbolises Woman, does not usher in other beasts: it is monstrous in itself.
- Line 300* This verse strongly echoes Verg. *Aen.* 2.49: '*Timeo Danaos et dona ferentes*' ('I fear the Greeks, even bearing gifts').
- Line 319* '*Laqueus*' can also mean 'trap' more generally.
- Line 331* This is the literal meaning of '*calamo fesso*', but Pictor of course does not refer to the inanimate pen, but to himself: 'I am exhausted'.