

# Concerning the Wicked Woman | De Muliere Mala

### **Text Information**

Author | Petrus Pictor
Language | Latin
Period | 11th Century, 12th Century
Genre | Didactic poetry
Source | BnF MS lat. 16699 176v-77v
URL | https://sourcebook.stanford.edu/text/pictor-wicked-woman/

Introduction and 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 knowled 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 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.

## **About this Edition**

The source used for transcription and translation is BnF MS lat. 16699 176v-77v, a twelfth-century miscellany containing both Christian poetry and saints' lives. The orthography, capitalisation and segmentation of the manuscript have been preserved in this edition, but abbreviations have been expanded. The transcription has been compared to that of Van Acker (see Further Reading), although his edition is primarily based on BnF MS lat. 13768. While the prose translation does not preserve the Latin rhymes, care has been taken to reproduce Petrus Pictor's rhythmic style and aggressive diction.





Petrus Pictor. "Concerning the Wicked Woman | De Muliere Mala". Trans. Astrid Khoo. Global Medieval Sourcebook. 2021. https://sourcebook.stanford.edu/text/pictor-wicked-woman/.

## **Further Reading**

Carver, Robert H. F. "Apuleius in the High Middle Ages 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

Spacing: it makes sense, but numbers could be closer to the center of the page

May you, who seek to know the wicked tricks of Woman,

Read, learn, and keep in mind the 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.

5 Here lie open the caves of Scylla and Charybdis, along with a thousand Sirtes:

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.

10 I can barely speak, write, and think:

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;

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.

20 On the other hand, Woman alone is more ferocious than the fiercest beasts:

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.

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'.

# 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 balenam. Que ne formides in mari, naui 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, rapidogue leoni; Uincitur istarum feritas, rabiesque ferarum, Hae que pati discunt homines illosque tremiscunt. Femina uero feris truculencior una seueris, Numquam pacatur, nulla racione 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, stimulogue resistit. Quisquis Samsonem considerat et Salomonem, Et reliquos multos mulieris amore sopitos Discet et intendet, mirabitur et reprehendet

Exemplis ueris portenta male mulieris.

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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 colendum. 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.

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. 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. 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. 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. 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; 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.



Fabula Grecorum de libris promit eorum 60 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. 65 Quis non horrescat, quis non horrenda pauescat, Dum contra legem nature, faemina regem, Regem formosum, prudentem, deliciosum Despicit, atque fere succumbit plus muliere? Femina, res fragilis, precio conducta monilis 70 In populo Danaum, male prodidit Amphiaraum. Sic quoque priuignum uita non funere dignum, Usque renitentem patriumque cubile uerentem, Prodidit Ypolitum, contra ius Phedra cupitum. Naso suis libris inscribit quomodo Biblis 75 Igne sit illicito male saucia fratre cupito. Fraude quidem mira Cynare coiit sua Myrra, Inque loco [matris] concepit semine [patris]. Scilla patri Niso, fatali crine reciso, Pretulit externum regem, regnumque paternum, 80 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 saecla notandam, 85 Ut relique discant mulieres, atque tremiscant, Ne poscant supra naturam turpia stupra. Huic fuerat natus, uultu formague beatus, Yet that serpent, who, through a thousand songs, Si non obstaret mala sors, miserumque necaret.

The books of the Greeks tell of How the Cretan gueen, 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 Amphiaraus 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 centuries, 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:



Exornat uultum sua gratia, gloria cultum. Your face is graceful and your dress does you honour. 90 De puero tali, tam pulchro, tam speciali 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, Multum gauderem, tibi si plus matre placerem, Aut plus quam natus faceres michi consociatus. Or if you became more than my son, having joined yourself to me. Visus formosus, ridens et luxuriosus Your lovely face, smiling and luxuriant, Et bene pressa foris labra, dulcis plena saporis, And your lips, so suited to the shape of your mouth, full of sweet flavour -Que te condecorant penitus, penitusque decorant, 95 All these wholly adorn you, indeed they do, Me nimis incendunt, et me, si uis, tibi uendunt. And set me exceedingly aflame: if you want me, you can have me. Quapropter, fili, dum flore nites iuuenili, Therefore, my son, while you are in the flower of your youth, Dummodo pubescis, primoque calore rigescis, While you go through puberty and harden with the first flush of passion, Ne perdas florem tenerum, tantumque decorem. Do not waste your tender prime and all this beauty. Immo sit ad cunctas ueneres tua prona uoluntas: 100 Instead, incline yourself towards all forms of sexual pleasure, Canis confaecta celer aduolat, ecce senecta. For soon grey old age will come upon you. Tecum non ludemus, sed tristia cuncta feremus. I am not joking with you, but rather suffering great sorrow at this prospect. Et quia tiro rudis nescis his ludere ludis Moreover, since you are but a young initiate, and do not know how to play the games Quos amat ipsa Venus et Amor persuadet amenus, Which Venus herself loves and pleasant Love suggests, Tantum consenti michi, tantum crede docenti: 105 Simply agree to my proposition and trust in my teaching. Illos complebo tecum, iamiamque docebo. I will explore these games with you, teaching you to play again and again. Ergo meis pare uotis, michi consociare, Hence, obey my wishes, join yourself to me: Quicquid agis meum celabo, con[s]cia tecum." As your accomplice, I shall keep secret all that you do with me." Tandem turbatus materno famine natus, Disturbed by his mother's speech, the son Heret, miratur, stupet, et quid agat meditatur, 110 Was lost for words. Flabbergasted and shocked, he thought of what he should Speque bona fortis lacrimis ita fatur abortis: do in response. "Cara parens, pietate carens, miranda fateris, Eventually, he spoke thus, shedding wasted tears in good faith: Criminibus mirabilibus nos perdere queris. "Dear mother, you lack piety in speaking of such unusual matters: Quod logueris suadet Venus puer ipse Cupido You seek to destroy us with these astounding crimes. <mark>115</mark> What you said must have been inspired by Cupid himself, Venus' son, Quo regitur, quo dirigitur mala cuique libido. Non ualeo, prohibente Deo, tibi consociari Who controls and directs each person's wicked lust. Coniugio, sed amore pio uolo castus amari. I am not able to join myself to you in marriage, since God prohibits it;



Te Venus horrida flammaque torrida ledit amoris,		Although terrible Venus has struck you with the torrid flame of desire
Vince uiriliter et iace fortiter arma pudoris.		Nevertheless conquer it bravely and fight back strongly with the weapons of modesty.
Tela cupidinis atque libidinis ignea frange,	120	Break down the spears of desire and the fires of lust:
Percute pectora, perdita tempora, uel modo plange.		Beat your breast and your wretched face*, or simply weep.
Stupra, negocia carnis, et ocia uana tremisce,		You should tremble at illicit sex, carnal intercourse, and vain leisure,
Spiritualia, perpetualia, cuncta cupisce.		And instead long for things which are spiritual, perpetual, and whole.
Suspice sidera, mater, et infera sperne deorsum,		Look at the stars, mother, and spurn whatever is below:
Queque labencia uel moriencia linque retrorsum.	125	Leave behind all these earthly impulses while they fall and die.
Scilicet omnia, sunt quasi somnia sunt fugitiva,		All of these are like fleeting dreams;
Lapsaque tempore, sunt sine robore, non rediuiua."		Lacking strength, they melt away with time and do not return again."
Mater ad haec dicta, uelut ictu fulminis icta		Upon hearing these words, the mother was as if struck by a bolt of lightning:
Pallet, tabescit, quasi cera sub igne liquescit.		She grew pale, drooped, and melted like wax under a flame.
Defectu mentis, penitus ratione carentis,	130	Due to her weakness of mind and complete lack of reason,
Quod uidet offensam se, quod grauiter reprehensam,		She felt offended and saw that she had been severely reprehended
Quod castigatur, quod casta manere rogatur.		And criticised. Moreover, she perceived that she was being asked to remain chaste.
Et, licet ingratum sibi senciat hac uice natum,		Although this outcome diminished her affection towards her son,
Non tamen errori caedit, ceptoque furori,		She did not give in to error and carry out her insane plan.
Hunc sed in occulto male saucia tempore multo	135	Instead, she spent a long time nursing her wounds in secret,
Impetit, insequitur, nec eo pro uelle potitur,		All the while seeking her son and making advances on him, whom she was nevertheless
Fertque graues penas, Veneris nec stringit habenas,		unable to obtain according to her wishes.
Dumque reluctatur Veneri, luctando grauatur.		She suffered heavy penalties and failed to control her desire,
Nec sua compescit mala, sed magis acta calescit,		But rather felt herself to be all the more burdened while fighting against it.
At postquam cernit quia filius hanc male spernit,	140	Moreover, she did not put an end to her evils, but rather grew hotter as she acted:
Quod pereunt uerba, perit et sua messis in herba,		After she saw that her son wholly despised her lust,
Fraudibus armatur, studet ut iuuenis perimatur.		As evidenced by her wasted words and her inability to harvest the fruits of her labour,
Hac igitur causa, maius scelus ob scelus ausa,		She girt herself with treachery and tried to destroy the young man.
ludicis ad sedem currit, flens introit edem.		Consequently, driven to greater audacity by her existing crimes,
Accusat natum, iacit in quem dira reatum,	145	She ran into the courthouse and entered it while weeping.
Dicens: "Huc, patres, oculos huc uertite, matres,		She accused her son and brought dreadful charges against him,



I have a demented son who is lustful and profane. Est puer insanus michi, lubricus, atque prophanus, I am ashamed of having given birth to him, since he strips me naked; Quem peperisse pudet me, cum mea turpia nudet, Quem doleo natum, male cum uideam fatuatum. 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, Hic pecudum more, materno captus amore, 150 He has been acting savagely towards me. Since he could not win his mother over Cum male seuiret nuper, matremque nequiret Through gifts and unceasing entreaties, Donis oblatis, precibus quoque multiplicatis, While I fought against him and turned my face from his lust Vincere, luctantis contra, stuprumque negantis Ora, cruentauit manibus, uestes lacerauit, He befouled me with his hands, tore my clothes apart, Sic et sic egit, sic me ferus ille subegit, 155 Did this and that, and pushed me down - the beast! - like this, But he did not possess me, for I shouted and forced him to retreat. Non tamen oppressit, quia me clamante recessit. May the judge, upon whom God smiles, and the wise assembly Ergo Deo gratus iudex prudensque senatus, Determine among themselves a proportionate penalty for these acts: Pertractent secum quid sit de talibus aequum. Quorum censura pollent ciuilia iura, After all, it is their judgement which grants the law its power, And it is through them that the city gains greater honour. Per quos maiorem res publica sumpsit honorem. 160 The majesty of the elders and the honour of the city Patrum magestas uilescit et urbis honestas, Will be cheapened, unless injured parties receive amends. Ni melioratae fuerint cause uiciate. This disgrace does not affect me alone, but Non uni tantum fit dedecus hoc michi: quantum Innumeris turbis, que presunt menibus urbis. 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. Nulla mei pietas nati, non forma, uel etas. 165 Even though he might use that excuse to win your mercy, Quamlibet aetatem moueat, precor, ad pietatem, Stupra sed obscena compescant uindice pena, I urge you all, whether great or small, whether young or old, To check these foul crimes of lust with a vengeful penalty." Parui, maiores, iuuenes simul, et seniores." Thus the youth, who had been summoned a short while ago, found himself accused. Sic accusatus puer, et mox ante uocatus Audit clamorem matris, lesumque pudorem. He heard his mother's cries and perceived her lack of modesty. 170 He stood in silence, and did not counter her bitter words with his own. Stat, silet ad uerba nec acerbis reddit acerba, Instead, he behaved in a reverent, doleful, and modest manner, Immo uerecundus, lacrimabilis et pudibundus Inundating his most handsome face with rivers of tears. Vultum preclarum riuis rorat lacrimarum, He portrayed himself as the guilty party and tainted his own face with the charge, Seque reum pingit, et vultum crimine tinguit, For he preferred to undergo torture rather than to speak ill of his mother, Malens torqueri, quam matris probra fateri, 175



They seized, dragged, grabbed, and scratched ludicis urgente monitu, genetrice petente, The poor youth who was about to suffer this very death. Vndique raptatur, trahitur, premitur, laceratur. Thus condemned, he was finally thrown Et sic dampnatus, postremo precipitatus Into the bottom of the river and underwent a second baptism. Gurgitis in fundum, subiit baptisma secundum. However, the mother's hidden crime did not go unpunished. At scelus occultum tandem non cessit inultum. 180 The Lord, who takes vengeance for sins and bears pious witness on behalf of the just, Nam scelerum uindex Dominus, iusti pius index, Revealed her incest to the people. Vt foret incaestus matris populo manifestus, Fulminibus crebris missis, ortisque tenebris, Sending down torrents of lightning and raising up the shadows, Vrbem, carnificem, puerum, pueri genetricem, He incinerated the city, thwarted the executioner, 185 Saved the youth, and tore the mother into pieces. Vssit, turbauit, saluauit, dilacerauit. O wicked and over-impudent woman – woman of death indeed – O nimium fortis mala femina, femina mortis, Who chose to die instead of giving up her fatuous love! Eligit ante mori, quam stulto cedat amori. She preferred to seek out illicit sex rather than to be praised for chastity, Mauult sectari stuprum, quam casta beari, And to be punished severely instead of being praised as a pious mother. Mauult ulcisci male, quam mater pia dici. Wretched mother, wicked mother, and not even a true mother: 225Infelix mater, mala mater, nec modo mater, 190 Having drowned her own son, Quam, quoniam natum male perdidit amne necatum, She burned with the just punishment of celestial fire. Suppliciis dignis, celestis torruit ignis. Woman is a terrible serpent, an aggressive she-wolf, a vile beast. Femina terribilis draco, trux lupa, bestia uilis. That miserable creature bursts into fatal rage at the smallest provocation, Cum tristis diram leuiter prorumpit in iram, And cannot be appeased quickly; on the contrary, she is never reconciled Non cito pacatur, non ante reconciliatur 195 Quam paena multa, sibi uis illata, sit ulta. Until she has avenged herself through violence. If her husband should, on some occasion, restrain her with a sharp scolding Hanc si ludentem male, uerbaque uana loquentem From clowning around and babbling vain words, Eius uir uerbis aliquando cohercet acerbis, Or even deter her from committing foul misdeeds with a stick, Siue leui terret uirga, ne turpiter erret, She will henceforth take offence and refuse to sleep with him. Ilico facta dolens, et ei succumbere nolens, 200 She will cry, upset herself, sigh, and think of Plorat, tristatur, suspiria dat, meditatur, How to deprive him of his life. To this end she will prepare him some monkshood. Qualiter ut uita careat, paret huic achonita. Indeed, having obtained the venom of poisonous snakes Tandem serpentum quesita uenena nocentum And the deadly toxin of death-bringing plants, Necnon herbarum uirus graue mortiferarum



Nec contradici debere fatentur amici,	205	And her friends persuade her not to refuse him,
Laeticiae plenas uotorum laxat habenas,		She will gladly give in to happiness
Menteque iocunda, sponso sit sponsa secula.		And transform herself into a worldly wife for her new husband
Quodque propinauit primo, quem perfida strauit,		Yet if he proves difficult, he will drink the same potion
Si sit uir durus, erit alter idem bibiturus.		That she served her first husband, whom she treacherously murdered.
Femina formosa nimis esset res preciosa,	210	A beautiful woman is precious beyond all description
Si male nil cuperet, si sponso fida maneret.		If she has no bad intentions and remains faithful to her husband,
Sed, quod abhorrendum nimis est cunctisque pudendum,		But it should be a source of horror and shame to all women
Vix habet ulla fidem, qua credi possit eidem.		That none of them can be trusted.
Que quo diligitur magis, hoc grauior reperitur,		The more a woman is loved, the more troublesome she becomes;
Quo magis ornatur, magis inde superba notatur.	215	Similarly, she grows all the more arrogant as a result of rich ornaments.
Nescit maiorem, nescit se ferre minorem,		As a result, she does not recognise her superior, nor does she fulfill her inferior role in an
Par* quoque iuncta pari, cupit impariter dominari.		appropriate manner.
Res optatiua nimis est, animeque nociua.		Although she is joined to an equal in marriage, she wants to take an unequal share of
Illius uultus, bene conditus, et bene cultus,		power.
Allicit, innectit iuuenes, sua sub iuga flectit	220	Woman is too desirable and thus harms the soul.
Apte ludendo, psallendo, uana loquendo.		Through her well-formed and well-groomed face,
Que dum spectari, dum se presentit amari,		She attracts and ensnares young men; she enslaves them
Querit maiorem membris augere decorem.		By playing games, performing music, and chatting about empty matters.
Tunc pingit uisum gratum, format bene risum,		When she perceives that she is being watched and admired,
Vestibus ornatur nitidis, gemmis honeratur,	225	She seeks to enhance her physical beauty:
Floribus innectit crines, et se bene pectit,		Consequently, she paints her face beautifully, sets her mouth into a smile,
Stricta succiungit se zona, basia fingit		Dresses herself in shining garments, and weighs herself down with jewels
Qualia uelle putat iuuenes, iuuenesque salutat,		She weaves flowers into her hair and arranges it in a becoming manner,
Fertque manu flores, et dulces cantat amores.		And also girds herself with a tightened belt. She performs the sort of kisses
Si uero nescit cantare, loquendo capescit	230	Which she expects will please young men, greets them warmly,
Cor auditoris, quod uulnere languet amoris,		Carries flowers in her hands, and sings about sweet romance.
Factaque uenalis, uenatio demonialis,		However, even if she cannot sing, she uses her speech
Prostat, ut incaestum querat de corpore questum.		To capture her listener's heart, which throbs with the wound of love.



Vt sua postposito uelit esse puella marito.		So that she might give herself to him behind her husband's back.
Sed male securus coniuncx de coniuge durus,	235	Nevertheless, her strict husband begins to feel insecure,
Quam sic prostantem, sic cernit ubique uagantem,		As he sees her offering herself freely and wandering all about.
Arguit etatem teneram, puerae leuitatem,		On account of her young age and her youthful levity,
Inque domo, tenere flentem cogit residere,		He forces his tearful wife to stay at home.
Vallatamque seris, custodibus atque seueris,		He walls her in with lock and key and assigns her care to austere guards,
Non sinit exire thalamis, ludosque subire.	240	Forbidding her from leaving the marital home and entering into her usual games.
Quam quia custodit, non diligit ille sed odit,		However, because he guards her, he ceases to love her:
Odit et infestat, et ut hec sit adultera prestat.		Instead he hates her and attacks her, treating her as an adulteress.
Cui custos durus nequid aut obsistere murus,		In any case, nothing - not a strict guard, not walls,
Non iugis pena, sed nec sera, siue catena,		Not punishments, bars, or chains -
Quin faciat secum, si uult, colludere mechum.	245	Can stop her from taking on a lover:
O male seruatus thesaurus sic uiolatus,		O badly-preserved treasure, thus violated,
Qui dum seruatur, furem uocat ut rapiatur.		Which encourages a thief to steal it even while it is being guarded!
Atque quod obscenum nimis est, querens alienum,		What is more, it is extremely obscene that a wife, while seeking another man,
Sponsa suum prodit sponsum, contempnit et odit.		Should betray, despise, and hate her own husband.
Ergo monstriferae metuens, homo, dampna Chimere,	250	Therefore, reader, fearing the injuries of that monstrous Chimera,
Sis exemplorum memor hic tibi propositorum;		Keep the aforementioned examples in mind.
Nuptas matronas, ad plurima crimina pronas		Remember to avoid married women, who are given to many offences,
Donaque prebentes uiduas, in amore furentes,		As well as love-crazed widows offering gifts.
Necnon uirgineas uitare memento choreas,		Leave dancing maidens alone,
Illarum mammas teneras fugiens quasi flammas.	255	And flee their tender breasts as if they were made of flame.
Hostibus his ternis, ut prescriptum bene cernis,		These three types of foes – as the preceding verses indicate –
Incentiuorum crescunt fomenta malorum.		Incite and encourage the growth of many evils.
Has fuge serpentes uirus letale uomentes,		Avoid therefore these serpents who spit out fatal venom,
Has hostes uita, ne te fugiat tua uita.		And flee these enemies, lest you should lose your life.
Claustra tue mentis signato meis documentis,	260	Seal the gates of your mind with my examples,
Ne liget illecebris uariis te fraus muliebris.		So that you will not find yourself entangled by the various traps of female deceit.
Quem semel illa ligat, curis sine fine fatigat,		Once a woman has trapped a man, she will harass him with unending cares;



Voluit, et euoluit, soluit, ligat atque resoluit,		Untwists them, unties them, ties them again, then once more unties them:
Vt male seducat miseros, et ad infera ducat.		She does all this in order to seduce wretched souls and lead them to Hell.
Quisquis ei cedit, nec ab eius amore recedit,	265	Therefore, whoever yields to Woman and does not give up his love
Tandem falletur, tandem laqueo capietur;		Will find himself deceived and caught in a noose.
Cuius amor, uisus, caro mollis, basia, risus,		The love, sight, soft flesh, kisses, smiles,
Alloquium, tactus, uariique libidinis actus,		Conversation, touch, lustful acts,
Vox etiam lena, laqueus sunt atque catena,		And whorish voice of Woman are all nooses, chains,
Et graue tormentum quorumlibet insipientum.	270	And heavy torments for the unwise.
Felix est supere quisquis ualet ista cauere,		He who can avoid these things is truly fortunate;
Quem non haec tangit contagio, non furor angit.		For madness does not disturb the man who remains uncontaminated by Woman.
Hic infelicem probo quisquis amat meretricem,		I say truly, whoever loves a whore is most unfortunate indeed;
Cuius amor dirus, tandem pungens quasi uirus,		For her love is fatal and stings like venom,
Sub specie mellis distillat pocula fellis,	275	And she prepares a cup of bitterness in the guise of honey.
Cuius amor nex est, caro uermis, gloria fex est,		Her love is a chain, her flesh is vermin, her glory comprises the dregs of the earth;
Verba, lenis uentus, fumus decor, umbra iuventus.		Her words are a soft breeze, and yet her smokescreen of beauty is but the shadow of youth.
lam calamo fesso, que sit mala femina cesso		My pen is exhausted; I shall now stop writing about the wicked Woman.
Scribere. Quod scripsi minus est quam congruit ipsi.		Nevertheless, what I have managed to set down falls far short of Woman's fair share of censure.
Si michi Nasonis, si detur lingua Catonis,	280	Even if I should receive the tongue of Ovid or that of Cato,
Claraque linguarum facundia magniloquarum,		And the famed skill of linguistic eloquence,
Non tamen exsoluo uerbis, scriptisque reuoluo,		I would not be able to outline in words or describe in my verses
Quam sit uersuta, quam perfida, quam sit acuta,		How wily, treacherous, keen,
Quam sit dampnosa mala femina, quamue dolosa.		Dangerous, and sneaky a wicked woman is.
Nesciat hoc nemo, quod carmine signo supremo:	285	Let no one be unaware of the following truth, with which I shall round off my poem:
Femina rara bona, sed que bona digna corona.		'Rarely is a woman good, but a good woman is worthy of a crown.'



# **Critical Notes**

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. <i>Od.</i> ) and Scylla, princess of Megara. In this case, the term <i>feritatis</i> ('[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 <mark>-</mark> 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 aggr <mark>r</mark> essive <mark>whore</mark> 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, Amphiaraus' wife, persuaded him to join a fatal raid. See PsApollodorus Bibliotheca 3.8.2.
Line 85	Cf., among others, Euripides' <i>Hippolytus</i>
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	lbid., <mark>10.300ff. Cinyras'</mark> 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 (recis 'having cut off') gives way to the perfect indicative (pretulitcredit, 'preferredbelieved'), and then to a perfect participle (detestatus,



	'detesting'), which in turn yields to a present participle ( <i>metuens</i> , 'fearing'), culminating finally in the present indicative ( <i>fugis</i> , '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, <i>portenta</i> ) 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 <mark>.'</mark>
Line 144	'Perdita tempora', literally 'lost temples' (i.e. sides of forehead), is a metonymic construction, here used to mean 'wretched face'.
Line 171	'Incestusaestus' 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 <mark>'pietatem</mark> ' as 'your piety', but ' <mark>pietas' really</mark> means <mark>'misericordia' ('mercy</mark> ') 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 'lupiter'.
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'.