

*Heroic Women
from the Old Testament
in Middle English Verse*

*The Storie of Asneth
The Pistel of Swete Susan
The Story of Jephthah's Daughter
The Story of Judith*

*Edited by
Russell A. Peck*

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The Storie of Asneth

Introduction

The Origin of the Story

The story of Asneth originates in Midrashic commentaries on two verses in Genesis. In the first verse, Pharaoh gives Joseph a new name “and called him in the Egyptian tongue, The saviour of the world. And he gave him to wife Aseneth,¹ the daughter of Putiphare, priest of Heliopolis. Then Joseph went out to the land of Egypt” (Gen. 41:45 — Douay translation). In the second passage we are told that before the famine, “Joseph had two sons born: whom Aseneth, the daughter of Putiphare, priest of Heliopolis, bore unto him” (Gen. 41:50), the two sons being Manasses and Ephraim. The verses caused some consternation among ancient Hebrewic commentators because it appears the lineage of Jacob and his favorite son passes through a gentile woman, a thought that is particularly troublesome in that it occurs in the same context as the story of Dinah, which is hostile toward mésalliance. When Dinah is inseminated by the gentile Shechem, Simeon and Levi kill all the men of his tribe for their affront to their sister (Gen. 34). One tradition explains that Asenath is Dinah’s daughter, who is secreted away to Egypt to be raised by the holy priest Potiphera.² Marcus Jastrow summarizes the two versions of this explanation:

When [Dinah’s] brothers had learned of the birth of an illegitimate child to their family, they wanted to kill the child in order to prevent public disgrace. But Jacob placed upon the child’s neck a talismanic plate engraved with the name of God, and — according to one version — left her exposed under a thorn-bush (“seneh,” whence the name of the girl, “Asenath”), and the angel Gabriel carried her to the house of Potiphar in Egypt, where the latter’s wife, being childless, reared her as

¹ Aseneth = Greek and Latin spelling; Asenath = Midrash spelling; Asneth = Middle English spelling.

² Pirke R. El. xxxviii; Midr. Abkir, quoted in Yair Gen. 146; Targ. Yer. Gen xli.45, xlvi.20; Midr. Aggadah, ed. Buber, i.97.

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her own daughter. According to another version (Midr. Aggadah), Jacob had the child exposed under the walls of Egypt. Her crying attracted the attention of Potiphar, who was passing at the time.¹

Thus, according to this narrative the blood-line of Joseph remains somewhat more pure, as Joseph marries, through God's intervention, his own niece.

Another Midrashic tradition, apparently from the Hellenistic community at Alexandria, turns the story of Aseneth into a missionary tale. In this version Asenath is Potiphar's daughter, but God makes the choice, cleanses the gentile woman, and prepares her by means of an angel for her sacred wedding. This tradition draws upon Egyptian mythology in the naming of Asenath after Neith, the androgynous river god-goddess who gives birth to the Pleiades, the seven shining stars that guide navigators.² In the missionary tale Asenath is a leader, like Ruth or Esther or Sara the wife of Tobit or Susannah wife of Joachim, whose life is an example to converts of God's mysterious ways.

The Asneth narrative first appears as a story independent of Hebrew commentaries in second-century Alexandria.³ Writing in Hellenistic Greek, the author seems to be of a Hebraic community that may or may not be Christian. If not, the eucharistic materials could be interpolations. If so, the author is of a learned Christian sect still closely allied to the Hebrew community that knows Hebraic symbology intimately and still adheres to dietary laws. The author is well acquainted with the Hellenistic Midrash and the perplexing issues of Joseph's marriage to a woman of pagan heritage. The position espoused by the romance narrative is evangelical and places faith in God above the Law. Kaufmann Kohler notes the similarity between the evangelical message of the poem and that of Hellenistic Hebrew commentators. In the Greek romance, when Aseneth receives her new name she is called "Manos," meaning in Hebrew "City of Refuge," as a sign that through Aseneth many gentiles "should take refuge under the wings of the divine Shekinah (compare Rev. xiii.6),

¹ *The Jewish Encyclopedia* (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1907), II, 172.

² Nahum Sarna, *Encyclopaedia Judaica* 3, col. 693. See also W. Spiegelberg, *Aegyptologische Randglossen zum Alten Testament* (Strassburg: Schlesier and Schweikhardt, 1904), pp. 18-19.

³ For an excellent detailed summary and commentary on the Greek narrative see Kaufmann Kohler, "Asenath, Life and Confession or Prayer of" in *The Jewish Encyclopedia* (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1907), II, 172-76. For a modern translation, see Christoph Burchard, *Joseph and Aseneth: A New Translation and Introduction*, in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, ed. James H. Charlesworth (Garden City: Doubleday, 1985), II, 177-247.

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and under her walls those that turn to God, the Most High, should find protection in repentance" (*Jewish Encyclopedia*, II, 174). Her Hebrew name "Asenath" is a transposition of letters in the word "nasat," meaning "she has fled," the idea being that in her conversion she has fled from idolatry to her refuge in God. According to Kohler,

The book as a whole belongs to the Hellenistic propaganda literature by which Jewish writers endeavored to win the non-Jewish world for the Jewish faith, while at the same time eagerly representing their Hebrew ancestors as physical as well as moral heroes. (*Jewish Encyclopedia* II, 176)

But regardless of whether it originates in a Hellenistic Jewish or quasi-Christian community, the Greek romance of *Joseph and Aseneth* survives with Christian interpolators who translate it into Syriac (sixth century), Armenian, Ethiopic, Slavic, and Latin. The Latin version comes from the twelfth century and was subsequently abbreviated by Vincent of Beauvais in the *Speculum historiale* (c. 1260). The Middle English version is based upon the twelfth-century Latin version, not the abridgment.

The Middle English Storie of Asneth and Its Provenance

The Middle English *Storie of Asneth* survives in a single manuscript, Ellesmere 26.A.13, which was once part of the Bridgewater collection and is now in the Huntington Library.¹ *Asneth* and a "Lament on the death of a fair lady" appear at the end (the last twelve folios, fols. 116–27, numbered 121–32 in the manuscript) in a textura script. The manuscript's first gathering of four leaves is in the secretary script of John Shirley and includes devotional verses by Lydgate, Boethius, Chaucer, and Petrarch (fols. ii–iii). Folios 1–17, in a bastard anglicana, include poems by Lydgate, and fols. 18–115, in the same hand, include Thomas Hoccleve's *Regiment of Princes*.

The manuscript provides a number of clues to its fifteenth-century ownership. The first page is headed with the names of Margaret and Beatrice, in large letters. Sketches of a griffin passant and a boar on fol. iv refer to the Lynne family and to Avery Cornburgh. The sketches, along with the Shirley bookplate on fol. v that also bears the women's names, account for the names on the first folio, for Margaret and

¹ For a detailed description of the manuscript see the *Guide to Medieval and Renaissance Manuscripts in the Huntington Library* (San Marino: The Huntington Library, 1989), pp. 35–39.

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Beatrice are two of the three daughters of William and Alice Lynne. The women are evidently the owners of at least the first gathering and most likely more.

Margaret and Beatrice were raised by their mother Alice after their father, a wool merchant and grocer of London, died. John Shirley, the famous amanuensis, publisher, book dealer, literary gossip, and founder of England's first important lending library,¹ helped with the management of their household. At some point between 1423 when William Lynne died and 1441 when John Shirley made his will, Margaret Lynne became Shirley's second wife. John was born about 1366, so it must have been a marriage in which "tendre youthe hath wedded stoupyng age" [CT IV 1737]. But he can't have been too "stoupyng," for he completed one of his most important manuscripts, Ashmole 59, when he was ninety years old, and conceived upon Margaret eight sons and four daughters before his death in 1456. John is thought to have known Chaucer in his youth and was apparently a longtime friend, publisher, and literary agent of Lydgate. Margaret must have been an intelligent and capable woman, for she was appointed executrix of his complicated will (Doyle, "More Light," p. 96).

Beatrice, Margaret's sister, married Avery Cornburgh. On fol. 115 of Ellesmere 26.A.13, after Hoccleve's *Regiment of Princes*, Cornburgh is identified by a note in Shirley's hand as "Aluredo Corneburgh de Camera Regis."² He is also mentioned in a letter from John Russe to John Paston dated 15 July 1462 (?) as a "yoman of the Kynges chaumbre."³ The appearance of Beatrice's name in conjunction with

¹ For discussion of John Shirley's biography, see A. I. Doyle, "More Light on John Shirley," *Medium Aevum*, 30 (1961), 93–101. For speculation on Shirley's role in the fifteenth-century book trade, see Walter Schirmer, *John Lydgate: A Study in the Culture of the XVth Century*, trans. Ann E. Keep (London: Methuen & Co Ltd, 1961), pp. 251–53; Derek Pearsall, *John Lydgate* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1970), pp. 73–78; and A. I. Doyle, "English Books In and Out of Court," in *English Court and Culture in the Later Middle Ages*, ed. V. J. Scattergood and J. W. Sherborne (London: Gerald Duckworth, 1983), pp. 163–81.

² *Guide to the Huntington*, p. 37. The inscription is illustrated in *English Court and Culture*, plate 17. The note in Shirley's hand naming "Aluredo Corneburgh" is important in that it indicates, along with the continuous pagination, that not only the opening gathering but the first 115 folios were assembled under Shirley's supervision and in the possession of the two sisters, even though the bulk of the manuscript is not in Shirley's hand.

³ *The Paston Letters 1422–1509 A.D.*, ed. James Gairdner, vol. 2 (Westminster: Archibald Constable & Co Ltd, 1900), p. 107. For a brief account of what is known about Cornburgh's career, see Doyle, "English Books In and Out of Court," p. 177.

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Margaret's at the head of the manuscript and again in the bookplate at the end of the first quire suggests that perhaps that gathering had at one time been a gift to the Lynne girls from Shirley. One other name written in this first gathering is that of "Elizabeth Gaynesford" (fol. iii^r). She is the wife of Nicholas Gaynsford (noted on fol. iv^r as "necolas gaynsford"). This Gaynsford may have been Usher to the Chamber of Edward IV and his Queen, Elizabeth Woodville.¹ If so, he would probably have known Cornburgh. That it is his wife's name that is first cited suggests she was a friend of at least Beatrice. These several names in the manuscript identify a circle of substantial Londoners affiliated with the outer reaches of the royal court and help us to understand the interests and concerns of such people.

But, regardless of whether *The Storie of Asneth* has anything to do with the Shirley household, one is struck by the prominence of women in the history of the manuscript's ownership. Given the subject matter of *The Storie of Asneth* and the female patronage announced in its Prologue, the Middle English *Asneth* would seem to be part of the dramatic increase of books of piety and instruction in the fifteenth century written in the vernacular at the request of women, under the patronage of women, and for the instruction of women, about which Susan Groag Bell writes in her pioneering study "Medieval Women Book Owners: Arbiters of Lay Piety and Ambassadors of Culture."²

Date of Composition

The *Manual of Writings in Middle English* estimates the date of composition of the Middle English *Asneth* to be c. 1400 (II, 383). *The Middle English Dictionary* cites several words that appear in *Asneth*, suggesting a date of about 1475. The language of the poem seems later than 1400, mainly because of the large number of Latin neologisms the poet invents as he is translating.³ But it could have been copied

¹ *Guide to the Huntington*, p. 39. See also J. C. Wedgwood and A. Holt, *History of Parliament* (London: H. M. Stationery Office, 1936–38), I, 368–69.

² *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 7 (1982), 742–68.

³ In a letter to me dated 17 April 1991, A. I. Doyle observes: "I would remark with relation to the possible date of composition of the poem(s), on the very strong alliterative style, which to a large extent over-rides the stanzaic rhyming quality. The syntax and accentuation are not polished post-Chaucerian in their effects. Some of the vocabulary supports this impression. It inclines me to push the composition back to earlier in the fifteenth century, and it is not easy to date paleographically the hand, as a conventional textura. The 'cadel' decorative initials with grotesques are also difficult to date, for they occur in liturgical manuscripts over a long stretch of time, certainly from the beginning

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into the Ellesmere MS around 1450 or 1460, during the time that the manuscript was still in the possession of the Shirley family. Or it could have been copied later. Most certainly the copy we now possess is not a holograph copy, as some addenda to fifteenth-century manuscripts appear to be.¹ That is, the date of composition and the date of entry into the Ellesmere MS are not the same. The Ellesmere poem has been copied from another draft of the poem. Although the scribe writes with a careful, well-trained hand, even decorating some capitals with the profile of a man, there are various eyeskip errors which have been corrected by the scribe.

The Poet, the Patron, and the Audience

Henry Noble MacCracken suggests that the author of the poem might be a cleric, a chaplain, perhaps, living not far from Warwickshire and not long after the death of Chaucer. He comments on the fact that several Lydgate poems are to be found in the same manuscript and notes that Lydgate is the only other Middle English writer he knows who mentions the name Asneth.² Richard Dwyer's study of the poem's relationship to its Latin source discards the possibility that Lydgate might be the author of the Middle English poem, however.³ But the poem is very like Lydgate in its taste. Lydgate would certainly have been capable of the neologisms in the poem, and he often wrote on the behalf of women. Moreover, Shirley often talks about Lydgate in his notes, how he wrote this poem for that occasion, and so on. But *The Storie of Asneth* bears no such annotation, which, given Shirley's propensity for gossip, militates against Lydgate's authorship. Moreover, Lydgate's verse is seldom as heavily alliterative as *Asneth*. It seems rather that the poet is well schooled in

of the fifteenth century into the sixteenth, when they are utilised by printers too. They are not common in English literary manuscripts, but there are some from Yorkshire of very early fifteenth or even late fourteenth century making. They could, of course, have been added sometime after the writing, though I wasn't inclined to think so when I saw the manuscript."

¹ See Rossell Hope Robbins, "The Findern Anthology," *PMLA*, 69 (1954), 610–42.

² "The Storie of Asneth: An Unknown Middle English Translation of a Lost Latin Version," *JEGP*, 9 (1910), 224–64. MacCracken prints the text along with Vincent of Beauvais' redaction of the Latin source at the bottom of the page. The Lydgate reference to Asneth appears in "To Mary the Queen of Heaven" (line 35), where "Assenek off Egypt, of beaute pereles" is compared to the Virgin. See *The Minor Poems of John Lydgate*, ed. Henry Noble MacCracken, EETS e.s. 107 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1911), p. 286.

³ "Asenath of Egypt in Middle English," *Medium Aevum*, 39 (1970), 122.

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Lydgate, sharing many of that poet's goals, and that his poem, like so much of Lydgate, is known to the Shirley circle. It is unlikely, however, that either of the Lynne sisters would have been the commissioner of the poem; more likely that person would be someone closer to the aristocracy.

The Prologue to the Middle English poem offers several specific clues about the poet and his patroness. The persona tells how a lady "me desired in Englysh to translate / The Latyn of that lady, Asneth Putifar." He replies that he lacks the skill to "kerve out the kernelis, to glade with yowre graunge." The lady insists that he translate the poem for her, however, so he complies. There is no equivalent to this prologue in the Latin source of the poem. In discussing the passionate interest of upper class women in obtaining vernacular devotional literature for purposes of instruction within the household, Susan Bell notes that often such material is added to existing volumes. She also notes that frequently such fifteenth-century women owned not simply a book or two, but had libraries of their own. The poet's phrase about carving out "kernelis, to glade with yowre graunge," which seems to mean "to add gladly to your granary," could be a witty reference to his patroness's library where such kernels of wisdom are stored. The metaphor also anticipates the grain motif which becomes important typologically in the subsequent poem. Though the lady's holdings would have been in no way comparable to the substantial lending library of John Shirley, it seems to be something she was proud of.

The addition of *Asneth* to the Ellesmere MS may provide clues to the manuscript's readership. Perhaps it began as a Shirley book that got lent but not returned, only added to! In his study of the Findern manuscript, another great fifteenth-century anthology laden with Chauceriana, Rossell Hope Robbins demonstrated that that work was not simply the possession of a great fifteenth-century woman's household but that it served apparently as a book for several households which were linked through, among other things, literary interests. Many names of women appear in the Findern manuscript, including those of "Anne Schyrley" and "Margery hungerford wtowte varyance" (p. 626).¹ Robbins notes that "documentation can be found for the families of Hungerford, Coton, Francis, and Shirley, all in the immediate vicinity of Findern, showing that they were well-known local families, and surely friends of the Finderns" (p. 627). (The names of women from all these families appear in the margins of the manuscript.) Robbins was of the opinion that young women of these neighboring families would visit Findern and copy into the big book texts of poems they enjoyed from manuscripts they owned or had bor-

¹ It is perhaps noteworthy that the phrase "without varyance" which is attached to Margery Hungerford's name appears three times in *The Storie of Asneth*.

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rowed for the occasion (p. 628). One is reminded of the situation in *The Assemblie of Ladies*, where women gather on a summer day to present poems to each other. I do not know whether the Anne Shirley of the Findern manuscript (Warwickshire) is kin to the Margaret and John Shirley of the Asneth manuscript (South Derbyshire),¹ but certainly the circumstances of the two manuscripts share in common a female propensity that cherishes books and adds appropriate materials to them. The owners and users of both books were clearly interested in vernacular literature, literature of a Chaucerian tradition as well as literature of devotion and Christian instruction.

Whoever the lady was who commissioned the poem, to know of the Latin story of Joseph and Aseneth she would have to have been quite well educated and in contact with someone who had an unusual library, for, except in its abridged form, the story was not widely known. In fact, the Latin version of the story that is the source for the Middle English poem could not have enjoyed much circulation at all, though Vincent of Beauvais' redaction of it did circulate more widely in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries in both Latin and French. The original Latin romance of *Joseph and Aseneth* survives in two Cambridge manuscripts, Corpus Christi 424 and Corpus Christi 288, which M. R. James collated and added as an addendum to Batiffol's edition of the Greek version published as *Studia Patristica* in 1889.² James was of the opinion that the copy in Corpus Christi 424 came from Christ Church, Canterbury, and that the whole of Corpus Christi 288 once belonged to it. The earlier copy is twelfth century and has been bound with fourteenth- and fifteenth-century astronomical treatises, including Chaucer's *Treatise on the Astrolabe*.³ In Corpus Christi 288, the thirteenth-century Latin *Aseneth* appears in a collection of religious biogra-

¹ In correspondence to me dated 17 April 1991, A. I. Doyle remarks: "I could not connect John [Shirley] with the contemporaneous Warwickshire Shirleys, well documented, or other north Midland branches, but I do wonder."

² Batiffol thought that the Latin translation of the Greek narrative might have been done by Robert Grosseteste, who in 1242 had translated from Greek into Latin *The Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs*, from which he had drawn material for his *Casteau d'Amour*; Batiffol thought both works had "une remarquable affinité" with the Latin *Aseneth*. But James notes that the copy of the poem in Corpus Christi 424 is of the twelfth century, and thus must precede Grosseteste.

³ Corpus Christi 424 consists of six volumes bound up into one. The Latin *Aseneth* is the only item in volume five (it is item twelve in the anthology) and is the only work of the twelfth century among the six fascicules. The copy of *Asneth* in Corpus Christi 288 is of the thirteenth century. Corpus Christi 288 includes several volumes of religious materials from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries bound together.

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phies and saints lives that share typologically similar materials. This version of the *Liber de Aseneth et quomodo Joseph duxit eam in uxorem* begins with a poem to the Virgin that apparently was meant to be sung, since the lines are spaced for music that is not filled in. It is preceded in the volume by *Liber de infantia salvatoris nostri et de ejus cognatis Ioachimo Anna, et de miraculis virginis Mariae*. This narrative tells of Jesus eating ears of corn during the flight into Egypt, a passage that suggests a pleasant inverse typology of the Joseph-Asneth narrative where, instead of Joseph as the Christ figure who supplies grain to Israel, Jesus is a Joseph figure going to Egypt to find grain.

Either might have served as the Middle English poet's source. If the twelfth-century manuscript were already bound with the astrolabe materials as it is in *Corpus Christi* 424, then it might have been accessible to the Shirley family, who specialized in Chaucer and Chauceriana. Or, given the devotional contents of the later copy, that manuscript might also have been one sought out by a fifteenth-century female patron. The Middle English poem makes no use of the poem to the Virgin, however, which, one might imagine, would have appealed to both poet and patron. The Middle English poet's female patron might have heard of the story of Asneth through one of the more popular redactions which circulated in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, of course, but that would not explain how the translator obtained a copy of the longer Latin version to translate.

It is worth thinking about the redactions in this context, however, since women have a place in their history, too. In the later thirteenth century, Vincent of Beauvais included a redaction of the Latin narrative of Asneth in his *Speculum historiale* (cap. 118–24).¹ In 1328 Margaret of Provence commissioned John de Vignai to translate Vincent's *Speculum* into French (the *Miroir Hystorial*), a work that was frequently copied.² Owning the compendious *Miroir Hystorial* would be like having

¹ See MacCracken's reprint of Vincent of Beauvais' text at the bottom of the page in his edition of the Middle English poem, *JEGP*, 9 (1910), 224–64.

² The Middle English poet quite evidently works from the longer Latin version, not a redaction, however. But although the longer Latin version of *Aseneth* was known to at least the Middle English poet and Vincent of Beauvais, the *Corpus Christi* manuscripts of the poem have not been widely known to more recent scholars. Batiffol had finished editing the Greek version, which was the source of the Latin work, before M. R. James informed him of the existence of the *Corpus Christi* manuscripts containing the Latin version; James's edition was then added as a second fascicule to some copies of *Studia patristica: études d'ancienne littérature chrétienne* (1889), but not to all. (Richard Dwyer notes that the Princeton Theological Seminary's copy of Batiffol does not have James' Latin text; nor is it mentioned in the *Jewish Encyclopedia*'s discussion of Batiffol's views.

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one's own encyclopedia. But women wanted books not just for their instructive stories. They sought books for religious and cultural instruction as well. Susan Bell notes that by owning books, especially Books of Hours, medieval women influenced the shaping of iconography and "acted as international ambassadors of cultural change through their distribution of books over a broad geographic area."¹ Such a cultural exchange is certainly evident in the diverse reaches of the Middle English *Storie of Asneth* as its pseudo-biblical plot and rich iconography conflate Hebrew, Greek, Latin, French, and English culture.

Christian Iconography and Pleasant Instruction

The Middle English poem is rich in Christian typology, which adds immensely to the complexity of the narrative and the general interest in the poem. Much of the typology may be traced back to the original Alexandrian Greek version of the second century.² The typology of the original is Neoplatonic and seems quite akin to the kind of glossing one finds in Philo and early Christian commentators such as Origen, Clement of Alexandria, St. John Chrysostom, and St. Basil. It is the same typology that survives in fifteenth-century block books known as the *Biblia Pauperum* (The Bible of the Poor), the illustrated Psalters, and Books of Hours, all of which draw their ideas from medieval biblical commentaries such as the *Glossa*

Dwyer found it in the copy of *Studia patristica* in the Andover-Harvard Theological Library. I obtained it through the Orthodox Catholic Alliance in Buffalo, New York.) When Henry Noble MacCracken edited the Middle English version in 1910, he knew nothing of the longer Latin text, though he argued that such a work must exist on grounds of the prologue to the Middle English poem, which mentions it, and the fact that the Middle English story is more complete and closer to the Greek version than Vincent's version in the *Speculum historiale*. It was not until 1970, in *Medium Aevum*, that Dwyer demonstrated that the Middle English version is in fact a translation of the twelfth-century version that James edited.

¹ Bell, pp. 167–68. See also Veronica Sekules, "Women and Art in England in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries," in *Age of Chivalry: Art in Plantagenet England: 1200–1400*, ed. Jonathan Alexander and Paul Binski (London: Royal Academy of Arts, 1987), pp. 41–48.

² Several typological elements of the story derive from the Targum of pseudo-Jonathan, the midrash of Rabbi Eliezar the great, and various writings of Philo Judaeus. See Dwyer, p. 118; the articles on Asenath by Gerson B. Levi and Kaufmann Kohler, *The Jewish Encyclopedia* (1907) II; and Pierre Batiffol, *Studia patristica* (1889), pp. 11–18, on the legends of Dinah and Aseneth.

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ordinaria and other compendia of earlier glosses or commentaries on Genesis such as those by St. Ambrose or St. Augustine.

Given the rich iconographic environment of *The Storie of Asneth*, it is easy to see how an intelligent woman, concerned with the raising of her household, might want to have it available in the vernacular for instruction. Girls trained on the Psalter, lives of the saints, and prayers of the church would find the poem to be richly resonant with the same figural language. Moreover, such a narrative as *Asneth* provides the governess with a superior example for the guidance of young women. The poem offers a magnificent study of a young woman coming into responsible adulthood, fully cognizant that her choices matter. The narrative functions on two levels, both as a compendium of Christian teaching and as a guidebook in social behavior for aristocratic women. Its plot is thrilling, high-minded and romantic, a story that a young girl would respond to and admire. Here the heroine is quite different from Virginia in Chaucer's *Physician's Tale* or Griselda in the *Clerk's Tale*. Asneth is an obedient daughter, yet she is also strongly independent. She thinks for herself. Above all, she is chaste and deeply religious. She enjoys a powerful person-God relationship. Hers is a religion that recognizes preeminently the importance of trust in God, but also strong personal responsibilities to herself. But with these responsibilities comes as well a keen sense of female privilege.

For example, with the news of Joseph's impending visit, Potiphar, her father, indicates that he would like to give Asneth to Joseph as a bride. She objects firmly:

And when Asneth had herd here fadir thise wordis reherse,
With straunge yes on hym sche loked, here color gan disteyne, {eyes}
And seide to hym, "Why seie ye thus, my worshyp to reverse,
To take me caytyf to a straunger? Of hym I have disdeyne.
A futif he ys, by bargayn bouht, and more I say yow pleine,
That herdis sone of Chanan his lady wold have fuyled.
In prison therefore he was put and of al worshyp spuyled.

"And after yt happid that Pharao, as he lay in slepe,
Dreyht was dered in hys dremys, diversely dremynge,
And then this Joseph was take out of the prison depe
To rede hym right the redeles of his swevenyng.
The olde wyfis of Egipt han craft in that cunnyng,
And therfore that dreme redere I utterly forsake,
And take me to the kyngis sone, my marie and my make."
(145-58)

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In the passage the poet studies with subtlety the dynamics of a healthy aristocratic family. Asneth would marry a husband who respects women, not defiles them. She knows that she is worthy of a prince, not some shepherd's son who has cheated his way to the top. (She will, ultimately, of course, marry even more than a king's son: she will marry the son of God — and in holiest matrimony.) The parents admire Asneth for her wisdom and intelligence, and for her chastity. She loves her parents, goes out to greet them on various occasions; but she also recognizes when not to be docile. Her father has no opportunity to reason with her at this point (though one can imagine that he would — he's no tyrant), because Joseph arrives at that very moment, and Asneth retires to her room.

Asneth's chambers are in a tower apart, but they have windows — three of them. She has a room with several views and can see in three directions. From her window she sees Joseph's arrival, immediately recognizes his chaste beauty, falls in love with him, and regrets her strong words. What pleases her about Joseph is *his* independence and *his* piety, which is manifested in his refusal to eat unclean food. He lives by a higher law which she yearns for but does not yet understand. When Joseph sees Asneth watching from her window, he scorns her as a designing woman, one of the hordes of Egyptian women who are trying to get into bed with him. But her father defends her, praises her chastity and cleanliness, comparing her to Joseph himself — which pleases Joseph, who asks to meet her. But when Joseph refuses to kiss her because her mouth has touched unclean food, Asneth is humiliated and again withdraws to her room to enter into a seven day penitential fast, casting out the idols of her parents, covering herself with ashes and tears, and praying to the God of Joseph for forgiveness. Her prayer is a superbly modulated piece, resonant in the language of the penitential Psalms, a model of self-chastisement. If part of a young woman's training was the study of the Psalter, she would be especially receptive to this moment in the poem as she contemplated the verbal echoes.

Asneth's independence and pious obedience are rewarded on the eighth day as the angel of God approaches her and bids her rise from the ashes, to cast off her penitential garb, to clean herself and dress in a new gown. In her transformed state she is given a new name — "Moche-of-Refute" (462). She is a new person, a person of grace. But she is also still her older virtuous self. Her good breeding shines as she behaves in the exemplary role of domestic management (one thinks of Milton's Eve in *Paradise Lost* hosting Raphael), offering the stranger food and courteous hospitality. He asks for a honeycomb. She immediately would make preparation to fetch one from the field of her heritage. When the angel says she has one in her cellar, she speaks right up: "My lord, / Knowyth wel ther is non, in no maner of wyse" (523-24). Asneth knows her house, knows what's in her larder and what is not, or at least she thinks she does. She is wrong, of course, for the angel has sup-

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plied the new food of which both he and she are about to partake. But her error does not matter. The point is that Asneth has a voice and uses it well. She thinks. When she goes to the cellar and returns with the divine food, the angel kindly taunts her: “Whi saidest thu ther was non in thi celer?” (532). To which she replies:

Lord, non swych honycomb in governance hadde I there,
But by commaundement of thi mouth, so yt was do,
For the odour therof ys lik the breth of thi mouth also.
(535-37)

She knows what is under her governance; she also knows what's new, and, with a Pauline sense of the odor of piety, identifies the source. The angel praises “the wisdam of Asneth,” smiles “upon here intelligence” (539), and blesses her.

Asneth is, indeed, bright and strong minded. Later, when she is to marry Joseph, she meets him alone — “here fadir was absent.” Joseph asks a maid to wash his feet for him, but Asneth interjects:

I schal hem wasshe, ye ar my lord dere.
Fro hennys forth I am thin awne, thi handmaid and thi thralle.
Whi ashest thu another maide to wasshe thi feet here?
Thi feet ar myn owne feet, thi handdis also with alle,
And thi soule ys my soule: thu are thn myn owen fere.
(627-31)

The point is not simply that she is obedient, but that her obedience gives her privileges which she recognizes and claims, privileges which extend not simply to his feet, but to his soul. He may get her when he marries, but she gets him too. He is hers — “thi soule ys my soule: thu are thn myn owen fere,” which implies, in effect, “you are my rib.”

A third example of her strong sense of privilege within obedience occurs when she first is to meet Jacob, her father-in-law: she, not Joseph, arranges the visit. She says to Joseph, “Mi fadir I schal go se, / For a god he is to me, thi fader Israel” (724-25). That is, although she acknowledges a godlike authority within the patriarchy, she does so through her own will and perspective. Jacob is not “your father,” but first “my father” and then “thi father Israel.” Asneth’s actions are always thoughtful. She understands formalities, both their forms and their implications. Even when she is distraught and overwhelmed with grief, the focus is on her intelligent use of her will. She is both attached and independent. She understands the private and the decorous. She is represented as being remarkably adult throughout

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the poem. It is the adult decisions that make her attractive to Joseph and to her parents and that give her status with the angel of God.

But let me return to my earlier comments on the poem's typology. *The Storie of Asneth* is rich with the resonances of Christian typology, typology of the sort that is prominent in meditational literature and iconography of the visual arts in general — those areas of cultural experience in which women have a dominant role. Primarily the poem works within familiar penitential typologies — the paradigms of death-life, old heritage-new, abduction-return — and typologies of a faith that is superior to Law, both topics of enormous appeal in fifteenth-century England. Joseph is Christ-like — “nothynge fro hym ys hid, he hath so gret cunnyngge” (206), this “son of God.” He is the food supplier who, though sold into exile by his brethren, becomes their redeemer (see Plate I). The blockbooks regularly juxtapose his being put in the well by his brethren with Christ’s being laid in the tomb (Plate II). And, when Reuben comes to help but finds the well empty, the parallel is drawn to the empty tomb after the Resurrection (Plate III). In *The Storie of Asneth* Joseph is not, of course, simply an allegorical figure. He too makes misjudgments when he first sees Asneth, before he comes to share in the dream. The point is made clear that the dream comes first to her. In this instance the effect is somewhat akin to the resurrected Christ’s first appearing not to Peter and the apostles but to the three Marys at the tomb.

Asneth is amply adorned with Marian imagery. The angel’s visit resonates with the Annunciation: she is the *ancilla*. In her redeemed state, with her new name — “Moche-of-Refute” — she is a mediator, protector, and guarantor like Mary; her spiritual wings, like Mary’s robe, provide shelter for her seven attendants and, through her womb, she provides guarantee of the heritage.¹ She is often compared to a city of refuge — a “cité bild of joye.” And, as in the earlier Alexandrian narrative, she is also like the bride figure in Song of Songs — a sort of orphan after she rejects the idols of her parents to discover God as her “protectour and defendour of fadirles children alle” (361). Like the Bride in the Song of Songs, her life is filled with vacillations which she copes with; she is approached, instructed, isolated, wedded, abducted, then restored (see Plate III, which links the Bride with penance and the Joseph story).

Juxtaposed to the elaborate penitential typologies of Asneth’s two prayers are the eucharistic and marriage tropes, those sacraments for which her penance prepares

¹ For an interesting discussion of the iconography of Mary’s robe as a refuge for the faithful, see John V. Fleming, “Anticlerical Satire as Theological Essay: Chaucer’s *Summoner’s Tale*,” *Thalia*, 6 (1983), 5–22.

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her. The honeycomb episode is rich with eucharistic lore. It is the food from God, a comb that is broken during the feeding, mended with the sign of a bloody cross, and borne back to heaven by the bees of paradise. The bees connote innocence and purity. According to John Plummer, they are affiliated with Mary's immaculate conception because they were thought to procreate without intercourse.¹ For Asneth, the serving of the honey is akin to a priestly rite in which she is the celebrant. A young girl, trained on the pleasures of reading from Books of Hours with their marginal beehives (Plate IV) and the incumbent iconography, would find such passages as the honeycomb episode to be delightful in their double-talk. Similarly the approach of the divine chariot to carry the angel back to heaven would resonate with the implications of Elijah and Ezekiel, as the translations between time and eternity are depicted. Reference is made to Leviathan as a figure of Hell (see the Jonah trope, Plate I), from which she would be protected. The field of "our heritage," to which Asneth's parents are often retired, carries overtones of the old dispensation, to be valued, but also to be surpassed. My point is, the poem is rich with signs, and trains one to delight in discovering them and exploring them as part of one's Christian acculturation.

But the signs in *The Storie of Asneth* are not simply those of biblical iconography. They are social and political as well. And in this regard they function pointedly toward the social acculturation of an aristocratic young woman. The relationship between Asneth and Joseph after their betrothal but prior to their espousal is detailed. Asneth is permitted outgoing generosity. She claims prenuptial time with Joseph, yet at the same time remains chaste, until all the formalities are accomplished. Then she is much adored, adorned, and blessed. After the marriage we see Asneth in an administrative role, looking after the business of the harvest from the fields of the heritage. Even in the abduction, she teaches her audience how to behave in adverse circumstances and to forgive their enemies, once order has been restored and the domestic and political scene secured.

One final observation. In the Ellesmere manuscript a lament on the death of a great lady immediately follows the story of Asneth. It is in the same verse form as *Asneth* and was apparently already attached to the exemplum that our scribe copied. MacCracken considered it to be an epilogue, as if the lady who requested the trans-

¹ See John Plummer, *The Hours of Catherine of Cleves: Introduction and Commentaries* (New York: George Braziller, n.d.), Pl. 5: Birth of the Virgin, with its bee hive and honey bees in the border (Plate IV). See the entry on bees in *The Book of Beasts, being a Translation from a Latin Bestiary of the Twelfth Century*, trans. T. H. White (London: Jonathan Cape, 1954), p. 154 for the proposition that they procreate without sexual intercourse.

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lation had died and is now lamented.¹ Brown and Robbins, in the *Index of Middle English Verse*, considered it to be a separate poem.² I have included it in this edition as a sort of tentative epilogue, probably not originally a part of the poem, but possibly written on behalf of the patroness and added to the manuscript after her death. If this interpretation is accurate, then we know that the patroness died a young woman and that she was of high birth — “of lordis lyne and lynage sche was” (927). I recognize that such a procedure is strictly conjectural, but it adds a fitting congruity for a work that was commissioned by women, read by women, and used as part of their effort to honor and maintain their privilege as well as their heritage, even in the face of death.

The Dialect and Versification

The Storie of Asneth was originally composed in a West Midland dialect, probably early in the fifteenth century. Participles are formed by *-ing*, or, usually, *-yngē*. Occasionally one finds *-i-* instead of *-e-* in plural inflections of nouns, as in *nuttis*, *ker-nelis*, and *spiritis*, and, rarely, *-i-* in the past tense inflection of verbs, as in *foundid*. The third person singular female possessive pronoun *her* is regularly spelled *here*, which will at first seem confusing to modern readers. The plural possessive *their* is also spelled *here* and sometimes *her*. The first person plural possessive *our* appears as *our*, *oure*, *hour*, and *howre*. The scribe often uses terminal flourishes (otiose strokes) after *-ng*, *-ll*, and *-r* in place of *-e*. I have transcribed such flourishes as *-e* for the sake of consistency in pronouns (about a third of the possessive third person singular female pronouns have the flourish instead of the *-e*, the others being spelled *here*); and all participles ending in the flourish I have transcribed with the *-e*, so that rhyme words with the flourish and those with the *-e* appear in this edition the same. It is quite possible that the *-e* had phonemic value in the original poem.

The manuscript has some punctuation in it, namely a dot used to mark periods within lines, as in lines 572, 573, and 624. Doyle is quite right in observing that the alliterative patterning is often more noticeable than the rhyme royal stanzas. One reason for this is the lack of metrical feet and the frequent use of enjambment. The poem reads like stanzaic prose. But I do not think that lack of meter or a regular alliterative scheme is a sign of incompetence in this overly modest poet. The effect

¹ Pp. 262–64. MacCracken notes (p. 264) that the *-yse* rhyme runs throughout the “epilogue” (i.e., the “Lament”) either as the *a* or *b* rhyme.

² Carleton Brown and Rossell Hope Robbins, *The Index of Middle English Verse* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1943), p. 1.

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of the alliterative stanzas is not unmusical; the poet has a good sense of rhythm, one might say a “good ear,” once one gets a feel for the line. The poetry is quite effective when read aloud.

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Prologue

	As I on hilly halkes logged me late, Biside ny of a Ladi sone was I war; La Bele me desired in Englysh to translate The Latyn of that lady, Asneth Putifar.	<i>recesses recently lodged myself Near beside; aware The Lovely Lady</i>
5	And I answered, "Ma Bèle, langage I lakke To parfome youre plesir, for yt ys ful straunge That broken tuskes shold wel harde nuttis crakke, And kerve out the kernelis, to glade with yowre graunge; ¹	<i>My Lovely Woman; lack teeth</i>
	For lame and unlusty now age hath me left;	
10	Mi spiritis are spended, I lakke sapience, Dulled I am with dotage, my reson ys me refst, Prived and departed from al eloquence, So my seson ys passed with langage to jape.	<i>exhausted; wisdom taken from me Deprived season; to daily suitable; chough</i>
	Hit ys not fetis forto see a cowe in a cage —	
15	The desire to make a fool of my lordis ape. He plesed never lady wel that lakked corage. For as the oule ys unable to blase the sunnebemys, So ys the moselynge molle to jaile the rede rose,	<i>owl; defame burrowing mole; cast forth</i>
	And as able ys the asse to Danielis dremys,	<i>to [interpret]</i>
20	As the cukkou with crochetis ony countour to close." And when daunger deynusly here desire refused, La Bele ful benignely sayde to me than, "That servant ys not to blame, but fully excused,	<i>quarternotes; duet; end resistence haughtily her</i>
	That meketh hym to his maystresse, and doth as he can."	<i>humbles himself</i>
25	Concluded thus with gentilnesse, I toke on to me the cure, Asneth storie to translate after my cunnyng, Fro Latyn into Englysh as God me sendeth oevre.	<i>duty wisdom occupation Guide Clearly</i>
	Gyde this werke, gracious Lord, and graunte it good endynge, Utterali the Latyn in Englyshe to transpose;	

¹ *And carve out the kernels to improve your store (of wisdom)*

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- 30 Hit is nuyus, but the sentence I schal sue in trace,¹
 And yf ye fynde fautes, grave hem with yowr glose,
 I pray yow thus, my maystresse, of yowre good grace.

faults; smooth them out

The Story

- PHARAO, the famus kynge of Egipt land aboute,
 The firste yeer of seven yeeris of plenteus abundance,
 35 The fifthe day, in the secunde monthe, he sende Joseph oute
 To purveie wete for the peple of his obeisance; *procure wheat; jurisdiction*
 And in the ferthe monthe, the eyhtethe day, to make purveance *eighth; inventory*
 Joseph cam into the cuntré of Helinpoleos,
 And gadered whete of that regiou: nobeli sprange his loos. *reputation*
- 40 And in that cité there was a prince of Pharaos the kynges, *King Pharaoh's*
 That was wondir noble and riche, and of gret prudence,
 Sad of conseyl, meke and wise, in alle manere thynghys,
 Chief cunseilour to Pharaos for his intelligence. *Solemn because of promoted*
 Above alle princes he was preferred for his excellency;
 45 Of Helinpoleos preest Putifar, so men did hym calle, *priest*
 Honoured in alle Egipt of gret and of smalle.
- This prince hadde a dowter dere, Asneth was her name, *daughter*
 A virgine ful specious and semely of stature; *lovely; becoming*
 Of eyhtene yeer age sche was, withoute ony blame, *eighteen; blemish*
 50 Florishyne in here beauté, the most comely creature *her*
 Of Egipt, and alle virgines sche passed in feture,
 Not lyke the dowhtres of Egipt in here resemblance,
 But assemblynge the Hebrewes in colour and cuntenance. *surpassed; bodily form daughters; appearance resembling*
- 55 Of stature semeli as Sare, specious as Rebekke, *Sarah; lovely*
 Fair formed of feturis as semblyng to Rachel, *resembling body*
 Her cors was ful comely of hue, hed and nekke.
 Cumfertable of cuntenance, hit becam here wel;
 Of here soverain beauté al Egipt gan tel, *Pleasing; it became her did talk*

¹ *It is irksome, but the meaning I shall pursue as exactly as possible*

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60	And praydes here in alle that lande, so noble was here fame, That bataile among princes childeeren was joyned for that dame.	<i>her undertaken</i>
65	But when that Pharois eldist child, his sone and his heir, Herde telle of this ladi, to his fadir he wente right And said, "Grante me to my wyf Asneth the feyr!" But Pharao denyed hym and answered to the knyght, "Thu schalt have to thin astate a ladi of more myght, The kyngis dowter of Moab of noble alliance, A comeli quene fair and free, evene to thi plesance."	<i>immediately fair higher rank family noble; well-matched to thy</i>
70	But Asneth that was so feir, soleyn she was withal, Dispisynge eche man deynusly, and proud of her corage. A ful high tour was bild for here, of werk that was rial, Joynynge to here fadir hous, and above it upon stage Ten chambres for here wer bild of precious parage. The firste was fair and large with porferett stonis walled, Poudred with precious polimites, of diverse colours called.	<i>different from others scornfully; spiritedness tower; royal second story built; value porphyry Sprinkled; (see note)</i>
75	With carpettis of cloth of gold hit was laid abowte, And in the wallis here Egipt godis sette in sundry wyse, Wrouht of goold and silver wel; of hem sche had gret doute, For everi day to the same sche dide sacrifice. In the secunde chamber was here atire, of ful riche assise,	<i>her Egyptian Wrought; fear made wardrobe; quality</i>
80	Goold, silver, preciouse stonis, and garnementis gaye, Schetis of silk, and robis fyne of ful riche araye.	<i>garments Sheets</i>
85	The thridde chambir was for stoor, stuffed as ye shul here Of alle goodis that growe on erthe to mannys sustinance. The seven chambiris remenant were ordeyned on this manere, For seven maidenes, that lowly served here with plesance. Thise were here Egipt eveneldis to here daliance, ¹ Fair of face, bright of ble as sterre in the firmament, With man ne manlichild speke thei in no manere entent.	<i>larder; provisioned remaining countenance as stars male youth spoke</i>

In the chief chambir of Asneth ther were wyndowys thre,

¹ *These were the Egyptian girls who were her same age and who served at her pleasure*

The Storie of Asneth

- 90 The firste retardynge to the est, the secunde was sought right,
 The thirde lay north upon the strete in swych manere degré
 That of alle that passed by sche mihte have a syght.
 In this chambir a bed was raid of goold and purpur bright;
 Contexit it was with jacintt and purpur bise with alle.¹
 95 Alone lay Asneth in this bed that riche was and rialle.
- A gret halle was bild abowte with wallis wonder hie,
 With foure yren gatis, spered faste and stronge,
 And kept with eyhtene men of armes harneised surely.
 Yet ther were planted in the side the halle trees faire behonge
 100 With frutes that were delectable, and fair leves amonge,
 And a cundite beside the halle that ran as cristalle cleer,
 That moisted the trees lustily and dide to hem gret chere.
- The fame of gentil Joseph sprange gretly and aroos
 To alle the lordis of Egipt land with gret reverence.
 105 And when he was come into the cuntré of Helinpoleos,
 He sende twelve wyse to Putifar preest seilynge in sentence,²
 “Greteth the wel oure sire Joseph, and noteth yn advertence,³
 To dyner at midday to thi hous he cometh for his cumfort,
 In the shade fro the sunne to take there his disport.”
- 110 And Putifar, plesed plesantly, sayd with voise joiynge,
 “Blessed be the Lord God of Joseph that my noble sire
 Ys comynge toward my hous; to me yt is plesynge.”
 He called the prevost of ys hous and sayd, “I the require
 Make redi a grete feste, and most deynteus to desire,
 115 And governe it goodly, I the charge, in thi beste aray,
 For Joseph the stronge man of God schal come to us this day.”
- Then herde Asneth that her fadir and her modir bothe
 Wer come in hervest fro the feeld of here heritage
 And sayde, “With joye I schal go and se hem forsothe,”

east; faced south

arrayed; purple

royal

built

iron; securely locked

guarded; armored

conduit

caused them

reached

pleasure

happy voice

steward of his; you

sumptuous

oversee

heard

harvest; their

them

¹ *It was adorned with jacinth and fine purple linen throughout*

² *He sent twelve wise counsellors to the priest Putifar, conveying the message*

³ *Our sire Joseph greets you heartily, and gives advance notice that*

The Storie of Asneth

- 120 And hasted here forth busly, agayns hem in passage, to meet them
Clothed comely in bright byse, lykynge to here lynage, linen; appropriate to
And wrought with goold of jacintt, a girdel of goold therto, adorned
With armillis aboute here handis, and here feet also. bracelets
- 125 A bie of bright burned goold aboute here nekke was bent chain-link neckpiece
Pyght ful of preciouse stonys, and grave in were alle Set; engraved
The idolis namys of Egyp, plesant to here entent. names; her desire
- 130 And above here hed was sett a riche coronalle, surrounded; forehead
That constreyned here fair frount, that was so virginalle; a veil
Here hed was covered with terestre, and went forth with plesance
135 And haileed here fadir and here modir with comely cuntenance. greeted
- Ful curteysly sche kyste hem and gretly gan joye, [they] did rejoice
To se here douter so honestly in riche ornature. their; splendidly; decor
The deynteus frutes of the feld to here thei did emploie, bestow
- 135 That delicious were and delectable and noble in nature. maiden; ripe
The mayde rejoosed of the frutes that were ful mature, birds; fruits; savory
Of figes, dates, pomgarnettis and of grapes grete,
Of dove briddes and othir frittes that savery were and swete.
- 140 And Putifar sayde to Asneth, “The closett dore the shitte.” chamber; shut
She did so, and he here kiste and saide, “My dowter dere, Marvellous tidings
Novellis newe I schall the telle — tend now to my witte: will
The mynty man, Joseph of God, this day wel be here peerless
And he ys governour to save Egyp, by Pharao saunz pere,
A maide clene as ye be, so virgine he ys specialle;
I schal marie yow to hym and make yow his contharalle.” marry; spouse
- 145 And when Asneth had herd here fadir thise wordis reherse, eyes; fade
With straunge yes on hym sche loked, here color gan disteyne, honor to diminish
And seide to hym, “Why seie ye thus, my worshyp to reverse, captive; disdain
To take me caytyf to a straunger? Of hym I have disdeyne.
A futif he ys, by bargayn bouht, and more I say yow pleine, fugitive
150 That herdis sone of Chanan his lady wold have fuyled. defiled

¹ *He's a fugitive, released by plea bargaining, and I tell you quite frankly / That shepherd's son from Canaan would have defiled his lady.*

The Storie of Asneth

In prison therefore he was put and of al worshyp spuyled. *honor despoiled*

- “And after yt happid that Pharao, as he lay in slepe,
 Dreyht was dered in hys dremys, diversely dremynge,¹
 And then this Joseph was take out of the prison depe
- 155 To rede hym right the redeles of his swevenyng. *advise; riddles; dreaming*
 The olde wyfis of Egipt han craft in that cunnyng, *lore*
 And therfore that dreme redere I utterly forsake, *dream reader*
 And take me to the kyngis sone, my marie and my make.” *husband; mate*
- AND as Putifar with his doucher stood thus talkynge,
 160 There com on of his meyné and thus to hym saide, *came one; household*
 “Joseph ys come to yowre gatis, I do yow to wytynge.” *let me inform you*
 And when he spak of Joseph, anon Asneth the mayde
 Ascended to here cenacle; to the wyndow sche here braide, *she herself hastened*
 That lay estward in the chambir of here stately tour, *tower*
 165 To se Joseph, for hir fadir of hym spak gret honour.
- And Putifar went forth with his wyf and with his kynrede,
 To mete with Joseph that gentil juge, as man that was sage; *household*
 He commaunded the porteris sone the gatis up to sprede, *prudent*
 And in entred Joseph thanne, upon that terrage, *immediately; open*
 170 Standynge on Pharaos secunde chare, statli upon stage, *place*
 With foure stronge stoute stedis therinne were drawynge, *next best chariot*
 That were white as the snow and proud of here likynge. *their celebrity*
- The brideles were fineli gild, the traies of noble atire; *bridles; gilt; traces*
 175 Joseph clothed was al in white, covered with purpure palle. *rich fabric*
 Wrought with braunches of bright byse contexit with goold wire, *blue woven*
 A coronite of goold on his heed that riche was and rialle,
 And in the cercle therof were sette twelf stonis imperialle, *gems*
 And above the saide stonis, twelf sterries of goold pure, *stars*
 With a sceptir in his hand that noble was in nature.
- 180 A braunche with beries of olive tree in hand he bar with alle;
 Ful plenteus it was of frut, therin was gret fatnesse. *abundance*

¹ *Was fiercely troubled in his dreams, dreaming repeatedly*

The Storie of Asneth

- Then entered Joseph in at the gatis, and cam into the halle,
 And the peple was voided sone with gret busynesse; *dispatched; efficiency*
 The porteris shitte the gatis faste, with moche hastynesse, *shut*
- 185 And Putifar, his wyf, and hys kynred, with worthi governance,
 Except Asneth, honourued Joseph with lowly obeisaunce. *All except*
- Joseph descended of his chaar, glorious to beholde, *chariot*
 And tok hem on his right syde, thankynge in noble wyse. *received them*
 Grett joye there was mad among yong and olde,
- 190 Save when Asneth saw Joseph, here sorwe gan arise,
 Here spirites failed, here bodi trembled, his noblei to dispise.¹
 “Alas,” sche saide, “I have misdo, dispisynghe this nobil man,
 When I called hym herdis sone of the land of Chanan. *shepherd's son*
- “And nowe he cometh as the sunne fro heven, with his bemys
- 195 Radiant richeli in his chaar, with glorious excellence,
 Passynge peerles and plesant, in rulynge of remys, *Surpassingly; realms*
 With beauté bounté he is braced, and grace of influence. *beauteous; surrounded*
 Allas that ever I dispised hym or made hym resistance;
- 200 Godis sone, I wot, is ful noble of alliance, *familial descent*
 And the saveour of al Egipt, withoute variance. *doubt*
- “Who was ever gete of a man so fair, so fresh of face? *begotten*
 Or what womman myhte conceive and bere so moche light? *radiance*
 Of most wrecched now I am; forfeited I have hys grace, *greatest wretchedness*
 When I dispurned hym to my fadir with wordis of unright. *injustice*
- 205 Now wyl I hide me fro his face, and kepe me fro his sight;
 And yet nothyng fro hym ys hid, he hath so gret cunnyngge.
 But mercy, gret God of Joseph, of my missayngge. *slander*
- “I wolde my fadir wolde me gife to Joseph in service,
 Forever therto I wolde assente to be hys owen servant.”
- 210 By that had Joseph wasshe his feet and in noble wyse *By that time*
 A boord was laid for hym that was to hym plesant,
 For with the Egiptianis in etynge he was not conversant, *table*

¹ *Her spirits failed, her body shook, for having scorned his noblesse*

The Storie of Asneth

But eschued heem in here metis and of hem had drede. *shunned them; food*
 And after he spak to Putifar thus, and to his kynrede:

- 215 "What womman was sche that in the wyndow stod
 Of the cenacle as I cam in? Sche ys ageyns my herte. *affecting*
 Remeveth her sone out of this hous for marrynge of my mod." *disturbing; mind*
 For Joseph dred wanton wymmen, that good men do perverte. *feared*
 Therfore he saide, "Have here out that I may be querte," *healthy*
- 220 For he was chast and virgine pure, and clene in continence,
 Dredynge with fere the infeccion of femenyn insolence.
- And for as moche as the dowtres of the dukys grete *great dukes*
 Of Egipt wowed hym ofte tyme to wanton wikkednesse, *wooed*
 Therfore he fledde here felauship, and ofte tyme did hem threte, *threaten*
- 225 Tho voyde hem fro the presence of his pure clennesse; *Then rid them*
 Alle faire femelis of Egipt he had in hevynesse, *love sickness*
 For thei desired to slepe with hym, he was so amiable;
 But he despised hem and here menis — in clennesse he was stable. *stratagems*
- And saide, "In the sight of gret God of my fadir Israel
 230 I wyl not synne in no wyse, but have in remembrance
 The commaundementis of my fadir, and ever kepe hem wel;
 For he bad me and my bretheren, withoute variaunce, *without wavering*
 To kepe us clene fro wymmen of straunge alliance, *foreign*
 And saide that here felauship wold man with deth destruye. *their fellowship*
- 235 Therfore have out the straunge womman, nothyng that sche me nuye."¹
- Then seyde Putifar thus: "My lord, the womman that ye saw stande
 Ys non alien, but of herinne, and howre dowhtere dere, *a resident; our*
 Hatynge the cumpanie of alle men; and more, I take an hande, *can guarantee*
 Sche ys virgine pure and clene. Therfore I pray yow here,
 240 That sche may come to yowr presence and haile yow with good chere."
 And Joseph gretly joied then for that Putifar saide *rejoiced; what*
 That sche loved no man flesly, but lyved a clene maide. *fleshly; pure*

¹ *Therefore remove the strange woman, so that in nothing may she harm me*

The Storie of Asneth

- “That sche ys a maide,” quod Joseph, “I love here the more,
And as myn owen sister, ful wel sche pleseth me.
- 245 Lett here come anon to me.” Here modir went here fore, *for her
honorable*
And brouhte here to his presence, that maide fair and fre.
Here fadir saide to here ful sone, “Dowhter, I charge the
Salu thi brother, a maide as yow, of dede and purpos pure,
Hatyng alienes and unclene wymmen, as thu in thi nature.” *Greet; virgin
as you do by nature*
- 250 Then Asneth, nurshid nobely, on knes fair hym grette, *well bred; knees
high*
And said, “Hail lord, blessed of God, hie hevene Kynge.”
And Joseph answered gentilly, hys wordis to her he sette:
“Blisse the maide, the grete God that quikketh al thyng.”¹ *with*
Than said the fadir, “Go kis thy brother, douhter, on my blesyng.” *according to; commands*
255 And Asneth wente to kysse hym after here fadir hestis; *reached*
But Joseph streight his right hand out and layd yt on here brestis,
And sayd, “Sothly, unsemynge and unsittyng hit ys *unseemly; unbecoming*
To the man that schulde serve God, and with his mouth Hym blesse,
And ete the blessed brede of lyve, and drinke of His chalis,
- 260 Ony womman, alien or straunger for to kesse,
That blysse mamettis with here mouth, and idolis in liknesse *worships false gods*
That are bothe dumbe and dede, and ete brede of here bord; *from her table*
Ony swych womman for to kysse, hit lyketh not God my Lord. *pleases*
- “But the man that worshipeth God, his modir kysse he schal
265 Hys sister, his wyf, and his kynrede, and make heem good chere.”

[Some portion of the poem, probably a whole page, is missing. See note.]

- Joseph sayd, “I wil departe upon this same day,
For in this day God bygan alle His creature,
And hereafter eyhte dayes, sothly as I the say,
I schal retourne and dwelle here, and therto do my cure.” *duty*
- 270 Putifar thenne and his kynrede, with humblesse of nurture, *humility of manners*
Toke at hym his bien aille, with ful gentil langage, *from; farewell*
And so dide Joseph at hym, and tok forth his viage. *from him*

¹ *May the great God who gives life to all things bless you, maiden*

The Storie of Asneth

- And Asneth abood soul alone with seven virgines clene, *utterly alone*
 And, greved with sorwe, sche wepte sore to the sunne siled west.¹
- 275 Bred ne water wolde sche noon, by no maner mene. *of means*
 When nyht cam, alle thei slept and wente to here rest *their*
 Save Asneth, wakynge allone, lay knockyng here brest. *beating her breast*
 For sche hadde take ful gret drede, and shok with tremblyng. *fear; shook*
 Sche was constrainyd so with sorwe, that caused here mournyng. *oppressed*
- 280 And then sche roos fro here bed and cam fro here chamber doun,
 The gatis where portere and his men slepte sure, *securely*
 And to wyndowe faste by sche busked here ful boun, *nearby; hastened; eagerly*
 And there sche drew out a large skyn for here couverture, *bed cover*
 And filde the skyn ful of askes, and after by aventure *ashes; by determination*
- 285 Sche ascended into here chamber, the doris fast barryng,
 And lay doun on the pavement and syhed with waylyng. *floor; cried out*
- A virgine that Asneth loved most herde of here sobbyng; *heard*
 Alle sixe virgines here felawys anon sche gan up rere. *companions; aroused*
 Thei wente to the chamber dore, and herde here syhyng.
- 290 Thei founde the dore lokked faste, thei myhte hit not unspre; *unlock*
 Weref ore thei cried with vois echon, and callid on here there,
 And sayde, "Madame, what ailes you, and ys your nuyrance?" *annoyance*
- Asneth opened not here dore, but sayde in this wyse,
 "Mi heed yt aketh grevusly; on bed therfore I lye. *aches*
- 295 I am so sik in al my membris, that I may not rise
 To open the dore. Goth fro me; to your chambres you hie." *hasten*
 Thei passed forth as sche bad, and Asneth privelye *bade; secretly*
 Com to the chamber where here robis pressed were welle, *neatly kept*
 And drew to here a blacke robe, a cloth of sorwe and deelle *grief*
- 300 That sche had mad for the deth of here yunger brother.
 With this cloth into here chamber sche returned sone,
 And schytte the dore with barre and bolt at travers upon othir,² *took off; moan*

¹ *And, overwhelmed with sorrow, she wept bitterly until the sun settled in the west*

² *And shut the door with bar and bolt, one across the other*

The Storie of Asneth

- | | | |
|-----|--|---|
| 305 | That riall was with bise and goold ful preciously bygone,
And so sche did here ceynte of goold that riche was of valour,
And did on here the blake robe, the vesture of dolour. | blue; done up
girdle; value
put on |
| 310 | The coronalle that covered her hed, in the pavement sche yt laide;
Here byes als and bracelettis of riche orfeoure, ¹
And in the north part of the chamber to a wyndow sche brayde,
And threw hem out by and by, that noble were of feiture;
Here garmentis of goold and girdelis of gay garnettur
And alle here godis of goold and silver, sche tok hem in haste,
With alle the idolis of Egipt, at the wyndow out sche caste. | on the floor
rushed
fashion
material |
| 315 | Sche tok here souper, araid fore here of wyld foul and fisshes,
The carcais als of fatte calfis, and of other sacrifice,
The vesselis for wyne of sacrifice — toupes, cuppis, disshes —
Cast hem out to straungeris houndis, and so did hem dispise
And sayde, “Alas how schod my houndis ete in ony wyse,
Of this souper of sacrifice, of fals maumettrie? | prepared
flesh as well
bottles
dogs
should
idolatry |
| 320 | I take yt therfore to straungeris houndis, and forsake al ydolatrie.” | |
| 325 | And after Asneth askes tok and strewed hem in and oute
Upon the pavement, and bond her leendis with saccloth for penance,
And did an here heve upon here bodi, and bette here breste aboute ²
With bothe handis, and wepte sore for here ignorance,
And laide here doun upon the askes, with teris of repentance,
Sobbyn sore with moche sorwe, sett on every side,
Al the nyth contynuyng so, til the morwe tyde. | ashes; everywhere
loins
ashes
Grieving sorely; beset
night |
| 330 | In the mornynge when she roos, with fen sche was fuyled,
That with the teris and askes were medled so in same,
Sche fil agayn flatt on here face, here body so sche spuyled,
And lay there til hit was nyght, Asneth by here name.
So sche meked here by seven daies, that noble worthi dame;
The eyhte day the cokkys crew, the day bygan to sprynge,
The mayde a lytel lefste up here heed, ful faynt of fastynge. | mud; defiled
mixed; together
fell; despoiled
was her name
mortified herself for
lifted; from |

¹ Her ornamental necklace also, and bracelets of rich goldsmith's work

² And put a hair shirt upon her body and beat her breast repeatedly

The Storie of Asneth

- 335 After she roos on here knees, feble sche was and feynt,
 And lifte up here heed a lite, and syhed wondir sore. little
 The maide was meked, and made megre, and with sorwe atteynt¹
 To a wyndow that lay estwarde sche dressed here therfore, presented herself
 And sette here doun undir yt, and saide, "Ha Lord! Thyn ore! mercy
 340 What schal I do? Were may I go? Were schal I have refute? Where; refuge
 Desolate maide and deserte, of cumfort destitute. isolated
- "Mi fadir, my modir, and my kyn, thei wel me have in hate, probably hate me
 For I have disparplid al here goodis, and cast hem underfote, ruined
 And forsake me for here douter, and with me debate. their
 345 Who may delivere fro this daunger? My balis who may bote? grieves; relieve
 Yett moreover in my mynde with sorwe I marke and note,
 That al my lovers that me wowed, I hated in alle wyse;
 Now may thei glade on my myschief, and utterly me dispise.² wooed; ways
- "But the heyhe Lord God of Joseph, almyhti in His trone, high; throne
 350 He ys jelous upon His peple, hatyng al idolatrie. complaint
 Therfore, dredful Lord, to The now make I my mone,
 For I have worshiped fals godis, and mortal mamettrie; idols
 Of here sacrifices I have ete; mercy therfore I crie,
 For the Lord God of Hebreis ys trewe and mercyable,
 355 Longe abydynge, mylde and meke, on hem that be unstable.
- "He repreveth no maner man that turneth Hym with penance.
 Therfore I wil returne to Hym and fro me synne chace;
 I wil forsake al my synnes, and after to His plesance
 Yete out my praieres in His siht, and to His love me brace. Utter; sight; cling
 360 And yf that I be repentant, He wil take me to grace,
 For He is protectour and defendour of fadirles children alle.
 Therfore to His grete mercy I schal clepe and calle." cleave; appeal
- And than sche roos out of the place ther sche satt, and stood
 To the wyndows that to the est parties hadde here regard, east; their prospect
 365 And saide, "Lord God of al rightful, that madest land and flood, sea

¹ *The maiden was humbled, emaciated, and sorrowfully marked (self-condemned)*

² *Now may they rejoice in my misfortune and utterly despise me*

The Storie of Asneth

That inspirest al wysdam in hertis that ben hard,
 And makyst thynggis invisible apparent afterward, *comprehensible*
 That hast enhanced heven an high and stablyd yt above the wyndes,
 And foundid land upon the wateris as creatour to al kyndes, *species*

- 370 "That hast made the stonis grete and wateris of hyhe depnesse, *great depth*
 Conservynge kyndly Thi preceptis, and to Thi vois obeisant: *commandments*
 Thei wyl nawt offende Thi maundementis, for in sekirnesse *certitude*
 To al lyvynge creatures Thi word ys lyf plesant;
 Therfore I flute, Lord, to The, Thyn humble suppliant, *turn (flit)*
 375 Cryinge to The with my prayere in Thyn hihe presence,
 Confessynge to The my grete synnes, and schewe The my offence.

- "Synnyng, Lord, I have synned ful gretly in Thi syght,
 And worsheped idolis and maumettis agayns Thi magesté; *idols*
 Therfore to open my mouth to The, unworthy I am by right.
 380 O Lord God, summe tyme I was a proud lay of degré,
 Preferrid in richesse above alle other; in worship gret plenté *once; lady*
 I hadde, but ful desolate and destitute I am forsake.
 Werefore, Lord, I fle to The; to Thi mercy I me betake. *esteem*
 385 "And as the infaunt, that sothly soketh his modir breste, *suckles*
 For drede fleeth to the fadyr, to have of hym socoure,
 So, Lord, I sprede out my handis: to The ys al my treste;
 Take me, Lord, and calle me to The, and helpe me with Thi favoure,
 For the develle, that wod lyoun, will ravesshe me with erroure, *mad lion*
 For he is fadir of fals godis of al Egipt land,
 390 But I have cast hem fro me, and destroyed hem with my hand. *them*

- "Delivere me, Lord, fro his powere and fro his mouth me drawe,
 Lest on happe he ravesshe me and sle me, that grett whale *by chance; leviathan*
 That ys acursyd eternally, by the sentence of the lawe;
 Receyve me, Lord, for fadir and modir refuse me with bale, *anguish*
 395 And seyn, 'Asneth is not oure douhter,' to grete and to smale,
 'For sche hath destroyed oure godis of goold, and gyfe hem in conculcacioun,¹

¹ *And say to everyone, great and small, "Asneth is not our daughter, / For she has destroyed our golden gods and trampled them underfoot"*

The Storie of Asneth

To alle men passyng by the way in gret abhominacioun.'

- “Werefore I fle to The, my God, that art of mythes most: *Wherefore*
 Delivere me, and spare me, Lord; I have synned by ignorance
- 400 When I called Thi child Joseph, in despite with my goost, *conflict; soul*
 The heerdis sone of Chanan, in pride of my bobaunce; *vanity*
 And now he is above alle men, withoute variaunce,
 For he The knoweth for on God, veray Lord and trewe. *one*
 Therfore Thu hast gyfe witt to hym, wisdam and vertue.
- 405 “Now, good Lord, take me to hym to be his handmaide, *entrust*
 And I schal wassche louly hys feet; subdue me to his servage, *humbly*
 Lernynge the knowlych of veray God.” And when sche thus had said, *true*
 The sterre Lucifer in the est shewed his visage, *[the morning star]*
 And therof Asneth was ful glad, and seide in here langage,
- 410 “Trowest not God hath my prayer herd?¹ The message — lo! — of lyht
 Is rise up!” And sodeynly sche saw a selcouth siht. *marvelous*
- Sche saw faste by the sterre how hevene partyd in two,
 And a wondirful gret liht lemed out in that stede, *gleamed; place*
 And Asneth ferd fel on here face, on the askes tho, *afraid; ashes*
- 415 And a man com doun fro hevene, and stood upon here heed, *in front of her*
 Callynge Asneth by here name; sche answered not for dred,
 And he called here the secounde tyme, and saide, “Asneth! Asneth!”
 Then sche answered, “Lo, my Lord,” and therwith sche took breth, *gasped*
- And saide, “Tell me who thu art,” and he answered in haste,
 420 “I am a prince of Godis hous, and of Hys heavenly ost. *host*
 Arise, and stand on thi feet, and be nothyng agast, *not at all afraid*
 And my wordis schal speke to the to cumfort of thi gost.” *spirit*
 Sche lyfte then here heed and saw a man like almost
 Joseph, with scepter, stole, and coroune, his cheer as lyhtyng leem,²
- 425 And his yes bright shynyng as doth the sunne beem. *eyes*
- The heris of hys heed, thei were as flame of fire brennyng,

¹ Do you not believe that God has heard my prayer?

² Joseph, with scepter, stole, and crown, his countenance bright as a flash of lightning

The Storie of Asneth

- And Asneth, frayd of the syhte, fel to his feet for fere, *fearful*
 In so moche that al here membris were meved with tremblynge.
- 430 And the aungel saide thenne, “Asneth, nothinge the dere; *(will) harm you*
 Be thou comforted, and rise up, and on thi feet the rere, *raise yourself*
 And [I] schal speke my wordis to the after myn entent.”
 And Asneth roos upon here feet at his commaundement.
- The aungel saide to Asneth, “Do of thi blak haire, *Take off your grim hairshirt*
 And thi garnement of drede, the saccloth, do away; *penitence*
- 435 Smyte the askes fro thi heed, and washe thi face faire,
 And thi handis with rennyng water; do on thi riche aray, *put on*
 Thi lynnен robe, untouched newe, that glorious ys and gay,
 And gird the with the double ceynt of thi virginité, *cincture*
 And then com to me agayn, and I schal speke to the.”
- 440 Asneth hasted forth anon and did as he desired,
 And caste on the white robe with precious parementis, *put on; trimmings*
 With double ceynt gird aboute, and diversly atired *cincture; ornamented*
 Above the brestis, and on the lendis gird on here garnementis, *loins*
 A lynen newe theustre vail with riche ornamentis; *summer veil*
- 445 Here hed was voluped with that vail, for virginal excellencie, *enveloped*
 And returned to the aungel, and stood in his presence.
- The aungel saide, “Lai don thi vail; discovere thi hed in haste. *veil; uncover*
 Why dost thou thus? Thu art maide, thin heed is fair to se, *virgin*
 As the heed of a yonglynge.” The vail away sche caste. *youth; veil*
- 450 The aungel said, “Asneth, maide, of good chere thu be,
 Oure Lord hath herd thi prayer and thi confession fre;
 Thi fast he saw of seven dayes, and thi lou mekyngne, *humble meekness*
 And the fen, mad of the askes and of gret terynge. *mud made; ashes; weeping*
- 455 “Be glad, virgine, for thi name ys write in the book of lif, *written*
 And schal never be don away, but ay in remembrance. *erased*
- Lo fro this day thu art renuwed and quicked fro al strif, *renewed; revived*
 And thu schalt ete of blesynge bred and have drinke of plesance; *holy bread*
 Thu schalt be enoynted with holi creme of glorious purveance. *provision*
 And, more, I gif the into wyf to Joseph my dere frend, *give thee*
 460 And Joseph into thi spouse in wordle withoute end. *world*

The Storie of Asneth

- “And thi name schal be called Asneth no more,
 But hit schal be Moche-of-Refute, and so men schul the calle, Refuge
 For peple schul turne to God by the, I warne the bifore,
 And undir thi wynggis thei schul be covered, tristynge in God alle, trusting
 465 And attendynge to the hiest God schul be kept in thi walle, sacred domain
 For thi penaunce hath prayd to Hym for the every hour,
 And upon alle other penantes, in Godis name with dolour. for you
penitents
- “For penaunce ys the dere doucher of hiest God in hevene,
 And entendynge upon maidenes and loveth you gretly, attentive to
 470 And praieth for you every hour to God, I telle the evene,
 And for alle repentant in Godis hie namemekly. tell you directly
high
 Yt maketh maidenes to reste in hevene in place arayd sikerly,
 And renoveleth virgines clene to Goddis dere blesynge, renews
 And ministreth hem joye and blisse in wordlis withoute endyng. provides
- 475 “Penaunce ys a maide good, glad, and mesurable. maiden
 The hiest God hath here in lond, his angelis in reverence, loves her on earth
 I love here wel. Now schal I go withoute ony fable,
 To Joseph and telle of the the wordis of my sentence,
 And he schal come this dai to the and see thyn excellencye,
 480 And with joye love the well; thi spouse be he schalle,
 And wedded wyf to hym in wordlis eternalle. realms of eternity
- “And now here me, Asneth, maide: do on thi garnementis
 Of weddynge now in thi chambre, and atire the with alle,
 And enbelise thi bright beauté, with preciouse ornamentis, hear; put on
 485 And go forth to mete Joseph, thi spouse specialle. embellish
beloved
 For he schal come and se the today, in vesture imperialle.”
 And after he had endyd his word, Asneth with consolacion
 Worshipped hym don on the erthe, and said in comendacyon, down
- “Blessed be thi God most hiest, that thus the hath sent,
 490 And delivered me fro derknesse and depnesse of my bale; misery
 Blessed ever be His name, Lord God omnipotent.”
 And to the angel afterward thise wordis sho gan availe: she; utter
 “What is thi name? Tel me sone, and give yt me in tale,
 That I mai worship and thanke the, my lord and my frend,
 495 And glorifie thi grete name, in wordle without ende.” detail
thee
world

The Storie of Asneth

- The angel saide, "My name is write in Godis book in heven,
 With Godis fynger afore al othir in the bokys bygynnynge.
 For I am the Prince of Godis Hous, and so I tel the even,
 That al that writen is in that boke, hit passed mannys spekyng; *surpassed*
 500 Inconvenienc therfore yt ys, to eche man unsytyng, *not proper*
 To commune or to here of hem that are celestialle, *confer; hear*
 For thei be gret fro mannys mynde, and wonderfull with alle." *too immense for*
- Thenne seide Asneth, "Good lord, lat me fynde grace
 That I mai knowe that yt be do that thu hast said to me.
 505 Gyf thyn handmaide leve to speke in presence of thi face." *Give; permission*
 The angel said, "Spek on, Asneth, thi bone I graunte the." *petition*
 And sche tok hym by the palle, and said with vois ful free,
 "I pray the, lord, to sitte a while upon this bed so clene,
 For man ne womman satt never theron by no maner mene,
- 510 "And I schall make a bord redy, and offre to your plesir
 Breed and wyn fro my celer, ful swete and redolent; *Bread; cellar; fragrant*
 And when ye have ete and drunke then aftir your desire,
 Ye mai folwe forth your way aftir your entent."
 The aungel saide, "Bringe yt sone, therto I consent."
 515 And Asneth sette a newe bord with business and haste, *eagerness*
 And went to fette breed and wyne plesant to his taste.
- The aungel saide, "A honycombe bringe thu me ful sone,"
 And for sche had non redy sche stood al dismaid. *because*
 Sche saide, "I schal send a chyld into the feeld anone
 520 Of hour heritance to fette on, and sone yt schal be rayd." *our; fetch one; ready*
 "Entre into thi celer," the aungel to here saide,
 "And thu schalt fynde an honycomb redy on the bord,
 Take and bryng yt to me." And Asneth sayd, "My lord,
- Knowyth wel ther is non, in no maner of wyse." *none*
 525 "Entre thi celer," quod the aungel, "and on ther schalt thou fynde." *one*
 Sche entred in; an honycomb sche fond of a gret assise,
 Also white as the snowe, clene and pure in kynde,
 Of odour swete. And Asneth mervayled in her mynde,

The Storie of Asneth

- 530 And said, "Trowest not that of this comb that this man hath ete,¹
For the flavour ys as the breeth of his mouth so swete?"
- And annon sche tok the comb and afore hym sette. *soon; before*
 The angel said, "Whi saidest thou ther was non in thi celer?
 Now hast thou broght a ful fair on, that was in thi recette." *keeping*
 And Asneth with gret drede saide in this manere,
 535 "Lord, non swych honycomb in governance hadde I there,
 But by commaundement of thi mouth, so yt was do,
 For the odour therof ys lik the breeth of thi mouth also."
- And the aungel smyled then, with lauhynge cuntenance,
 For the wisdam of Asneth, upon here intelligence. *laughing*
 540 He called here unto hym, his right hand he did hance *Because of*
 Upon here heed. Sche loked on hym with shame and reverence;
 He gaf here then hys benison of gracious influence. *lift*
 He saide to here, "Thu art blessed, for thou hast left the fay
 Of alle maner fals ydolys, and belevist in God veray. *humility*
blessing
faith
true
- 545 "And blessed be thei that come to God in holy penance,
 For thei schul ete of this comb, that bees made of Paradise, *bees of Paradise*
 Of the dew of rosis there, that are of gret plesance. *roses*
 The angelis of God schul ete also this comb of prise, *wondrous value*
 And who that eteth of the same schal never dye in no wise." *way*
 550 After he brak it and ete a part of that hony swete; *Afterwards*
 The remenant he putte in Asneth mouth and bad here to ete.
- The aungel saide, "Lo, thou hast ete of the bred of lyf,
 And thu art enoynted with holi creme, and thi flesh fro this day
 Schal be renewed, and thi bonys cured from al strif,
 555 And thi vertu nevere faile; the sothe now I the say. *truth*
 Thy juvente schal have non age, thi beauté schal laste ay. *youthful vigor*
 Of alle that fle to oure Lordis name, God and Hevene Kynge,
 Thu schalt be as cité bild of joye, withoute endyng." *fly*

¹ *And said [to herself], "Don't you believe that of this honeycomb this man (angel) has eaten?"*

The Storie of Asneth

- He touched the comb broke with his hand: hool it was anone; *whole*
 560 He touched the hony with hys fynger upon the este partie, *east side*
 He drow his fynger ageyn to hym to the west part sone, *immediately*
 And the way of his fynger was mad al blodi.
 He drow his fynger theron fro the north to the sowth surly; *surely*
 The way of hys fynger ther was turned into blood,
 565 And Asneth biheld al that he did; in his lift side sche stood. *on his left*
- The aungel saide, "Upon the comb behold and take hede,"
 And bees come out therof ful fele, and white as the snow; *came; very many*
 Here wynges were of purpre hewe; aboute here thei yede *purple; went*
 And wrouhte a honycomb in here handis and ete therof inow. *enough*
- 570 The aungel saide then to the bees as I schal tel yow:
 "Go ye now into your place." Thei wente toward the est,
 Into paradis. The angel said, "Asneth, al this thu seest?"
- She answered, "Ye, my lord." The aungel saide thenne,
 "So my wordis schul be fulfild that I have said to the."
 575 The comb he touched with his hand, and fire bygan to brenne, *burn*
 And consumed the comb anon, not hurtyng bord ne tre. *table nor wood*
 The fragrant odour of that brennyng yt was swete and fre.
 Asneth saide, "I have seven maidenes on o nyht bore *(see note)*
 With me; as my sisteres I love hem all therfore.
- 580 "To blesse hem as thu hast me afore the I hem calle."
 "Calle on," he saide. Sche called sone; thei com to his presence. *right away*
 The aungel seide, "Almyhti God Lord blesse you alle,
 Be ye to the Cité of Refute seven pileris in assistance, *Refuge*
 And alle dwellynge in that cité schul reste on your prudence."
 585 The aungel saide to Asneth then, "This bord awey thu dihte." *table; take*
 [See note on the missing line.]
- Sche turned and saw lik a char with foure hors passynge *chariot*
 In heven toward the est lik flame of fire reed, *red*
 The hors assemblinge to the flame of thunder leihnyng; *resembling*
 Sche saw the aungel upon the char standyng in that steed. *place*
- 590 That he was aungel sche was unknowe; therfore sche said with dred, *ignorant*
 "Alas! I have spoke with Godis aungel. Have mercy on thi handmaide,
 For the wordis I spak in thi presence, in ignorance I hem saide."

The Storie of Asneth

- | | | |
|-----|---|-------------------------------|
| | And Asneth yet thus spekyng, a yonge man cam ful faste
Of the servantes of Putifar, and to here he saide, | |
| 595 | “Joseph the strong man of God cometh here in haste.
His messanger ys at the gate.” And Asneth forth sche braide
And stood aside in a tresance: sche was ful wel apaide. | drew
gateway; pleased |
| | Joseph entred into halle. The gatis men did spre
And shitte out alle straungeris that no man schul hym dere. | close
shut; bother |
| 600 | And Asneth wente to mete Joseph, out of the tresance goynge.
Joseph saw here and gan to wonder upon beauté briht, | gateway |
| | For sche was chaunged and enbelised by the angelis communyng; | embellished |
| | And Joseph saide, “Who art thu? Telle me anon riht.” | |
| | “I am thi handmaide,” quod sche, “to thi commaundement diht, | obedient |
| 605 | And alle mamettis I have do away, and utterli forsake; | idols |
| | The aungel of God fedde me today and hevenly fode me take, | provided |
| | “And saide, ‘I have gyfe the today wyf unto Joseph,
And he schal be thi spouse in the wordle withoute ende;
And saide my name schulde no more be called Asneth, | given you as wife
world |
| 610 | But the Cité of Refute, and thi Lord God schal the sende
Moche peple that thu schalt turne and to Almyhþy God wende.’ | convert; send on |
| | He saide me more, ‘To Joseph forth now schal I passe,
And speake thise wordis in his eris, of the more and lasse.’ | ears |
| | “Now thu knowyst, my lord Joseph, yf the aungel cam to the,
615 And spoke to the of me the wordis that I shewe.” | |
| | Then Joseph sayde, “Of hiest God, Asneth, blessed thu be,
And thi name, in kynredis blessed, of kynredes schal renewe, | among kindred |
| | For God of hevene loved the and send me his angel trewe,
And speake of the to me thise wordis; and therfore, maide, com ner. | near |
| 620 | What ys the cause thu standist fro me now so fer?” | far |
| | And Joseph streihte out his hand, and loveli gan her brace.
Thei kiste then bothe in same with cuntenance excellent. | extended; embrace
together |
| | Then saide sche, “My lord Joseph, entre into oure place.” | |
| | Sche ladde him in by the right hand. Here fadir was absent. | |
| 625 | Sche broughte water to wasse his feet, with ful trewe entent,
And he ashed another maide to whasshe ys feet there. | wash |
| | And Asneth saide, “I schal hem wasshe, ye ar my lord dere. | asked; wash his feet |

The Storie of Asneth

- “Fro hennys forth I am thin awne, thi handmaid and thi thralle. *own; servant*
 Whi ashest thou anothir maide to wasshe thi feet here? *ask*
- 630 Thi feet ar myn owne feet, thi handdis also with alle,
 And thi soule ys my soule: thou are thn myn owen fere.” *then; companion*
 Sche constreyned hym and weeshe hys feet with ful good chere. *convinced*
 And he beheld here fair handis: of beauté ther was no misse. *defect*
 He tok here by the right hand and lovely did here kysse.
- 635 He made here then sitte by hym upon his right hand;
 Here fadir, here modir, and here kynred com out of the feld
 Of here heritage, and wondringe stil thei gan stande.
 The glorious beauté of here douhter mervaillus thei beheld. *their*
 Thei saw here sitte with Joseph; reverence to hym thei yeld. *yielded*
- 640 More thei mervailed that sche wered on the stole of here weddynge.¹
 And after thei ete and drunke togadir, gretly enjoynge,
- Then saide Putifar to Joseph, “Tomorwe I schal calle
 Alle the governouris of Pharao and princes of Egyp lande,
 And make espousailes unto you; my douhter take thu schalle *betrothal*
- 645 Unto thi wyf.” Then saide Joseph, “Thu schalt understande:
 I schal go myself tomorwe, and that werke take on hande,
 And speke to Pharao of Egyp king, my fadir of gret honour;
 Of al his land he hath me mad chief prince and governour.
- “And I schal speke in his eris of Asneth plesantly, *ears*
 650 And he schal yeve here me to wyf with solempnité.” *give her to me*
 Then said Putifar, “Go forth with pees ful obeisantly.”
 But with Putifar he dwelled al nyght with tranquillité,
 And with Asneth sclepte he not, but said in verité *slept*
 “Hit is no right that a man that wirshipeth God an hihe *high*
 655 Afore his espousailes in no wyse with his wyf to lye.”
- Joseph ros up tymely, to kynge Pharao he goos, *goes*
 And said, “Graunte me to wyf Asneth, the maide reverent,
 The douhter of preest Putifar of Olinpoleos.”
 And Pharao saide, “To the, Joseph, the maide is congruent, *well-matched*

¹ Even more, they marvelled that she wore her wedding stole

The Storie of Asneth

- 660 For sche is a maide clene as thu. Tak to here to thin entent. *Possess her world*
 Be sche to the thi dere spouse in wordle everlastynge.”
 And Pharao send to Putifar his douhter forth to bringe.
- 665 Afore Pharao Asneth stood in his hihe presence; *Before*
 And he wonderinge on here beauté: “Endure with the for ay;¹
 The rightful God of Joseph hath chose the his spouse today.
 And Joseph is called the sone of God of hih dignité, *high*
 And thu schalt be called his owen spouse in perpetuité.”
- 670 Pharao then tok hem bothe and here hedis frette *their heads adorned*
 With crounys of pure gold, that riche were of atire,
 Upon the right side of Joseph Asneth then sette, *[Pharaoh] placed Asneth*
 And laide his handis on here hedis and saide in his desire. *their; delight*
 “Blesse you now the Lord God of the heavenly empire,
 And fulfille you eternally with glorie, joye, and blisse.”
 And after turned hem mouth to mouth, and togedir did hem kysse.²
- 675 And after Pharao dide the weddynggys to be solempnised, *caused*
 Callynge alle princes and governours of Egyp land therto,
 A rial feste by seven dayes duringe was devised, *royal; duration; arranged*
 And Pharao declareret a newe decree to alle hys land also,
 Saiyngge, “What man that ony werke ever hereafter do
- 680 In the day that Joseph and Asneth were wedded inne, *Upon*
 Thei schul dye in grevus deth for that gret synne.”
- And after Joseph knewe his wyf and sche conceived sone, *right away*
 And bar Manasses and Effraim — this was here procreacion.
 And after Asneth seurly to God sche mad here mone, *prayer of confession*
 685 Remembringe here olde synne by privé meditacion, *inward*
 And after mournynge thus sche saide, with gret lamentacion, *contrition*
 “Lord, synned I have synned, moche synned in Thi presence,
 Asneth, dowhter of Putifar, pardone myn offence.
- “Most foulest in my fadir hous I was of governance,

¹ “May all go well with you forever”

² And then they turned themselves mouth to mouth and kissed each other

The Storie of Asneth

- 690 A maide enhansed and right proud, I have synned, Lord, to The,
 Fals godis herid withoute nombre to my daliance, *praised; in my foolishness*
 And ete bred of her sacrifice so synned in that degré; *their*
 Synned, Lord, I have synned in thi sihte fre,
 And ete of bord of pestilence, bred that is straunglinge, *table of death; deadly*
 695 And drunke of the chalis of defaute, in thi presence synnyng. *cup of deprivation*
- “And of The, Lord God of hevene, I was ignoraunt,
 Not tristinge in the hihe God that art lyf eternalle.
 I have synned, Lord, in Thi presence, my synne is displiant, *displeasing*
 For I triste on my richesse and my beauté withalle. *trust*
- 700 I have synned, Lord, lift up with pride, confesse so I schalle:
 I was dispisyng every man on erthe with errour;
 There stood never man in my presence that I gaf favor. *gave*
- “Alle my woweris I dispised; of hem I hadde disdeyn. *wooers*
 Synned, Lord, I have synned in presence of Thi face,
 705 For I saide there was no prince, with glorie that was veyn, *vain*
 That the girdel of my maydenhed was worthi to unbrace. *disarm (undo)*
 I willed to marie the kyngis sone, so proud was my trace. *wished; conduct*
 Synnyng, Lord, I have synned contynuyng in Thi presence, *continuously*
 Til Joseph the myghty man of God tok me with excellencie;
- 710 “For as the fyssh by the hook ys take by distresse, *constraint*
 So ys beauté drew me to hym by vertuus provydence, *his; drew; powerful*
 And ladde me to Almighty God with gret gentynesse, *gentleness*
 And did me taste of the drynke of the eternal sapience. *caused me to*
 And now I am mad his conthorall by his advertence *spouse; thoughtfulness*
 715 Ay to dwelle an byde with hym in wordle withoute ende. *and abide; world*
 Synned, Lord, I have synned; remission thu me sende.”
- AND after seven yeer were passed of plenteus abundance
 Ther bygunne seven yeer of hunger scars and chere, *scarce; sparse*
 And Jacob herde of Joseph, and with gret plesance, *heard*
 720 He com into Egipt land with his kynrede in fere, *together*
 In the secunde monthe the secunde yeer when vitaile was dere, *food; scarce*
 The on and twenti day of the monthe, Israell com don then *down*
 And descended with his kynred into the land of Jessen. *Goshen*

The Storie of Asneth

- Then saide Asneth to Joseph, "Mi fadir I schal go se,
 725 For a god he is to me, thi fader Israel."
 Joseph saide, "To se hym com now forth with me,"
 And thei come to Jacob, to the land of Jessen welle.
 And Joseph bretheren mette hem with reverence and revelle;
 Thei wirshiped hym, don upon the erthe louely obeyinge,
 730 Thei entred into Jacob where was his loggynge. down; lowly
lodging
- Israel was sittyng on his bed, old and of gret age;
 Asneth saw hym and mervailed for Jacob was good in sight,
 Of hys age ful reverent, as youthe of fair parage,
 His heed white as the snow, his berd to the brest right
 735 Al white was sittyng, and his yees schynynge as liht. to look upon
ancestry
 Hys synewis, schuldres, and his armes were stable and vailant,
 His knes, schynys, and his feet like to a geaunt. arranged; eyes
strong
knees; shins; giant
- And Asneth salued hym on here knes with humble contenance; greeted
 Then said Jacob to Joseph, "My sone, thy wyf this is?"
 740 He said, "Ye." Than Jacob this wordis to here gan vance: these; advanced
 "Blessed be thu, daughter of hiest God," and after he did here kys.
 And after thei ete and drunke togedir with gret joy and blys, afterwards
 And thenne Joseph and Asneth to here hous thei wente
 And the bretheren of Joseph afore hem were sente. led the procession
- 745 In the right side of Asneth was Levy in assistance, attendance
 And Symeon the left parte wente by and by,
 And Asneth loved Levy wel for hys intelligence.
 And after, as sche in Pharaois hous walked plesauntly,
 Pharaois sone beheld here as he loked an hy,
 750 That was his first bygeten child, his sone and his heir. [Pharaoh's] first begotten
 Anon he brente on here for love, her beauté was so feir. burnt; fair
- Wherfore he languyshid for love, and nyste what to do. knew not what
 But sone he sente messagers to Symeon and Levi,
 That were the bretheren of Joseph, and thus said hem to:
 755 "I knowe wel that ye are men stronge and mihty,
 And meny a Sichym ye han slain with swerd manfully, Shechemite
 And now I pray you tendrlly for to helpe me:

The Storie of Asneth

- I schal you gife goold and silver and men gret plenté;
- “Servantis, assis, and chamelis to youre lote schal falle. *asses; camels*
- 760 I warne you that to your brother I have gret envye,
For he hath Asneth to his wyf, ordeyned me first of alle.¹ *brothers trusty*
Therfore assenteth now to me: on my swerd schal he dye;
Asneth to spouse then schal I have I tel you trulye.
Then schal I take you as my bretherre tristy and trewe;
765 And if ye dispise my cunseil, sore ye schul yt rewe. *sorely; rue*
- “For my swerd ageyns you then schal I araye.”
Then spak Levi unto hym with riht bolde chere,
“Wherto speketh my lord thise wordis us to afraye?
We are men that worship God, and oure fadir dere
770 Ys the child of hie God and our brother in al manere,
Ys dredyngre gretly God; thi word hou schul we do
To synne so in Godis presence and oure fadris also? *intimidate*
high; in every respect
God-fearing
[Since it would be]
- “Therefore, heer now my wordis, and do not thyn entent,
For howre brother tok here not of his owen acceptance,
775 But by the lawe of thi fadir and of his consent;
And yf thu dwelle in thi purpoos of wykked purveance,
Oure swerdis, lo, in oure handis wyth the in variance,
In thi presence with oure brother ful redi for to dye.”
And when Pharaois sone herd this, he dred hem gretlye. *hear*
our; own
continue; scheme
behold; in opposition
feared them
- 780 Then Symeon and Levi went out fro his presence,
And Pharaois sone was replete with sorwe, drede, and ire. *filled*
To injure he dradde Joseph for his gret prudence;
Yet on the beauté of Asneth his corage was afire.
His meyné then saide to hym, to plesance of his desire,
785 “Lo, the sonys of handmaides to Rachell and to Lye,
Of Bale and of Zelphe, to Joseph have envye;
- “Thei wil be redy to do thi wil.” And forth thei were fett, *fetched*
And Pharaois sone unto hym then did hem calle,

¹ *For he has taken Asneth to be his wife, who was ordained at a prior time to be my wife*

The Storie of Asneth

- And saide, "Lo, here lyf and deth afore your face ys fett.¹
- 790 Taketh the lyf and not the deth, I cunseyl you withal. *choose; urge*
 I herde Joseph sey to my fadyr that ye wer children thral
 'And not my bretheren. I abyde hem utterly to destruye
 After the deth of my fadir and al here generacion nuye; *slave children*
plan
harrass
- "Thei schul never enherite with us, the sonis of servage. *these sons of slaves*
 795 Thise schalde me to the Ismalitis; I schal yelde hem malice, *sold; give them*
 That thei maligned ageyns me in here gret outrage.' *their*
 My fadyr Pharao preised hym and said that he was wyse,
 And saide, 'I schal werke with the after thi devyse.' *scheme*
 And after thei hadde herde thise wordis of the sone of Pharao,
 800 Thei said, troubled gretly, "Then, Lord, schal we do?" *[what] shall*
- He saide, "My fadir Pharao I schal sle this nyht,
 For he is as fadir to Joseph and loveth hym gretly,
 And ye youre brother Joseph to deth ye schul dyht. *arrange*
 Then schal I have Asneth to wyf, that fair is and lovely,
 805 And ye shul have part of myn heritage as my brether tristy. *trusty*
 Then saide the bretheren Gad and Dan, "Thi men, lord, we be;
 What thu cumaundis, hit schal be do and more, we telle the.
- "We herde Joseph to Asneth saie, 'Tomorwe thu schal go
 Into felde of howere heritage, for now is hervest seson,' *our*
 810 And commaundet six hundred men to passe with here also.
 Commaunde us, lord, mo fihtyng men that we may by reson *by plan*
 Go afore hem on the nyht and leye a bushement with treson, *ambush*
 Bi the brook and hide us there in the spers of the redis, *leaves; reeds*
 And tak with the fyve hundred archeris whatsoever nedis, *you; is necessary*
- 815 "And go afore us a good way, fert out in lengthe; *spread out*
 And Asneth withynne our bushement then come schalle, *ambush*
 And we schulle sle here men echon, that be with here by strenthe,
 And Asneth wil fle on here char and in oure handis falle. *chariot*
 Thu schalt parfourme then thi wil and thi desires alle,
 820 Then schul we Joseph and hys children sle byfore thi ye." *eye*

¹ "Behold, life and death is placed here before you."

The Storie of Asneth

- When Pharaois sone thise wordis herde, he enjoyed gretlye, *was pleased*
- And sende to hem two thousand that armed were briht.
Thei wente and hidde hem by the broke in the reed slily,
And Pharaois sone roos hym upon the same nyht,
825 And com to his fadir chamber to entre in prively.
His fadir wacche forbad hit hym, and told the cause why: *watchman*
“Thi fadir hed of wacche it aketh and now reste hath take;¹
He forbad entré to every man, that non schulde hym wake.”
- And when he herde thise wordis he departed than,
830 And toke five hundred archiris; afore the gate he wente, *archers*
After that that yt was spoke bothe by Gad and Dan.²
And Asneth aros tymely, to Joseph sche here mente: *spoke*
“I go to the feld of oure heritage after thyn entente,
But sory dredeth now my soule that we schul parted be.”
- 835 Joseph said, “Dred nothynge, for God is with the

And schal keep the fro al disease, as the appell of the ye, *harm; eye*
For I schal go and gif bred to the land aboute.”
And bothe thenne thei toke here way, and Asneth cam bye
Upon the brook, and six hundred men with here in a route. *company*
- 840 And sodeynly the busment brake on hem a shoute, *ambush; (with) a shout*
And slowe hem ful cruelly in the egge of the swerde, *slew; with the blade*
And Benjamyn fledde with Asneth on here char aferd.
- A man ther scaped away, that was with Asneth there,
And told Levi and his brother in haste of the afrai. *fracas*
845 Men of armes thei tok forth, hors, harneis, and geer,
And after Asneth quickly thei folwed on the way,
And sone in haste thei come there that the busment lay,
And fille on hem sodeinly, and gaf hem dethis wounde.
Gad and Dan entred the redis and hid hem that stounde. *fell*
themselves; time
- 850 Benjamyn, abydyng with Asneth, saw Pharaois sone com on

¹ Your father's head aches from keeping watch, and now he is resting

² According to the plan agreed upon with Gad and Dan

The Storie of Asneth

- To sette hand upon here; therof he was war.
 In the lift side of the sculle he smote hym with a ston,
 That fro his hors with the same to the grounde he hym bar;
 As good as ded there he lay, he gaf hym swych a scar.
 855 His horsmen and archeris when thei saw that siht,
 Thei fledde to the redis and hidde hem there right.
- When Benjamyn saw Symeon and Levi comynge
 He was glad, and gaf Asneth wordis of good chere.
 And after thei assembled ful gretly enjoynge,
 860 Askynge after Gad and Dan, yf thei sawe hem there,
 Willynge to have slain hem with purpose entere;
 But Asneth saw thei souhte her brether to sle hem in rage,
 And myldely with softe wordis her wrathe sche gan swage.
- “Ye schal not now do this thyng; youre brothere thei be,
 865 Of the kynde of youre fadir, and yf ye slowe hem so,
 Ye schulde be repref to alle men, tristeth to me,
 And make your fadir sori and sette his herte in wo.”
 And when sche hadde thus said, her ire swaged tho,
 Aftir thei tok up Pharaois sone, the blood fro hym wasshyngne,
 870 And sette hym on a hors, his wondis softe byndyne.
- Then thei laidede hym to hys fadir, and told hym more and myn.
 Pharao thanked gretly God that he was not slain.
 The thridde day he was ded by the wounde of Benjamin,
 And Pharao sorwed sore for hym and gretly did complayn,
 875 And that sorwe with sikenesse so sore gan hym constrainy
 That Pharao dide in the age of nynty and nyne yeer,
 Levyng his kingdom to Joseph that was hym leef and deer.
- Joseph regned nobeli there wyth gret prosperité
 Fourty yeer and eyhte, ful graciously governynge,
 880 And after he gaf his diademe to Pharaois sone fre,
 That was at his fadir deth at the brest soukyngne.
 And Joseph was called in Egipt fadir to the kynge.
 Thus endeth the storie of Asneth to youre remembrance.
 My rude translacion I pray you tak hit with plesance.

left; skull

wound

reeds

with great joy

their whole will

their brothers

their anger; assuage

kinsmen

a disgrace; trust

their anger eased then

wounds softly binding

bore; less

died

beloved; dear

The Storie of Asneth

[Epilogue]

- 885 Ha, cruell deeth! contrarious to creatures in kynde,
 Ha, deeth dispitous! Who may advertise
 Thi mourther, thi malice? Who may have in mende
 The myschief that to mankynde thu dost excercise?
 Thi rigour, thi rancour, who may devyse?
- 890 The matyngē of thi miserie no man may endure,
 For thi chekkes conclude everi creature.
- Thu art to alle creatures hidous to beholde —
 Thu pyllour! thu pirate! — cesse of thi prise.
 Thi felonye ys multiplied in so many folde
- 895 That al the wordle generally of the, deth, agrise.
 Stynt of thi malice, for wyth thy malgyse
 Lovers ful lykynge and lusty in game
 Thu marrest with myschief, and makest hem lame.
- 900 Thu tyraunt untemperat, with thi tene and treson,
 The solas of soveraignes thu dost silvestrise,
 And ladies likynge thu sleest out of seson,
 And revest hem here ryaltē with thi reprise.
 Thyn insaciable malice who may accomlise,
 When that loveli ladies thu leyest so lowe
- 905 And here bright beauté thu blemshest in a throwe?
- For thi malice me semeth reames sholde arise,
 To destruye cruell deeth, and do hym of dawe.
 But oon wynked on me then: “War!” quod the wyse,
 And cesse of thi sentence, for symple is thi sawe;
- 910 For deeth universelly the wordle schal vengyse;
 So ys the tyraunt tytled to that victorie,
 By Adam the alderman of old auncetrie.”
- Then sorwed I that sentence recovered by assyse,
 And mourned for my maystresse here marred in molde.
- 915 There ys countour ne clerk bounté can decyse;
 In vertu here wommanhed was volupid many folde —
 Discreet, devoute, diligent. Deeth, thu mayst agrise
- without pity; convey
 murder; mind*
- checkmating
 checkmates*
- hideous
 pillager; give up your prize*
- world; shudders with fear
 Stop; wickedness
 happy*
- intemperate; trouble
 banish
 pleasure*
- bereave; royalty; reprisal
 insatiable*
- in an instant*
- realms
 ban him from life (day)
 “Beware,” said the wiseman
 naive; talk*
- avenge
 entitled
 of ancient ancestry*
- delivered by edict
 in the earth*
- neither accountant nor; diminish
 enveloped with
 take fright yourself*

The Storie of Asneth

To represse so noble, so gentille a creature,
In tendir age untymely agayn the ordir of nature.

- 920 O myghty Lord, Whos goodnesse never schal fynse,
Have mercy on the soule of my dere maistresse. *Whose; be exhausted*
The fendis power fro that soule chare and chastise. *divert; chasten*
Delivere here, gracious Lord, fro peyne and distresse.
Endowe here in Thi place of plesaunt paradise,
- 925 And receyve here, blyssed Lord, upon Thi right side,
In Thy blysse eternally wyth The to abyde.
- Of lordis lyne and lynage sche was: here sche lyse, *lies*
Bounteuous, benigne, enblesched with beauté, *embellished*
Sage, softe, and sobre, and gentylle in al wyse,
930 Florishyne and fecunde with femenyn beauté, *bounteous*
Meke, mylde, and merciful, of pité sche bar the prise.
Comely, kynde, and curteis, in nobleye of nurture,
Vernant in alle vertu, plesaunt and demure. *nobility*
Abundant

Notes

- 1 Initial *A* rubricated, with face in profile with visor. Here and henceforth in the text I indicate rubricated cadels by capitalizing the whole word. The cadels range in height from four to six lines, usually four. Though all contain profiles none are the same. In fact, they offer a rather witty diversity of noses, chins, and caps.
- 5–8 Through the rhetorical demurral of talent to translate, the poet anticipates the food-supplier trope of the subsequent narrative. Although here at the outset he doubts that he can supply much grain for his Lady's *graunge*, i.e., her granary, by the time he finishes he will have supplied the narrative of Joseph himself in one of his most fructuous acts, the marrying of Asneth and the producing of his people's heritage. The metaphor continues in line 30, where *sentence* could be translated as "kernel." *Graunge* might also be taken as a metaphor of his Lady's library — her storehouse of wisdom — to which another book will soon be added, to her delight.
- 14 *cowe in a cage*. Compare Mum & Sothsegger 3.262: *as becometh a kow to hoppe in a cage!*
- 15 MacCracken emends *The* to *Ye* to read: *Ye desire to make a fool of my lordis ape*. The MS reading (*The desire*) turns the line into an appositional gloss on *a cowe in a cage*, which is possible, albeit less clear than MacCracken's emended version.
- 18 *jaile*. From OF *jalir*: to cause to spring up, to cast forth.
- 30 *sentence*. A rhetorical term meaning the fruit within the chaff, the kernel of the idea. See note to lines 5–8 above.
- 31 *grave*. Perhaps from OF *graver*: to part hair, to make smooth; or from OE *grafan*: to engrave, carve.
- 33 Initial *P* rubricated, profile with fool's cap.

Notes

- 35 *The fifthe day, in the secunde monthe.* April 5, with March being the first month.
- 37 *the ferthe monthe, the eyhtethe day.* June 18. According to J. van Goudoever, *Biblical Calendars* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1961) the day would be a Sunday (p. 63). It might also be “an indication of the summer solstice” (p. 120), which would befit the impending harvest.
- 48 *specious.* OED cites Holland, *Howlat* line 733, as earliest instance of this usage (i.e., c. 1450).
- 52–53 According to Midrashic tradition Asneth is the daughter of Dinah by Shechem, son of Hamar, who, to avoid tribal embarrassment, was whisked away by an angel to be raised by Potiphar’s wife, who was barren. This rabbinical tradition keeps the Hebraic line more pure than the tradition that views her as a convert, the true proselyte who finds refuge in and through God. Here the poet has it both ways: Asneth is the natural daughter of Potiphar who converts, but looks and behaves like a Hebrew woman from the outset. See Louis Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews*, tr. Henrietta Szold (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1913) II, 38; *Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer*, tr. Gerald Friedlander (New York, Benjamin Blom, Inc., 1971), pp. 287–88; and Kaufmann Kohler, “Asenath, Life and Confession or Prayer of” in *The Jewish Encyclopedia* II, 172–76.
- 54–55 Sarah, Rebecca, and Rachel: Hebrew women of great virtue, cited in the Christian marriage service as models for good women, Rachel being praised for her friendliness to her husband, Rebecca for her wisdom, and Sarah for her long life and fidelity. In choosing his adjectives to describe them the Middle English poet follows closely the formulas of his Latin source which reads: *eratque magna ut Sarra, speciosa ut Rebecca, et formosa ut Rachel.*
- 58 *gan* is an auxiliary used to indicate perfective aspect, similar to *did*, but sometimes (though not necessarily) with ingressive and causative implications as well, like *began* and *made*. Here *gan tel* = *spoke*.
- 68 *soleyn.* unique, one of a kind, as in Chaucer, *BD* 982–83: *The soleyn fenix of Arabye; / For ther livyth never but oon.*

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- 70–95 The tower built specially for Asneth, with its three chambers for herself and seven chambers for her attendants, who have no intercourse *in no manere entent* with men, signifies her cloistered chastity. That her main chamber's purview has windows to the north and south but with *the firste retardynge to the est* suggests, perhaps, her pious orientation backward toward Paradise. See Gen. 2:8.
- 74 *polimites*. From OF *polmite* or *polimite*, a multi-colored precious stone.
- 84 MS: *The seven chambir was remenant were ordeyned on this manere*. MacCracken emends *chambir was* to *chambiris*.
- 89 MacCracken reads MS as *wyndows there*, which he emends to *wyndowys three* to match the rhyme and the sense of the text and to avoid the redundant *there*. In fact, the first *e* in *there* has a dot placed under it which, according to scribal practices of correction, expunges the unwanted letter. The MS thus reads *thre* and requires no emendation.
- 94 *purpur bise*. OF *bysse*, a fine linen; from Greek *byssos*, flax. The word is often used with purple and as a word to designate a blue pigment (see line 175). In ME *bis* is often linked with Egypt. N.b., Trevisa, *Barth.* 233b, which identifies *bis* as a kind of flax of which *the fayrest of alle groweth in egypte*.
- 98 The recurrent appearance of 18 (the 18th day of the 4th month [line 37] and the 18 guards of this 18 year old girl [line 49]) is intriguing. The number is sometimes construed by gematria to be a sign of Jesus since, in Greek numbering, it gives us the first two letters of Jesus' name [iota=10 + eta=8]. If such a gloss is applicable here it would enhance the chosenness of Joseph's bride to be, Joseph himself being in this narrative a Christ type. See note to line 149. The point would seem to be that they are both numbered in Christ, though they do not yet know it. Such a numerological crux is in keeping with other biblical numberings in the poem, especially the uses of 3, 7, 8, and 12, which seem likewise to carry Christian and Hebraic overtones. This kind of evidence perhaps places the original Greek narrative more closely within the Christian component of the Hebrew-Hellenic community of Alexandria than scholars such as Kaufmann Kohler have acknowledged. On the intimacy of early Christian and Hellenic Hebrew iconography see Christoph Burchard, "The Importance of Joseph and Aseneth for the Study of the New Testament," *NTS*, 32 (1986), and E. W. Smith, Jr., *Joseph and Asenath and Early Christian Litera-*

Notes

ture: *A Contribution to the Corpus Hellenisticum Novi Testamenti*, Ph.D. dissertation, Claremont Graduate School, Claremont, California, 1974.

- 99 MS: after *halle* the scribe's eye skipped to 101, and he copied *that ran as crista*
talle cleer, which he then crossed out and finished the line correctly with *trees*
faire behonge.
- 103 MS: between *and* and *aroos* the word *row* is stricken.
- 106 MS: the first word *Heu* is corrected to *He*.
- 123 *armillis*. From OF *armilles*, a bracelet.
- 124 *bie*. From OF *buie*, a chain. The poet seems to have in mind a more elaborate
neckpiece than a simple chain, given its ornamentation and the fact that it is
“bent.”
- 129 *terestre*. The Latin text reads *theristrum*, which is a summer garment. Compare
line 444, where the poet translates the same Latin word as *theustre* *vail*.
- 144 *contharalle*. From Medieval Latin, referring to a companion or spouse.
- 145–58 Asneth's forthrightness in addressing her father here is a virtue, albeit a blind
one. The passage sets up her penitential prayer (lines 339 ff.) through which
she becomes a *dreme redere* herself and achieves a *kyngis sone* as husband be-
yond her present unenlightened capacities of perception, namely, as she subse-
quently perceives, *Godis sone . . . ful noble of alliance, / And the saveour of al*
Egypt (199–200).
- 148 In line 158 the scribe uses *take* to mean “marry.” If that is the word's sense
here the line could perhaps mean “To marry me as a slave to a renegade.”
- 149 *by bargayn bouht*. By alluding to Joseph's having been sold into slavery by his
brothers, Asneth unwittingly underscores the typology whereby Joseph is said
to prefigure Christ. The Christian commentators on the biblical event regularly
parallel it with Jesus' being sold by Judas for thirty pieces of silver. Implicit as
well may be an allusion to his having been imprisoned for the falsely alleged
flirtation with Potiphar's wife, then released through a deal with Pharaoh.

The Storie of Asneth

- 150 *That herdis sone of Chanan*. See note to line 727.
- 152 MS: a letter is expunged before *happid*.
- 158 *make*. MS: *take*.
- 159 Rubricated initial on *And*, with an old fool's face.
- 163 *cenacle*: A small dining room on an upper floor (n.b. the cenacle of the Last Supper). It is in this room that Asneth has her subsequent conversation and communion meal with the Angel.
- 166 *And*. MS: *Ant*.
- 169 *terrage*. The word perhaps comes from Medieval Latin *terragium*, referring to land, territory, or district. There is no equivalent in the Latin source.
- 176–80 The gold crown with the circle of twelve imperial stones suggests that Joseph is truly the king of the twelve tribes of Israel just as the twelve stars suggest that, as a Christ type, he is obedient to the ruler of the zodiac as well. The scepter designates his nobility and the olive branch that he is a prince of peace. The tone of his majestic entrance is apocalyptic, a vision in keeping with Asneth's impending conversion and encounter with the angel.
- 211 MS: *apt* canceled between *hym* and *that*.
- 215 MS reduplicates *that* mid-line to read *was sche that that in the wyndow stod*.
- 215–21 Joseph's initial response to Asneth seems as unknowing as hers to him as he scorns her for affecting his heart and *for marrynge of my mod* and scorns *the infecccion of femenyn insolence*.
- 229 *And*. MS: *Ant*.
- 232–33 Joseph's insistence on cleanness and his refusal *withoute variaunce* to have to do with *wymmen of straunge alliance* is identical to that of Simeon and Levi when they slay the Shechemites for defiling Dinah in Gen. 34 (see notes to lines 756 and 52–53, where rabbinical tradition avoids the problem by making Asneth Dinah's daughter). The question remains, however: how is it that Jo-

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seph can marry Asneth *withoute variaunce*? It is not enough that she be unlike other Egyptian women or that she, like Shechem, would agree to take on Hebrew customs. The point in this version is that both she and Joseph are made the same, *withoute variance*, through the new grace dispensed by the angel, who cleanses her and transforms her even as he transforms Joseph. Through that new dispensation she too comes to believe *withoute variaunce* (line 402).

- 245 MS: Between *went* and *here*, *fo* is crossed out.
- 256 MS reads *steeight* instead of *streight*.
- 256 *and layd yt on here brestis*. The Latin text is more emphatic and explicit: *ap- posuit ad pectus eius medio duarum mamillarum, et mamille eius prominebant foras*. Compare Song of Songs 8:10.
- 259 The eucharistic allusion in the line comes directly from the Latin source: *et manducare panem benedictum vite, et bibere calicem benedictum incorruptionis*.
- 265 A portion of the poem here is missing, certainly more than the remainder of the stanza. The scribe of the MS is careful in catching eyeskip errors; thus it seems likely that the error here of the missing page occurred at an earlier stage of copying and was already in his exemplar. The skip takes place about a third of the way down fol. 124^r. Since there are no stanza divisions marked in the manuscript the short stanza is not evident. About twenty-eight lines of the Latin text's narrative are missing, lines in which Joseph tells Asneth about the God of Israel and His power to give life and His superiority over Egyptian idols. Joseph then calls for his horses. Potiphar asks him to stay longer, but Joseph replies with the new stanza beginning at line 266. Perhaps our scribe or the scribe he or she was copying from skipped the remainder of the page of the Middle English manuscript being copied (assuming the ME source was ruled about the same as the ruling in the Ellesmere MS). The ratio of Latin lines per page is about the same as that of the Ellesmere and the Middle English scribe at this point in the text is ruling his/her page for forty-two lines. The break occurs twenty-nine lines from the bottom of the page.
- 266 ff. Joseph apparently departs to celebrate the creation of the world. His return on the eighth day is part of the Christian apocalyptic typology of the poem, where eight, the new life number, signifies the new day, a new week, and a new beginning.

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- 283 Compare OF *couverte*, a bedcovering, or a robe.
- 286 *pavement*: a tiled floor.
- 287 This stanza is one line short in its concluding couplet. It seems likely that the scribe skipped a line while copying from the exemplar manuscript. See also the stanza beginning line 580.
- 294 MS: between *yt* and *aketh*, the word *asketh* has been stricken.
- 306 MS: *thaf* cancelled between *here* and *the*.
- 309 That Asneth throws the idols out the north window may imply that she is returning to Satan what is Satan's, whose dwelling place is traditionally in the north.
- 317 Asneth's casting of the idols and the sacred vessels to strangers' dogs carries biblical overtones of defilement. See Matt. 7:6 ("Give not that which is holy unto the dogs") and Exod. 22:31, I Kings 14:11, 16:4, and 21:19–24 on the corpses of wretched sinners being cast to the dogs. Asneth's sensitivity to the moral welfare of her own household dogs (line 318), who don't get fed, is, in its way, touching.
- 323 MacCracken misreads the line *And did an heve upon here bodi*, omitting the first *here*. He interprets *heve* to mean *hives*, as if Asneth has had an allergic reaction to the ashes and sackcloth. The equivalent phrase in the Latin text is *et circumposuit cilicium tristicie*, which indicates that she put on a penitential hair shirt. MacCracken did not have access to the Latin text that was the source for the Middle English poet, only Vincent of Beauvais' condensation, which was no help to him on this point.
- 328 The poet translates *lutum* (mud, mire) as *fen*. See also line 453.
- 331 MS: *Ausneth* corrected to *Asneth*. The phrase *Asneth by here name* seems to imply some hidden meaning in the etymology of Asneth's name. See note to line 464.
- 333 *The eyhte day the cokkys crew*: the eighth day and the cockcrow mark a new beginning as Asneth rises from her fast and, facing the east, offers her penit-

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tial prayer to which the angel responds and translates her to blessedness. Compare the Gospel references to Easter as the day after the Sabbath, that is, the eighth day, and the resurrected Jesus appearing to the Apostles eight days later (John 20:26). This day marks Asneth's new beginning of her new life with her new name. It also marks the day on which Joseph, her new lord, will return. See lines 266 ff.

- 338 Asneth's twofold penitential prayer (lines 339–407) is delivered at the east window, a point made again at line 364, and it is from the east that *the sterre Lucifer* shines brightly (line 408), indicative that her prayer has been answered. The heaven then parts and the angel comes to her from the east (i.e., from Paradise).
- 339 *Ha* is an interjection of distress. See the “Epilogue,” line 885.
- 343 *disparplid*. A neologism based on the Latin *disperdidit*, to destroy, ruin, utterly undo.
- 384 The whole of Asneth's penitential prayer is a pastiche of biblical verses. Here see especially Psalm 8:3 and Wisdom 10:21.
- 392 The whale (Leviathan) is a common medieval figure of Hell. Hellmouth, in the mystery plays and medieval art, is normally represented by the whale's open mouth. Jonah, entering the whale and then returning, prefigures Christ's descent into Hell to reclaim the patriarchs prior to the Resurrection. See biblical commentaries such as the *Glossa ordinaria* or the representations of the event in *The Forty-Leaf Blockbook Called the Biblia Pauperum*, plate G, which juxtaposes with the Entombment of Christ Joseph's being placed in the well as his brothers sell him into slavery and Jonah's being cast into the whale's mouth, and plate I, which juxtaposes with Christ's Resurrection Samson's removal of the gates and Jonah's being cast up at Ninevah. (See Plates II and III below.)
- 396 *conculcacioun*. A neologism from the Latin text *conculcari*, from *conculco*, *-avi*, *-atum*, to tread under foot, to crush or bruise by hostile trampling.
- 405 Asneth's request to be God's handmaiden (*ancilla* in the Latin text) associates her with the Virgin Mary (*ancilla domini*) at the Annunciation. The whole passage is filled with Annunciation echoes — lines 410–11, 416, 418–19, 421–23, 425, 429–31, 489–91, 503–05. The motif of light descending repeats the

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visual iconography of the Annunciation, as does Asneth's modesty as servant receiving that benefaction. See notes to lines 578 and 604.

- 414 MS: *A* expunged between *face* and *on*.
- 415 ff. Kee (pp. 400–05) relates the appearance of the heavenly visitor adorned with solar imagery and Asneth's personal conversion to divine interventions and personal transformations in the Isis and Asklepios cults of the second century A.D. as portrayed by Apuleius in *The Golden Ass* and Aelius Aristides in *The Sacred Teachings*, where the acolyte in the epiphanic vision receives a new dress and a new name and is confirmed in the new eternal life through the eating and drinking of the heavenly substance.
- 417 The angel's calling of Asneth — *Asneth! Asneth!* — echoes the biblical trope of a divine calling, usually of the innocent, who replies, "Here am I, send me," or at least, like Asneth, indicates that she is listening: *Lo, my Lord, / . . . Tell me who thou art*. See Gen. 22:11–12 [Abraham]; I Sam. 3:4–18 [Samuel]; Isaiah 6:8–9 [Isaiah]. As in the biblical analogues, the call leads to the bestowal of a new name upon the one addressed. See note to line 462.
- 429 MS: *dredere* corrected to *dere*.
- 431 The emendation *[I]* is MacCracken's. The MS line has no subject, as is often the case in compound constructions (e.g., line 800 where the subject is simply omitted). In line 439, the scribe leaves out the subject "I," as he does here, but then inserts it superscript.
- 433 ff. Asneth's divesting of her penitential garb to put on her new white robe is apocalyptic in tone and typology. It marks her putting on the new clothing of faith to become the recipient of grace, symbolized by the honeycomb on which she and the angel feast.
- 444 *theustre* *vail*. MacCracken interprets the phrase to mean "dark veil," suggesting that *theustre* is from ME *theostre*, meaning dark. But it is more likely that the poet derives the word from *theristrum* in the Latin text, meaning a summer garment, or veil. See line 129, where the neologism *terestre* avoids the pleonasm of *theustre* *vail*.

Notes

- 446 By eyeskip error the scribe has miscopied and then deleted the phrase *sayde lay don* between *aungel* and *and*. The phrase occurs in the following line, after the word *aungel*, as *saide lai don*.
- 454–58 The Latin text here is loaded with new life metaphors: *Ecce ab hodierno die renovata es et vivificata es, et manclucabis panem benedictionis, et bibes potum incorruptionis, et unqueris crismate sancto*” (p. 103).
- 460 *in wordle withoute end*, here and elsewhere, is in the Latin text the liturgical phrase *in secula seculorum*.
- 462 *Moche-of-Refute*. In the Latin text: *Multis refugii*. According to Kaufmann Kohler, the new title is implicit in her given name, “‘Asenath,’ which by a transposition of the letters, is made to read ‘nasat’ (she has fled) — from her idolatry, and which also suggests the idea of ‘manos’ (refuge) and ‘nas’ (to flee), also taken as ‘refuge’” (II, 174). Kohler sees in this passage the conception of the Shekinah under whose wings the heathen came to take refuge, a concept, he argues, that is crucial to the proselytizing Jewish community in Alexandria. In Christian tradition Asneth’s new name is rich in Marian iconography of shelter for those in need or for the chosen people. The phrase *under thi wynggis* is akin to Mary’s sheltering folk under her robe. See John V. Fleming’s discussion of the trope in “Anticlerical Satire as Theological Essay: Chaucer’s *Summoner’s Tale*,” *Thalia*, 6 (1983), 5–22.
- 465 The allusion to Asneth’s protective *walle* is affiliated with her new name and *wynggis* (line 464). The ideal bride knows her *privité*, maintains her sacred place, and is a wall against corruption. See Song of Songs 8:10, where the chosen one is referred to as a wall with breasts like towers. Compare note to line 256.
- 472 MS: *siketly* instead of *sikerly*.
- 474 *ministreth*. MacCracken has difficulty with the word, which begins with seven minims in a row. He thinks the first four letters resemble *numr* but concludes by offering *purchaceth*, a word which makes sense of the passage. The Latin text provides the necessary clue, however, as it reads: *et ministrat eis in eterna secula* (p. 103). If one reads with that clue in mind the word quite clearly is *ministreth*.

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- 507 *palle*. Compare OE *pael*: a costly robe. The poet is translating the Latin word *pallium*, meaning a covering.
- 516 MS: *to* deleted between *And* and *went*.
- 520 Asneth's recurrent mention of *hour heritage* where her parents work and out of which they come to greet her on various occasions seems to bear typological significance as the barren old place which will be displaced by a new dispensation through Asneth, as the angel directs her to the honeycomb.
- 521 *celer*: a storeroom, not necessarily underground, though it could be. In the *Cursor Mundi* Joseph commands *Depe selers to delve* (line 4676) to store grain for the famine years. Asneth, like Joseph, is a cellarer, and like the poem's patron, a keeper of the *graunge* (line 8).
- 522 MS: *sche fond* is written and crossed out between *honycomb* and *redy*. The scribe's eye appears to have skipped momentarily to 526, then caught the error as he or she approached the rhyme.
- 537 On the sweet odor of the honeycomb and the eater's breath as signs of divine presence, see Philippians 4:18 on the sweet odor of grace, and 2 Corinthians 2:14–16 on the fragrance of Christ that leads to life. For an extended medieval commentary on sacred odors see St. Bernard's Sermon 22 on fragrance in Song of Songs (Bernard of Clairvaux, *On the Song of Songs II*, trans. Kilian Walsh [Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications Inc., 1983], III, 14–24.)
- 543 MS: *for* is repeated on either side of a hole in the parchment.
- 545–77 The angel's breaking and serving of the honeycomb to Asneth has strong eucharistic overtones that are subsequently picked up in his making it whole again with the sign of the cross (lines 559–77) and the account of the bees of paradise who make the honeycomb. All this vision stands as a sign to Asneth: as the angel says, *al this thu seest?*
- 551 MS: there is a heavily crossed out word prior to *remenant*.
- 557 MS: *Of* is written twice at head of line; the second is expunged by dots.

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- 578 ff. *on o nyht bore*: “born on the same night,” an echo, perhaps, of the Egyptian Pleiades myth. Asneth’s desire to save her seven sister servants, born on the same night she was born, implies a kind of pregnancy by the Holy Spirit whereby she becomes fruitful as Mary did at the Annunciation. She would have these seven, born on her birthday, be reborn on her new name day to become assisting pillars for the City of Refuge she has become. See Chaucer’s St. Cecile in *The Second Nun’s Tale*, where Valerian, once converted, would immediately share his fruitful condition with his brother Tiburce.
- 580 This stanza is one line short. Either the second line of the couplet is missing or the poet has ignored the Latin line *Et conversa est seponere illam* as well as the exigencies of his seven-line stanza. See the note to line 287.
- 583 MS: four words are stricken after *Cité of Refute*.
- 585 MS: The line clearly reads *This lord awey thu dihte*. Taking his cue from Vincent of Beauvais, who mentions the removal of the table, MacCracken emends the line: *This bord awey thu dihte*. The Latin source, which MacCracken did not know, in fact accords with his reading: *Dixitque angelus Aseneth: “Leva mensam inde.”* It could be that the ME poet writes *lord* rather than *bord*, whereby the angel refers to his own lordly departure, for instantly Asneth sees the chariot coming from heaven to carry him away, in which case the emendation is inappropriate. Perhaps the missing line (see note to line 580) could provide the key to the problem.
- 586 The arrival of the chariot drawn by four horses carries apocalyptic implications, as do the thunder and lightning. See 2 Kings 2:11 where Elijah is carried to heaven in the fiery chariot. Also compare Habakkuk 3:8 on God’s chariot of salvation, and Revelation 9 on the horsemen of the Apocalypse.
- 591 The references to Asneth as her lord’s *handmaide* link her to the Virgin Mary, who refers to herself just prior to Gabriel’s departure after the annunciation as God’s handmaiden: *Ecce ancilla domini* (Luke 1:38). See note to line 405.
- 597 *tresance*. The Latin source reads: *et stetit in ypodromo domus*. Her standing in the trace, or gateway, as she awaits Joseph’s return is perhaps a sign of the bride’s right guardianship of what is hers to guard. See Theresa Coletti’s discussion of the trope of Mary and Elizabeth at the gate, “The Meeting at the

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Gate: Comic Hagiography and Symbol in *The Shipman's Tale*," *Studies in Iconography*, 3 (1977), 47-56.

- 598 MS: *spredere*, with *de* expunged.
- 604 "I am thi handmaide," *quod sche*. The Latin source reads: *Ego sum ancilla*. See line 591.
- 607 MS: *to* is expunged before *unto*.
- 610 MS: *I passe* is cancelled between *schal* and *the sende*. See line 612, which accounts for the eyeskip.
- 626 MS: scribal correction is made in the midst of *another*.
- 638 MS: scribal correction is made in the midst of *beheld*.
- 663-67 A short stanza. The third and fifth lines appear to be missing.
- 667 OED lists the earliest usage of *in perpetuity* with the meaning of perpetual possession as Hoccleve c. 1406.
- 669 MS: *A* expunged between *were* and *of*.
- 670 MS reads: *Upon the right side of Joseph Asneth then sette*. MacCracken silently emends the line to read: *Upon the right side of Joseph Asneth he sette*, thus maintaining the Pharaoh's instrumentality throughout the passage.
- 686 MS: *Sche saide sche saide*.
- 687 ff. Asneth's second penitential prayer, like the first, is a pastiche from Psalms, especially penitential ones such as Psalm 51. The recurrent refrain *Synned, Lord, I have synned* adds a liturgical quality to the prayer. The Latin phrase, *peccavi, domine, peccavi*, is repeated eleven times in the source, perhaps as a reflection upon the problem, eleven being commonly cited by commentators as a number of sin (both of excess and deficiency).

Notes

- 710–11 Through love, Joseph’s beauty draws her to him like a hooked fish. The poet is manipulating a love trope in which the Latin term for love (*amor*) is derived from the word for hook (*hamus*), whereby the love is like a hooked fish. See Andreas Cappellanus, *De amore* I. cap. iii. The figure is found in the Latin source: *Joseph . . . comprehendit me sicut piscam per hamum pulcritudine sua*.
- 713 MS: *dry* is stricken, mistakenly, then *drynke* is written out.
- 717 Rubricated *A*, with face and visor, demarcating the end of the seven years of plenty and the beginning of the last section of the narrative.
- 721–22 I.e., April 21.
- 724 MacCracken reads: *The father I schal go se*. But the MS clearly reads *Mi father*. In the next line Asneth refers to Jacob as *thi fader*. Perhaps the point is that through her spiritual rebirth and holy marriage to Joseph Asneth now claims Jacob as her father even as Joseph does, identifying him first as hers, then as his, as she desires to meet him.
- 727 The Latin source has no equivalent for *Jessen welle*, only the phrase *in terra Gessen*. Earlier, for line 723, the Latin source reads *in terra Iessen*. In Genesis 46:28–34 Goshen is designated as the place where Jacob and Joseph are reunited, but no mention of a well is made, only that it is an area of cattlemen where every shepherd is an abomination to the Egyptians, which might explain Asneth’s earlier scorn of Joseph as *herdis sone of Chanān* (line 150).
- 731–32 Israel is Jacob’s new, God-given name. See Gen. 35:10.
- 737 *and.* MS: *ant.*
- 741 If Joseph is “son of God,” Asneth is *doughter of hiest God*, which is all the lineage she needs for her new, important role within the patriarchy.
- 744 Simeon and Levy are regularly paired in Genesis, as in chapter 34, where they are seen as strong holy men, or in 49:5–6, where Jacob curses them as instruments of cruelty. In Numbers 18 the tribe of Levy is charged with responsibilities of the priesthood.

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- 756 *Sichym.* The allusion seems to be to Genesis 34, where Simeon and Levi engineer the slaughter of Shechem and his tribe after he has violated Dinah, Joseph's sister, and then attempted to marry her. Jacob and his sons give the would-be husband a dishonest reply, agreeing to the marriage providing that Shechem, his father Hamor, and their fellow citizens be circumcised. On the third day, when the newly circumcised are still sore, Simeon and Levi, the "full brethren" of Dinah, enter the city and kill every male. Pharaoh's son seems to be worried about fooling around with the women of the House of Israel, particularly if they are protected by Simeon and Levi, the full brethren of Joseph.
- 768 MS: *afraye* is miswritten, the error crossed out, and then the word completed.
- 769 *and.* MS: *ant.*
- 800 MacCracken emends the line to read: *Lord [what] schal we do?* and inexplicably leaves out *then*.
- 804 MS miscopying of *fair* is crossed out then corrected.
- 824-28 The sense of the ME is unclear. The Latin source reads: *Et surrexit filius Pharaonis nocte illa, et custodes patris eius prohibuerunt eum intrare ad patrem suum, dicentes: "Pater tuus caput doluit, et vigilavit tota nocte, et nunc quievit paululum, et dixit nobis quod nulla intret ad me, neque filius meus primogenitus"* (p. 113).
- 827 MS: *asketh.* I follow MacCracken's emendation: *aketh.*
- 831 MS: two letters expunged between *that* and *yt.*
- 846 MS: *quickly.*
- 885 ff. The "Epilogue" was so designated by MacCracken. Robbins in the *Index of Middle English Verse* considers it to be a separate poem, and it is printed as such in Carleton Brown, *Religious Lyrics of the XVth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1939), pp. 241-43. There is a space of three lines in the MS between the end of *The Storie of Asneth* and this lament. There is no spacing between any other parts of the poem, not even the stanzas. But the poem is

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copied by the same scribe, it is in rhyme royal, it uses comparable meter and alliteration, and it begins with the same rubrications as the Asneth poem does: here, in 885, a rubricated H, with face and cap that extends upward across two of the three lines of spacing. The pronoun usage, idiom, word formation, and spelling practices are the same in both poems. It seems likely to me that the lament is by the same poet, and perhaps is for the same lady he addresses in the Prologue, the lady who asked him to translate the story of Asneth. The affection expressed in the latter stanzas of the lament is quite personal and in keeping with the flirtatious courtesy of the Prologue. Perhaps the lament might be considered to be an after-the-fact epilogue. In the notes to his edition Carleton Brown observes: “The very remarkable personal tone in these verses distinguishes them sharply from other elegies in Middle English” (p. 339).

900 MS: *Thi solas*.

912 *Adam the alderman*. The old Adam, who brought sin into the world, thus giving death its universal privilege throughout the *wordle*.

920 *Whos*. MS: *Wos*.

926 MS: *whyt*. MacCracken emends to *wyth*.

929 *and*. MS: *an*.

930 *and*. MS: *ant*.



Plate I *Biblia Pauperum: The Forty-Leaf Blockbook, R*

Joseph sold by his brothers to the Ismaelites (Genesis 37:25-28)

The chief priests pay Judas

The Ismaelites sell Joseph to Potiphar (Genesis 39:1-2)

Haggai 1:6 Zechariah 11:12

Haggai 1:8 Zechariah 11:12
The Pierpont Morgan Library, New York, PMI, 3103, Plate R XVIII

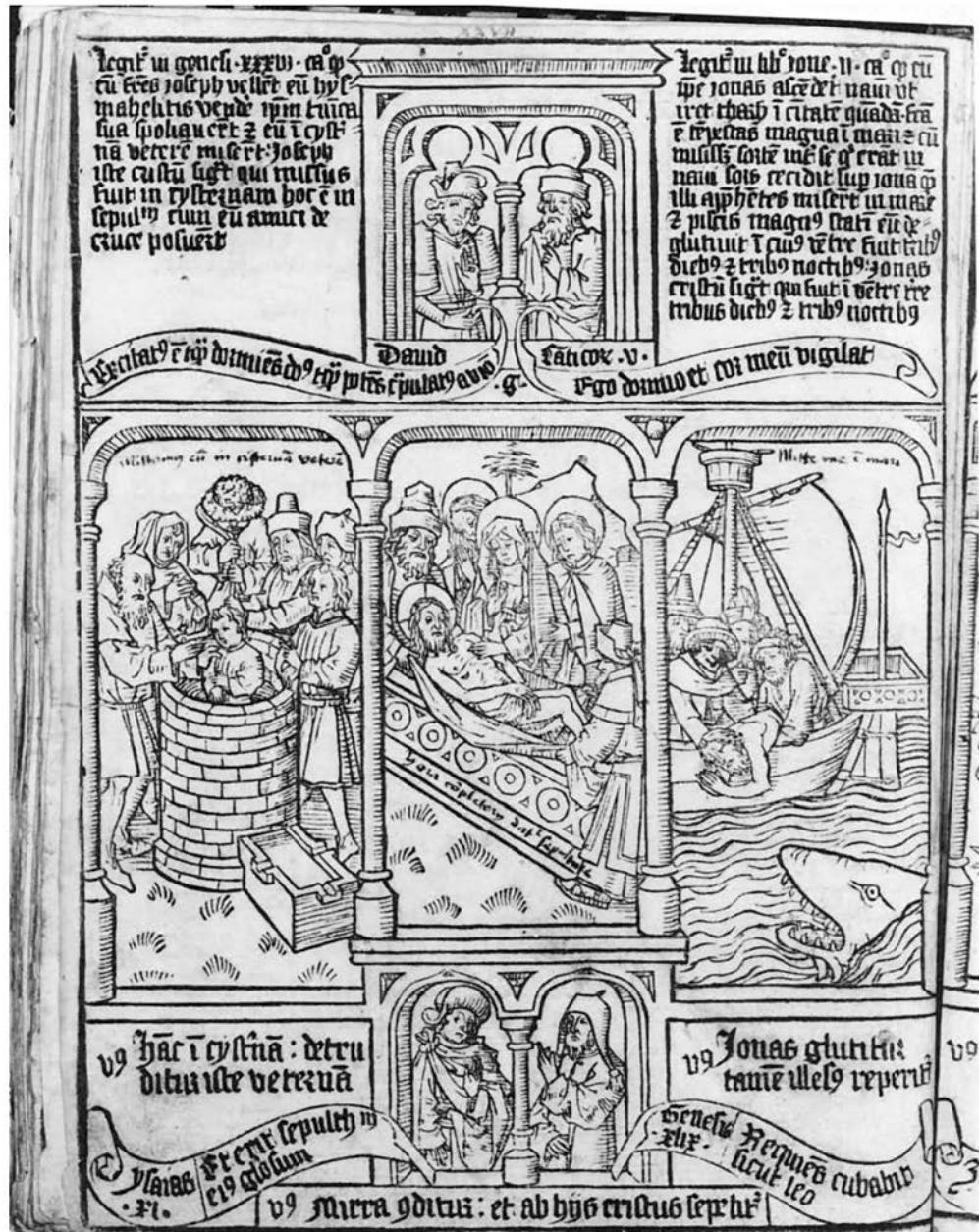


Plate II Biblia Pauperum: The Forty-Leaf Blockbook, G

Psalm 77:65 Song of Songs 5:2

Joseph cast into a pit by his brothers (Genesis 37:23-4)

The entombment of Christ

Jonah cast into the sea (Jonah 1:15-2.1)

Isaiah 11:10

Genesis 49:9

The Pierpont Morgan Library, New York. PML 3193, Plate G - XXVIII

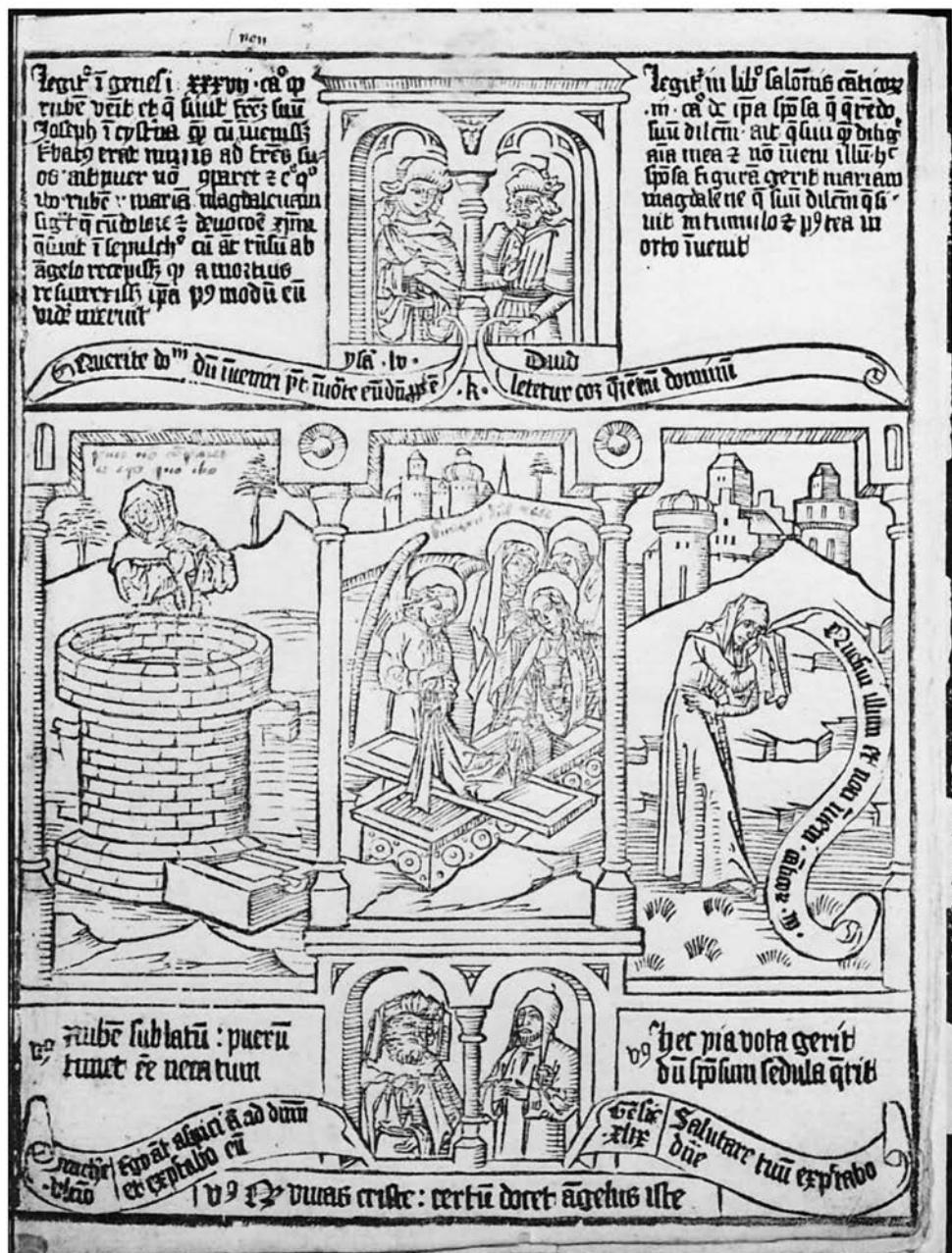


Plate III *Biblia Pauperum: The Forty-Leaf Blockbook, K*

Isaiah 55:6 Psalm 104:3

Reuben searching for Joseph (Genesis 37:9)

The three Marys at the tomb of Christ

The Bride searching for her Bridegroom (Song of Songs 3:23)

Micah 7:7 Genesis 49:18

The Pierpont Morgan Library, New York. PML 3193. Plate K - XXX



Plate IV *The Hours of Catherine of Cleves*
The Birth of the Virgin Mary
The Pierpont Morgan Library, New York. M. 945, f. 20

The Pistel of Swete Susan

Introduction

The Pistel of Swete Susan is a later fourteenth-century adaptation in thirteen-line alliterative stanzas of the thirteenth chapter of Daniel, the story of Susanna and the Elders. Its audience was that newly literate group, composed in part of women, among whom the Wycliffite movement flourished. Although there is little in the poem that would suggest the politics of that movement, apart from women, literacy, and Bible study, occasionally the wording of the poem is similar to that of the early Wycliffite Bible, enough to suggest that the author could have used that translation, along with the Vulgate, as his source. (I don't think the poem is by a woman, however, though its focus, even more than the thirteenth chapter of Daniel, is upon a woman.) The poem, like *Patience*, which retells the story of Jonah, reflects the strong interest in biblical narrative that marks vernacular literature and its audience around the time of John Wycliffe and his followers. *The Pistel of Swete Susan* is not as energetic or skillfully narrated as *Patience*, but, like *Patience*, it serves to familiarize its audience with a compelling biblical narrative and to provide through that vehicle instruction by thrilling example in complex moral and social issues. Although the story of the victimization of the innocent and virtuous young woman is universally appealing, it speaks with particular poignancy to medieval aristocratic women who found themselves intricately contained within patriarchal power structures which, if abused, might easily have destroyed them. It is a study in obedience — its dangers and rewards. The story is reassuring in that a benevolent and just God protects the innocent through the intervention of his youthful prophet Daniel, who is able to challenge the abuse, thus salvaging both Susan and the laws and institutions which had seemed about to kill her.

The poet follows the biblical narrative quite closely, both in plot and even in wording, with three exceptions. At the point in Daniel when the two judges begin ogling Joachim's wife and planning their seduction of her, the poet introduces an elaborate description of the orchard garden in which the ugly event will take place. The passage creates a wonderfully Edenic world, a world manifesting both God's bounty and the young couple's worth as aristocratic caretakers of nature. Joachim's estate is that of a superbly manicured fourteenth-century household, with moat,

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lovely dwelling places, and especially a well-tended garden, inhabited as joyously by the birds as by the people who relax there. The garden reflects well upon its owners — sophisticated people, who understand the order of God's world, enhance it through civilized gestures, and live by it in their personal lives. The garden is well enclosed, like the *hortus conclusus* of the Song of Songs, a semi-sacred place where Susan feels secure and confident of her privileges. She understands her household, and manages it well. On the fateful day she gives her attendants the afternoon off, providing they secure the gates while she modestly bathes. The intrusion by the lecherous old men is like a rehearsal of the fall, except that Susan does not fall. When threatened and coerced, rather than secure a few more days on earth at the expense of her soul by complying with the evil design of her would-be seducers, she commits herself to God, thereby protecting her chastity, and, ultimately, her beautiful relationship with Joachim, the law, and God, symbolized by the garden. She and Joachim keep their precious place, despite the wicked intruders. This chaste resolution they accomplish through Susan's steadfastness.

After the description of the garden the poet introduces a second innovation into the biblical narrative. As Susan withdraws into the garden to bathe, the poet dwells upon the mysterious beauty of the moment (lines 124–30): it is near the magical time of noon, and she is under a laurel tree as she undresses — auspicious phenomena in the fairy conventions of the day. It is a time and place when “feole ferlys” (many wonders) might unfold, depending, of course, upon how one sees the events. The lines heighten the illusive qualities of beauty, civilized structures where there are gardens, married couples, guests, servants, codes of behavior, and so on. Who sees what in such wondrous places? The wicked judges see opportunity as they set out to seduce Susan. They count on being perceived as just men by the public, so that they might manipulate how the public will respond to their accusations. They count on how society will view an impossibly beautiful woman in a compromised position; and they count on her perception of their power and how she will be viewed if exposed to the public, all as leverage to force her into having sex with them. They count on such cultural illusions being deceptively more powerful than her faith in God or the trust in her by others, such as her husband and attendants, who are mysteriously bound to her through their sacred contracts. The poet attends skillfully, albeit briefly, to the perspective of the servants as they wonder at the strange charges brought against her. The point of this innovation in the biblical narrative is to raise questions of how we read illusions within our wonderfully, but dangerously, sophisticated social structures.

A third alteration in the biblical narrative is less elaborate than the description of the garden, though more precisely pointed than the illusive moment of the encounter. Like the garden description this alteration enhances the personal worth, both

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private and social, of the heroine. And, especially, it demonstrates her ability to see through “feole ferlys.” The passage occurs after the false charges of adultery have been brought against Susan, where she asks for and is permitted an audience with her husband. (In the Vulgate no such meeting takes place.) The passage (lines 239–60) is a superbly modulated study in trust and simplicity. When charged with adultery by the judges, she asserts “I am sakeles [guiltless] of syn” (line 240) and asks to see her husband. What is unsaid is as important as what is spoken. In the presence of her husband Susan does not challenge the laws or even her male accusers. She simply says as “kyndeli” as she knows how: “Iwis, I wraththed the [abused you] nevere, at my witand [to my knowledge], / Neither in word ne in werk, in elde ne in youthe” (lines 250–51) and, modestly rising to her knees, kisses his hand, acknowledging that since she has been condemned by the judges, she will not presume to “disparage thi mouth” (line 253). She does not attempt to dispute the case or to manipulate his opinion. Her modest silence speaks for her. She knows how to see him and he her. He responds by removing the fetters from her feet, kisses her sweetly, and commits both Susan and himself to God: “In other world schul we mete.’ / Seide he no mare” (lines 259–60). He, like her, recognizes the complexity of the entrapment, and rather than rebelliously curse justice and the law, maintains trust in God. Susan then prays to “Thou Maker of Middelert” (line 263), professing her cleanness and beseeching His mercy; whereby, “Grete God of His grace” (line 276), as in the source, sends Daniel to make clear to all what the wicked have obscured. In the end, none but the lecherous judges, who looked perversely, are entrapped by the illusions.

Susan’s faith in God and the moral system of the patriarchy is presented as something beautiful and enduring. Like Virginia in Chaucer’s *Physician’s Tale*, or Griselda in the *Clerk’s Tale*, or Constance in the *Man of Law’s Tale*, Susan’s chastity and trust in divine benevolence sustain her through her trial. The poet is careful to delineate her feelings and her awareness of boundaries and obligations. In the Vulgate, several verses are devoted to the feelings of the lecherous old men, depicting how they initially hide their lechery from each other, then, once exposed, make a concerted effort to entrap her (Dan. 13:10–14). The effect in the Bible is to dramatize how sin, which begins in the individual hearts of men, assumes political dimensions and becomes fiercely destructive. By deleting these materials, the Susan-poet keeps the focus on the heroine’s dilemma and her virtue. She is capable of making right choices and does so decisively, in the process securing herself in God and her husband’s affection even more firmly than she was secure in the moated and well-tended garden. Her example defines a model that was much cherished by women in the fourteenth century, both for its heroism and for its poignancy. It was not, of course, the only model. Nor is it a model easily understood in the twentieth

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century. We must be especially careful not to confuse Susan's heroism with passivity or weakness. She is more active, decisive, daring, and firm in her choices than the old men are in their perverse abuse of their authority.

We do not know precisely when or where *The Pistel of Swete Susan* was first written. The dialect suggests that it comes from southern Yorkshire, the same area as *The Middle English Metrical Paraphrase of the Old Testament*. Andrew of Wyntoun, in his *Cronykil of Scotland* (1420), attributes "The Pistil of Suet Susane," along with "a gret Gest of Arthure, / And the Awntyrs of Gawayne," to "Huchown of the Awle Ryale" (Bk. V, ch. 12, lines 4311–13; 4280, 4288). At one time the "gret Gest of Arthure" was identified with the *Alliterative Morte Arthure*, since Wyntoun describes in some detail the contents of the poem as an account of Arthur's conquest over "Lucyus Hyberyus emperoure." Henry Noble MacCracken and others have demonstrated the unlikelihood of such an identification, however, because of differences in dialect between *The Pistel of Swete Susan* and the *Alliterative Morte Arthure*. Likewise, some argued at the end of the last century that the "Awntyrs of Gawayne" must be the poem we know as *The Awntyrs of Arthur*, though others have dismissed the association on grounds of dialectal differences. Certainly, none of the three works attributed to Huchown are Scottish, and we have no knowledge how Wyntoun may have been acquainted with them. Nor, in the instances of the two Arthurian works, can we be exactly certain what poems the titles refer to. In the instance of "The Pistil of Suet Susane," however, it seems unlikely that Wyntoun could mean any other poem than the Middle English poem of our concern here. Perhaps a copy of the poem made its way to Scotland where the chronicler encountered it in the company of manuscripts of the Arthurian poems. Such a clutch of materials could well have come from Yorkshire, as much that was of value did.

Numerous attempts have been made to identify Hucheon (see MacCracken's summary essay on the problem), the only certain conclusion being that whoever he was, if he did write "The Pistil of Suet Susane" and if that is our poem, he was not a Scotsman. Nor does Wyntoun say that he was. In an effort to link the authorship of the *Alliterative Morte Arthure* and *The Pistel of Swete Susan*, Moritz Trautmann [*Anglia*, 1 (1878), 109–49] noted eleven words which he thought were unique to the two poems. His word list has been pecked at by other scholars who have succeeded in finding other instances of the eleven in other texts. The fact remains that several of the words are not common words, however, and there are thus some instances of likeness of wording and usage between those two works that, although not unique, are strikingly similar, nonetheless. Such common word hoard does not, of course, prove common authorship or even common provenance, but it does suggest something about a common readership. The Susan-poet might well have known the

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Alliterative Morte Arthure. He could also have known the *Awntyrs of Arthur*. The advice offered to women in this poem is not utterly different from the advice to Guinevere in that poem. All three of the poems explore abuses of power by men of authority. That is, someone interested in those topics might well have assembled them in such a way that, a generation later, Andrew of Wyntoun could have thought them to be by the same author.

The Pistel of Swete Susan apparently enjoyed some circulation among readers in that it survives in five manuscripts, one of which is fragmentary. None of the five is the original. And though it is not possible to provide a very useful stemma that relates the manuscripts to a single source, it is evident that three of the manuscripts (Vernon, Simeon, HM 114) constitute a genetic group which could be fairly close to the original, and a fourth (Pierpont Morgan M 818), though somewhat later than the others, can sometimes be right where the other group shares common errors. In this edition I have followed the Vernon manuscript, partly because its version of *Susan* is the best and earliest of the group of three, and partly because of the significance of the great book itself. The Vernon manuscript is one of the marvels of the fourteenth-century English book world. It is a gigantic book, originally containing more than 420 leaves measuring at least twenty-two and a half inches by fifteen and a half, in two or three columns of normally eighty lines in each and weighing more than fifty pounds. A. I. Doyle speaks of it and its companion volume as “virtual libraries” unto themselves (p. 331). The Simeon anthology, which is nearly as large as the Vernon, was copied in the same workshop as the Vernon, and also contains *The Pistel of Swete Susan*. Both are enormous anthologies of religious and instructional verse and prose, mainly in the vernacular English, and containing such important works as the *South English Legendary*, the *Northern Homily Cycle*, the *Prick of Conscience*, Robert Grosseteste’s *Castle of Love*, the *Speculum Vitae*, Richard Rolle’s *Form of Perfect Living*, an English translation of Pseudo-Bonaventura’s *Stimulus Amoris*, the *Abbey of the Holy Ghost*, an A-version of *Piers Plowman*, and a version of the *Ancrene Riwle* (the latter two being in the Vernon but not the Simeon manuscript). Robert E. Lewis and others have suggested that the two manuscripts may have originated in a Cistercian house in northern Worcestershire, perhaps Bordesley Abbey (p. 251). Although *The Pistel of Swete Susan* appears in both anthologies, copied in the same hand from a common exemplar, it seems likely that the Vernon was done first.

A. I. Doyle (1974) has commented on the pre-history of both manuscripts, which is “no less remarkable than the end-products” (p. 333). The range of supply of originals to be copied and therefore the knowledge of what was available and desirable in putting together such an anthology are diverse professionally and regionally. How or why *The Pistel of Swete Susan* was chosen to be included we can only con-

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jecture, but given the predominantly instructional and religious content of the other materials in the anthologies it is fair to assume that it was seen as of a piece with the saints' lives and instructional material. Who commissioned either or both of the manuscripts is not known. The Simeon manuscript has one faint clue, however, a scarcely legible phrase or signature in a margin, which could be read as Joan Bohun. Whether it is her signature or whether she had anything to do with the Simeon or Vernon manuscripts we don't know. But it is worth including A. I. Doyle's account of her here (*Vernon MS Facsimile*, 1987), simply because it must have been someone like her whose patronage lay behind these great anthologies and whose agenda in life made such books and their contents important:

The Joan Bohun in question was daughter of Richard Fitzalan, Earl of Arundel, and sister of Thomas Arundel (1354–1414), Bishop of Ely, Archbishop of York and of Canterbury. She married Humphrey Bohun, Earl of Hereford, Essex and Northampton (1342–73), to whom the alliterative romance *William of Palerne* was addressed. Their first daughter Eleanor married Thomas Duke of Gloucester, one of the sons of Edward III, both leaving notable collections of books, his including a Wycliffite Bible; the second daughter, Mary, was the first wife of Henry IV and mother of Henry V. After her husband's death Joan seems to have spent much of her life in the eastern counties, being buried with him in Walden Abbey, of which she was a major benefactor, in 1419. In 1395/6 she was living in the diocese of Ely and in 1399 she had a royal grant of residence in the castle of Rochester for life. In 1414 she was allowed to modify a vow of fasting on account of increasing infirmities, which suggests that she had been leading a particularly pious life, like such later noble widows as Cecily Neville, Duchess of York, and Margaret Beaufort, Countess of Richmond, in a quasi-religious household. Her death, and those of her husband, father and mother, are recorded in the Luttrell Psalter, perhaps by one of her executors. She may have been the owner of the Anglo-Norman Apocalypse, New College MS.65 . . . and for her Thomas Hoccleve translated the verse Complaint of the Virgin which is also found in the anonymous English prose rendering of Deguileville's Pilgrimage of the Soul made for a great lady in 1413, and so possibly by him for her too. . . . As a devout and wealthy widow with her own retinue, and no doubt many links with the West Midlands and clerical counsel, she was undoubtedly the sort of person for whom the manuscript would have been appropriate, even if not specifically designed. The tabs and Latin annotations, implying an earlier clerical utilisation, are not wholly incompatible, if for use by her household. (pp. 15–16)

We cannot know whether Joan Bohun ever read *The Pistel of Swete Susan*, let alone commissioned it or chose to have it included in anthologies such as the Vernon and

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Simeon manuscripts. But whoever did must have been someone like her in devotion and literary temperament. The poem's appearance in these manuscripts is simply one further hint at the poem's life within the jurisdiction of women and their vested interest in vernacular religious literature.

The Dialect

The dialect of *The Pistel of Swete Susan* is mixed. Originating in Yorkshire it bears some northern features that persist in the Vernon and Simeon manuscripts. Thus we find *mare* for *more* and *bare* for *bore*. But mainly the linguistic features of the poem are midland in the mid-fourteenth century. Of the pronouns we find *heo* for *she*, *hir* for *her*, *hem* for *them*, *heor(e)* for *their*, *ur(e)* for *our*. The adverb is more often formed with *-lich(e)* than *-ly*, as in *semlich* and *holliche*.

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	Ther was in Babiloine a bern in that borw riche That was a Jew jentil, and Joachim he hiht. He was so lele in his lawe ther lived non him liche. Of alle riches that renke arayed he was riht.	young man; town Jew; was called loyal; like knight; correctly
5	His innes and his orchardes were with a dep dich, Halles and herbergages heigh uppon heighth: To seche thorou that cité ther nas non sich Of erbes and of erberi so avenauntliche i-diht	within; moat cottages high; hill seek throughout; such plants; flowers; splendidly
	That day, ¹	
10	Withinne the sercle of sees, Of erberi and alees, Of alle maner of trees, Sothely to say.	circle of the seas (i.e., on earth) shrubbery; garden paths <i>To tell the truth</i>
	He hed a wif hight Susan, was sotil and sage;	had; called; wise
15	Heo was Elches daughter, eldest and eyre, Lovelich and lylie whit, on of that lynage, Of alle fason of foode frelich and feire. ² Thei lerned hire lettture of that langage:	She; [his] heir one; lineage <i>taught; letters in their</i>
	The maundement of Moises they marked to that may, ³	
20	To the mount of Synai that went in message That the Trinité bitok of tables a peire To rede. ⁴ Thus thei lerne hire the lawe Cleer clergye to knawe;	 <i>taught</i> <i>To know pure theology</i>

¹ *Were one to search throughout that city, one would find no finer example / Of plants and flowers so splendidly prepared / In that day*

² *In every manner of womanly feature gracious and lovely*

³ *The commandments of Moses they taught to that maiden*

⁴ *The Trinity bestowed a pair of tablets / Upon Moses on Mount Sinai that imparted the message / To be read*

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25	To God stod hire gret awe, That wlonkest in weede.	<i>She stood in great awe of God most noble; dress</i>
	He hedde an orchard newe that neighed wel nere That Jewes with Joachim priveliche gon playe; For he [was] real and riche of rentes ever rere, ¹	<i>had; lay near by played in private</i>
30	Honest and avenaunt and honorablest aye. Iwis, ther haunted til her hous, hende, ye may here, Two domes of that lawe that dredde were that day, ² Preostes and presidens preised als peere; ³	<i>pleasant</i>
	Of whom ur sovereign Lord sawes gan say, And tolde	<i>About whom our; sayings did say</i>
35	How heor wikkednes comes Of the wrongwys domes That thei have gyve to gomes, This juges of olde.	<i>their From perverse judgments given; people These [two]</i>
40	Thus this dredful demers on daies thider drewe, Al for gentrise and joye of that Juwesse, To go in his gardeyn that gayliche grewe To fonge floures and fruit thought thei no fresse;	<i>judges nobility; delight; Jewess</i>
	And whon thei seigh Susan, semelich of hewe, Thei weor so set upon hire, might thei not sese. Thei wolde enchaunte that child — hou schold heo eschewe?	<i>gather; danger when; saw were; cease delude; avoid it</i>
45	And thus this cherles unchaste in chaumbre hir chese With chere. ⁴ With two maidenes al on,	
50	Semelyche Suson, On dayes in the merion Of murthes wol here.	<i>all alone Comely at noon amusements</i>

¹ *For he was regal and powerful through income he always raised*

² *Truly, there lurked about their house — oh gracious listeners, pay heed — / Two judges of the law, who were feared [by all] in that day*

³ *Praised as equal to priests and governors*

⁴ *And thus these lecherous scoundrels in their chamber chose her with lascivious countenances*

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	Whon theos perlous prestes perceyved hire play,	reckless
	Tho thoughte the wrecches to bewile that worly in wone; ¹	
55	Heore wittes wel waiwordes thei wrethen awai ² And turned fro His teching that teeld is in trone;	<i>[God's]; is seated; throne</i>
	For siht of here soverayn, sothli to say,	<i>To avoid the sight of their</i>
	Heore hor hevedes fro hevene thei hid apon one.	<i>gray heads</i>
	Thei caught for heor covetyse the cursyng of Cain,	<i>Cain</i>
60	For rightwys jugement recordet thei none, They two.	
	Every day bi day	
	In the pomeri thei play.	<i>orchard</i>
	Whiles thei mihte Susan assay	
65	To worchen hire wo.	
	In the seson of somere, with Sibell and Jone,	<i>Joan</i>
	Heo greithed hire til hire gardin, that growed so grene,	<i>situated herself</i>
	Ther lyndes and lorers were lent upon lone, ³	
	The savyne and sypres, selcouth to sene,	<i>red cedar; cypress; marvelous</i>
70	The palme and the poplere, the pirie, the plone,	<i>pear; sycamore (plane tree)</i>
	The junipere jentel, jonyng bitwene,	<i>joining</i>
	The rose ragged on rys, richest on rone,	<i>thorny branched; thicket</i>
	I-theuwed with the thorn trinaunt to sene,	<i>Cultivated; flourishing</i>
	So tiht;	<i>thick</i>
75	Ther weore popejayes prest,	<i>lively parrots</i>
	Nihtyngales uppon nest,	
	Blithest briddes o the best,	<i>Most happy birds</i>
	In blossoms so briht.	<i>flowers</i>
	The briddes in blossoms thei beeren wel loude,	<i>birds; sing out</i>
80	On olyves and amylliars and al kynde of trees,	<i>almond trees</i>
	The popejayes perken and pruynen for proude,	<i>perch; preen proudly</i>
	On peren and pynappel thei joyken in pees,	<i>pears; pinecones; roost</i>
	On croppes of canel keneliche thei croude,	<i>upper branches; cinnamon</i>
	On grapes the goldfinch thei gladen and glees;	<i>rejoice and make merry</i>

¹ *Then those wretches thought to beguile that excellent woman in her own dwelling place*

² *Their utterly wayward wits become increasingly hostile*

³ *Where linden and laurel trees hung over the path*

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85	Thus schene briddes in schawe schewen heore schroude, ¹ On firres and fygers thei fongen heore fees, In fay.	fir; figtrees; take; rewards truth
	Ther weore growyng so grene The date with the damesene	plum
90	Turtils troned on trene By sixti I say.	<i>Turtle-doves enthroned in trees</i> At least; saw
	The fyge and the filbert were fodemed so fayre, The chirie and the chestein that chosen is of hewe, Apples and almaundes that honest are of ayre,	grown (flourishing) cherry; chestnut smell delicious
95	Grapes and garnettes gayliche thei grewe; The costardes comeliche in cuththes thei cayre, The britouns, the blaunderers, braunches thei bewe, ²	pomegranates apples; clumps are found
	Fele floures and fruit, frelich of flayre, With wardons winlich and walshenotes newe,	Many; lovely of scent lovely pears; fresh walnuts
100	Thei waled. Over heor hedes gon hyng The wince and the wederlyng, Spyces speden to spryng	chose did hang quince; codling apple hasten to grow
	In erbers enhaled.	fragrant
105	The chyve and the chollet, the chibolle, the cheve, The chouwet, the cheverol that schaggen on niht, ³ The persel, the passenep, poretes to preve, ⁴	chive; shallot; allium; best
	The pyon, the peere, wel proudliche ipiht; The lilye, the lovache, launsyng with leve,	peony; pear; displayed lovage, sprouting promiscuously
110	The sauge, the sorsecle so semeliche to siht, Columbyne and charuwé clottes thei creve, With ruwe and rubarbe ragget ariht — No lees.	sage; marigold caraway flourishing in clumps rue; rhubarb; ragged in the right way lies
	Daysye and ditoyne,	dittany
115	Ysope and averoyne,	hyssop; artemisia

¹ *Thus brilliant birds in the woods show their plumage*

² *The Breton apples and white apples bow down the branches*

³ *The little cabbage, the chervil that sways at night*

⁴ *The parsley, the parsnip, scallions of the best*

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	Peletre and plauntoyne Proudest in pres.	wild thyme; plantain Finest of all
	Als this schaply thing yede in hire yarde, That was hir hosbondes and hire, that holden with hende, ¹	<i>shapeley young woman went</i>
120	“Nou folk be faren from us, thar us not be ferde; ² Aftur myn oynement warliche ye weende. Aspieth nou specialy the gates ben sperde, For we wol wassche us, iwis, bi this welle strende.”	<i>ointment quietly you may leave</i> <i>See to it; locked</i> <i>stream</i>
	Forthi the wyf werp of hir wedes unwerde, Under a lorere ful lowe that ladi gan leende, So sone.	<i>removed her clothes unguardedly</i> <i>laurel; relax</i>
	By a wynliche welle Susan caste of hir kelle; Bote feole ferlys hire bifelle Bi midday or none.	<i>lovely</i> <i>took off; headdress (cawl)</i> <i>many marvels</i> <i>before noon</i>
	Nou were this domesmen derf drawen in derne ³ Whiles thei seo that ladi was laft al hire one, Forte heilse that hende thei highed ful yerne, ⁴ With wordes thei worshipe that worliche in wone:	<i>Until they saw; left</i>
135	“Wolt thou, ladi, for love on ure lay lerne, And under this lorere ben ur lemmone? Ye ne tharf wonde for no wight ur willes to werne, ⁵ For alle gomes that scholde greve of gardin ar gone	<i>person worthy in abundance</i> <i>in our law be instructed</i> <i>laurel; our consort</i>
	In feere.	<i>people; might disturb us</i> <i>All together</i>
140	Yif thou this neodes deny, We schal telle trewely We toke the with avoutri Under this lorere.”	<i>If you feel compelled to deny this request</i> <i>caught you in adultery</i>
	Then Susan was serwful and seide in hire thought:	<i>sorrowful</i>

¹ *That was her husband's and her own, [a garden] that [they] maintained with diligence*

² *Now that people are departing from us, we need not remain together (see note)*

³ *Now were these judges sneakily withdrawn in secret*

⁴ *In order to hail that gracious woman they hastened full eagerly*

⁵ *You need not hesitate for [fear of] any one who might hinder our desires*

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- 145 "I am with serwe biset on everiche syde.
 Yif I assent to this sin that this segges have sought,
 I be bretenet and brent in baret to byde;
 And yif I nikke hem with nai hit helpeth me nought —
 Such toret and teone taketh me this tyde!"¹
- 150 Are I that worthlich wretch, that al this world wrought,
 Betere is wemles weende of this world wyde."¹
 With this
 Tho cast heo a careful cri,
 This loveliche ladi;
- 155 Hir servauns hedde selli;
 No wonder, iwis!
- Whon kene men of hir court comen til hir cri,
 Heo hedde cast of hir calle and hir kevercheve;
 In at a privé posterne thei passen in hi
- 160 And findes this prestes wel prest her poyntes to preve.
 Tho seide the loselle aloude to the ladi:
 "Thou hast gon with a gome, thi God to greve,
 And ligge with thi lemon in avoutri,
 Bi the Lord and the Lawe that we onne levee!"
- 165 They swere.
 Alle hire servauns thei shont
 And stelen awey in a stont;
 Of hire weore thei never wont
 Such wordes to here.
- 170 Hir kinrede, hir cosyns and al that hire knewe
 Wrong handes, iwis, and wepten wel sare,
 Sykeden for Susan, so semeliche of hewe,
 Al wyes of that wyf wondred thei were.
 Thei dede hire in a dungon ther never day dewe,
- 175 While domesmen were dempt this dede toclare,
 Marred in manicles that made wer newe,
 Meteles whiles the morwen to middai and mare,
- these men
 torn apart; burnt; anguish
 say no to them
 torment; pain; time
- Then she heaved; mournful
 servants were amazed
 indeed
- When valiant; to
 had removed her cawl; veil
 secret gate; haste
 well-prepared their
 Then; scoundrels
 man; aggrieve
 lie; lover; adultery
 believe in
- servants were ashamed
 instant
 accustomed
 hear
- Wrung; sorely
 Sighed
 All people
 put; day never dawned
 judges; ordered; elucidate
 Confined
 Without food; more

¹ *Before I besmirch that worthy [God-husband] who created all this world (garden), / It would be better that I departed from this wide world spotless*

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- In drede. fear
- 180 Ther com hir fader so fre
With al his affinité,
The prestes sauns pité
And ful of falshede. kinspeople
without
- Tho seide the justises on bench to Joachim the Jewe
That was of Jacobes kynde gentil of dedes:
185 "Let senden after Susan, so semelych of hewe,
That thou hast weddet to wif, wlankest in wedes.
Heo was in trouthe, as we trowe, tristi and trewe,
Hir herte holliche on Him that the hevene hedes."
Thus thei brought hire to the barre, hir bales to brewe;
190 Nouther dom ne deth that day heo ne dredes
Als yare.
Hir hed was yolow as wyre
Of gold fyned with fyre,
Hire scholdres schaply and schire,
195 That bureliche was bare. As greatly
hair; yellow
refined
beautiful
stately were carried
- Nou is Susan in sale sengeliche arayed
In a selken schert, with scholdres wel schene.
Tho ros up with rancour the renkes reneyed,
This comelich accused with wordes wel kene.
200 Homliche on hir heved heor hondes thei leyed,
And heo wepte for wo, no wonder I wene.
"We schul presenten this pleint, hou thou ever be paied,
And sei sadliche the soth, right as we have sene,
O sake."
205 Thus with cauteles waynt
Preostes presented this playnt;
Yit schal trouthe hem ataynt,
I dar undertake. hall singly dressed
silken garb; beautiful
perfidious men
comely one
Familiarly; head their
woe; think
sought pleasure
tell solemnly; truth
O you wicked one
cunning (quaint) lies
convict them
guess
- "Thorwout the pomeri we passed us to play,
210 Of preiere and of penaunce was ure purpose.
Heo com with two maidens al richeli that day,
In riche robes arayed, red as the rose.
Wylyliche heo wyled hir wenches away orchard
Deviously; misled

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- And comaunded hem kenely the gates to close. *sharply*
 215 Heo eode to a yong mon in a valay; *went; hiding place*
 The semblaunt of Susan wolde non suppose, *deceitfulness; suspect*
 For soth!
 Be this cause that we say,
 Heo wyled hir wenches away;
 220 This word we witnesse for ay,
 With tonge and with toth.
- “Whon we that semblaunt seigh we siked wel sare, *ruse saw; sighed sorely*
 For sert of hir sovereyn and for hir owen sake. *For the sake of her husband*
 Ur copes weore cumberous and cundelet us care,¹
 225 But yit we trinet a trot that traytur take. *went at; overtake*
 He was borlich and bigge, bold as a bare, *massive; huge; boar*
 More mighti mon then we his maistris to make.² *quickly; went full swiftly*
 To the gate yaply thei yeoden wel yare, *moat*
 And he lift up the lach and leop over the lake,
 230 That youthe.
 Heo ne schunte for no schame *She didn't hold back*
 But bouwed aftur for blame; *followed after shamelessly*
 Heo nolde cuththe us his name *would not make known to us*
 For craft that we couthe.” *Despite our skillful questioning*
- 235 Nou heo is dampned on deis; with deol thaugh hir deve,³ *unjust judges order her to*
 And hir domesmen unduwe do hir be withdrawn. *Modestly; bowed; took*
 Loueliche heo louted and lacched hir leve *Of [all] kinsmen; had*
 At kynred and cosyn that heo hed evere ikanwen. *mishap*
 Heo asked merci with mouth in this mischeve:
 240 “I am sakeles of syn,” heo seide in hir sawen, *guiltless; remarks*
 “Grete God of His grace yor gultus forgive *your guilt*
 That doth me derfliche be ded and don out of dawen⁴ *injury*
 With dere.
 Wolde God that I miht

¹ Our cloaks were cumbersome and hindered our vigilance

² It would take someone more mighty than we to overpower him

³ Now she is condemned on the dais; they overwhelm (deve=deafen) her with grief

⁴ Who cause me cruelly to be slain and deprived of the light of day

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- 245 Speke with Joachim a niht.
And sithen to deth me be diht
I charge hit not a pere."
- Heo fel doun flat in the flore, hir feere whon heo fand,
Carped to him kyndeli as heo ful wel couthe:
- 250 "Iwis, I wraththed the nevere, at my witand,
Neither in word ne in werk, in elde ne in youthe."
Heo kevered up on hir kneos and cussed his hand:
"For I am dampned, I ne dar disparage thi mouth."
Was never more serwful segge bi se nor bi sande,
- 255 Ne never a soriore siht bi north ne bi south;
Tho thare
Thei toke the feteres of hire feete,
And evere he cussed that swete.
"In other world schul we mete."
- 260 Seide he no mare.
- Then Susan the serwfol seide upon hight,
Heef hir hondes on high, biheld heo to hevene:
"Thou Maker of Middelert that most art of miht,
Bothe the sonne and the see Thou sette upon severne.
- 265 Alle my werkes Thou wost, the wrong and the riht;
Hit is nedful nou Thi names to nempne.
Seththe I am deolfolich dampned and to deth diht,
Lord hertelich tak hede and herkne my stevene
So fre.
- 270 Seththe thou maight not be sene
With no fleschliche eyene,
Thou wost wel that I am clene.
Have merci nou on me."
- Nou thei dresse hire to deth withouten eny drede,
- 275 And lede forth that ladi, lovesum of lere;
Grete God of His grace, of gyftes ungnede,
Help with the Holi Gost and herde hir preyere.
He directed this dom and this delful dede
To Danyel the prophete, of dedes so dere;
- 280 Such giftes God him gaf in his youthehede,
- Then for death let; prepared
I know it is fruitless*
- husband; found
Spoke; knew how
angered you; knowledge*
- got up; knees; kissed
Because; condemned; sully
sorrowful person; sea
more sorrowful sight*
- Then there
off
kissed*
- sorrowful; out loud
Raised
Middle Earth
created in seven days*
- know
declare*
- Since; dolefully; sentenced
soulfully; heed; voice*
- eyes*
- for death; any doubt
lovely; countenance
unsparing*
- judgment; doleful deed
works; excellent*

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	Yit failed him of fourten fullich a yere, ¹ Nouht layne.	<i>Not to hide the truth</i> <i>noble youth</i>
285	Tho criede that freoly foode: “Whi spille ye innocens blode?” And alle thei stoteyd and stode This ferlys to frayne.	<i>they all hesitated and stopped</i> <i>weirdness; question</i>
	“What signefyes, gode sone, these sawes that thou seith?” Thus these maisterful men with mouthes gan mele. “Thei be fendes, al the frape, I sei hit in feith,	<i>words</i> <i>speak</i>
290	And in folk of Israel be foles wel fele. ² Umbiloke you, lordes, such lawes ben leith, Me thinketh yor dedes unduwe such domes to dele. Agein to the gildhalle the gomes ungreith!	<i>fiends; mob</i>
	I schal be proces apert disprove this apele For nede.	<i>Look about you; hateful</i> <i>behavior unfiting</i>
295	Lat twinne hem in two, For now wakneth heor wo; Thei schal graunte ar thei go At heore falshede.”	<i>Back to; [with] the wicked men</i> <i>openly; accusation</i>
		<i>Necessarily</i>
300	Thei disevered hem sone and sette hem sere And sodeynly a seneke thei brought into the sale. Bifore this yonge prophete this preost gon apere, And he him apeched sone with chekes wel pale.	<i>separated; apart</i> <i>elder; hall</i>
	“Thu hast i-be presedent, the peple to steere;	<i>accused</i>
305	Thu dotest nou on thin olde tos in the dismale. Nou schal thi conscience be knownen, that ever was unclere; Thu hast in Babiloygne on benche brewed muche bale, Wel bolde.	<i>leader</i> <i>toes; evil times</i> <i>deceitful</i> <i>concocted; evil</i>
	Nou schal yor synnes be seene	
310	Of fals domes bideene, For theose in Babiloyne han bene Jugget of olde.	<i>judgments immediately</i>

¹ Yet he was fully a year short of fourteen (i.e., he has just finished his twelfth year)

² Among the people of Israel there are a good many fools

The Pistel of Swete Susan

	“Thu seidest tho seghe Susanne sinned in thi siht; Tel nou me trewly, under what tre?”	saw
315	“Mon, bi the muche God that most is of miht, Under a cyne, sothli, myselven I hir se.” “Nou thou lyest in thin hed, bi heven uppon hiht, An Angel with a naked swerd the neighes wel nere. He hath brandist his brond brennynde so bright	great hawthorn (see note) head; high is close upon you sword burning
320	To marke thi middel at a mase in more then in thre, ¹ No lese. Thou brak Godes comaundement To sle such an innocent With eny fals juggement	waist; blow lie broke
325	Unduweliche on dese.”	Unfittingly; dais
	Nou is this domesmon withdrawen, withouten eni drede, And put into prison. Ageyn in to place Thei broughten the tother forth whon the barn bede, Tofore the folk and the faunt freli of face. ²	take away; any to the [same] place the other [elder]; youth youth honest of face
330	“Cum forth, thou corsed caytif, thou Canaan sede! Bicause of thi covetise thou art in this case. Thu hast disceyvet thiself with thin oune dede; Of thi wit for a wyf biwiled thou wase	(see note) lechery; situation deceived desire; beguiled wedlock
335	In wede. Thou sey nou, so mote thou the, Under what kynde of tre Semeli Susan thou se Do that derne dede.	Say now, so may you thrive tree unspeakable deed
340	“Thu gome of gret elde, thin hed is greihored, Tel hit me treweli, are thou thi lyf tyne.” Tho that rethly cherl ruydely rored And seide bifore the prophet: “Thei pleied bi a prine.” “Nou thou liest loude, so helpe me ur Lord!	man; grayhaired before; lose fierce churl holm-oak lie loudly

¹ To smash your belly at a blow into more than three pieces

² Now the judge is removed, without intimidation from him, / And put into prison; then, when young Daniel gave the order, / The other judge is brought forth to the same place, / Before the people and the youth with the honest face.

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- For fulthe of thi falshed thou schalt ha evel pine,
 345 Thu and thi cursed cumpere, ye mou not acorde.
 Ye schul be drawen to the deth this dai ar we dine,
 So rathe.
 An Angel is neih honde
 Takes the domes of yor honde
 350 With a brennyng bronde
 To byte you bathe.”
- filth; have; torment
 companion; may
 before (ere)
 quickly
 near at hand
 office of judgment from your hand
 punish; both
- Then the folk of Israel felle uppon knes
 And lowed that loveli Lord that hire the lyf lent.
 All the gomes that hire god wolde gladen and glees;
 355 This prophete so pertli proves his entent.
 Thei trompe bifore this traiters and traylen hem on tres
 Thorwout the cité bi comuyn assent.¹
 Hose leeveth on that Lord, thar him not lees,
 That thus his servaunt saved that schold ha be schent
 360 In sete.²
 This ferlys bifel
 In the days of Danyel,
 The pistel witnesseth wel
 Of that profete.
- knees
 hallowed
 people wished her well
 clearly
 destroyed
 marvel
 prophet
- 365 Jhesu Crist, with mylde stevene,
 Graunt us alle the blisse of Hevene.
 Amen

¹ *They blow trumpets before these traitors and drag them on rails / Throughout the city by common assent of the people.*

² *Whoever believes in the Lord, needs not suffer perdition, / Thus God's servant will be saved, who otherwise would have been destroyed / On the spot.*

Notes

- 1–26 The Vulgate reads: “Now there was a man that dwelt in Babylon, and his name was Joakim; / And he took a wife whose name was Susanna, the daughter of Helcias, a very beautiful woman, and one that feared God. / For her parents, being just, had instructed their daughter according to the law of Moses” (Dan. 13:1–3 [Douay translation]).
- 2 *Joachim*. MS: *Joachin*.
- 4 *riches . . . arayed*. MS: *riche . . . arayes*.
- 5 *a dep dich*. The Vulgate simply gives Joachim a garden (*pomarium*) near his house. The medieval poet imagines a moated estate, with orchard, halls, and many rooms for lodging, some in upper stories. Subsequently the poet greatly expands upon the splendor of the orchard.
- 8 Miskimin emends *erbes and of erberi* to “*arbres & herbes*,” which she glosses as “fruit orchards and herb gardens,” which may be the sense, though her emendation is without textual authority. Amours observes that *erberi* is uncommon in M.E., but notes its use in the *Alliterative Morte Arthure*, lines 3244–45.
- 10 *sercle of sees*. I.e., “on earth.” Compare *Troilus and Criseyde* V. 1815–16: “This litel spot of erthe that with the se / Embraced is.”
- 16 *lylie whit*. A sign of purity. In the fourteenth century a phrase often associated with the Virgin Mary.
- 17 *alle fason of foode*. Turville-Petre glosses *foode* as “young person,” to create the sense “every manner of womanly feature” (p. 123). Amours glosses *foode* as “food for the mind, nurture, upbringing, education,” to suggest that the line means “Noble and fair with all kind of nurture” (p. 365). But see also line 283 and note.

Notes

- 18–22 That Susan is lettered and can read Scripture may have been to a fourteenth-century audience an important feature of the narrative, lending “biblical” authority to the practice of teaching women to read, at least in the vernacular, so that they might better understand, at least in translation, biblical materials such as the Psalter. The Vulgate does not, in fact, indicate that she could read, only that her parents, “being just, had instructed her according to the law of Moses” (Daniel 13.3). The Middle English poet expands the half verse to a stanza emphasizing her literacy.
- 19–22 MSS diverge widely on these lines. So do emendations in modern editions. I have stuck with Vernon, which makes as much sense as any. Much of the confusion hinges on the last word in 19: *may*, in Vernon and Simeon. PM 818 reads *mayre* (i.e., leader), the reading preferred by Turville-Petre. That reading turns the clause into a commentary on Moses rather than Susan, which makes the compounded clauses of lines 20–23 easier to fit syntactically into the complex sentence. Amours likes the sense of *may*, but notes that the rhyme is bad; he wonders if a word like the adjective *maere* used as a substantive = “noble one” (i.e., Susan) might have been the word the author intended. HM 114 reads *lair*, the sense there apparently being that Susan’s parents *marked* (i.e., “chose”) the commandments of Moses “for the teaching” of Susan.
- 27–39 Vulgate (Douay): “Now Joakim was very rich, and had an orchard near his house: and the Jews resorted to him, because he was the most honourable of them all. / And there were two of the ancients of the people appointed judges that year, of whom the Lord said: Iniquity came out from Babylon from the ancient judges, that seemed to govern the people. / These men frequented [frequentabunt] the house of Joakim, and all that had any matters of judgment came to them” (Dan. 13:4–6). The Wycliffite Bible translates *frequentabunt* as *hauntiden*, as does the Susan-poet, line 31.
- 29 *was . . . ever rere*. MS omits *was* and reads *euer there*. The emendation follows PM 818 in adding “was” and in reading “rere” for “there.”
- 31 *hende*, “gracious.” Here used, according to Turville-Petre, as an address to the audience — “gracious listeners” — without plural inflection, since the word is formally an adjective (p. 124n).

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- 32 *Two domes*. Other editors emend the phrase to *Two domesmen*. But the sense is clear enough without emendation, and the phrase occurs in both Vernon and Simeon.
- 40–52 Vulgate (Douay): “And when the people departed away at noon, Susanna went in, and walked in her husband’s orchard” (Dan. 13:7).
- 40 *dredful demers*. The later MSS read *derf domysmen* (HM 114) and *domesmen ful derf* (PM 818), readings favored by Turville-Petre and Miskimin; but the sense of *dredful demers* is clear and the alliterative figures of the line in Vernon are good, which, it seems to me, take priority, especially in the pointed repetition of the figure of dread from line 32, which so chillingly defines these wicked judges.
- 42 *his*, i.e., Joachim’s. The point is that in attempting to violate Susan, the judges violate Joachim as well, and, even worse, the “maundement of Moises,” which should bind them all together, a truth that “demers,” of all people, should well know.
- 44 *whon thei seigh*. In the Vulgate the two elders see Susanna independently, are “inflamed with lust toward her,” but dare not acknowledge their lechery to each other until, one day when they both return to the garden to look upon her and catch each other out (Daniel 13.10–14). Thereafter they agree upon a strategy for entrapping her. In the Middle English poem the “two domesmen,” these “perlous prestes,” conspire against her from the outset.
- 48 *With chere*, “with lascivious countenances; or with delight.” The continuance of the alliterative figure from the previous line into the short line occurs in eight other places in the poem. PM 818 reads *To fere*, i.e., “together, or as a companion,” the latter reading preferred by Turville-Petre and Dobson (p. 112). The Vulgate dwells extensively on the lecherous judges turning their eyes and thoughts from heaven to feast on Susan, both when they are in the garden and in their chamber thinking about her (Dan. 13:8–14). The Middle English poet focuses on the oneness of their thoughts in their chamber in line 47. Whether *with chere* or *in fere* is the better reading, the poet emphasizes both the old men’s lasciviousness and their togetherness in the adjacent lines.

Notes

- 53–65 Vulgate (Douay): “And the old men saw her going in every day, and walking: and they were inflamed with lust towards her: / And they perverted their own mind and turned away their eyes that they might not look unto heaven, nor remember just judgments” (Dan. 13:8–9).
- 54 Turville-Petre glosses *worly in wone*, “lady esteemed in the world.” He cites J. A. Burrow’s *Essays on Medieval Literature* (Oxford, 1984: 74–78) on the form and associations of *worly*, and reads *in wone* as a tag meaning “in the homes of men,” hence “in society” or even “on earth,” comparing it to such phrases as *truest in town*, or *bright in bower* (p. 125n).
- 56 *teeld*. Pp. of *tight*, “to appoint, ordain, set, prepare.”
- 66 ff. The Vulgate expands at this point upon the feelings of the old men: “So they were both wounded with the love of her, yet they did not make known their grief one to the other: / For they were ashamed to declare to one another their lust, being desirous to have to do with her. / And they watched carefully every day to see her. And one said to the other: / Let us now go home, for it is dinner time. So going out they departed one from another. / And turning back again, they came both to the same place: and asking one another the cause, they acknowledged their lust; and then they agreed upon a time, when they might find her alone” (Dan. 13:10–14). The Susan-poet excludes these details to concentrate upon the garden. See the following note.
- 66–72 Turville-Petre’s comments here are indispensable: “The Vulgate says only that Susan ‘walked in her husband’s orchard’ (Dan. xiii.7). The poet’s long description of the enclosed garden depends in general terms on three seminal texts: the Book of Genesis, the Song of Songs and the *Roman de la Rose*, on the influence of which see D. Pearsall and E. Salter, *Landscapes and Seasons of the Medieval World* (London, 1973: esp. 76–118). By association with the Song of Songs and its medieval interpretations, Susan in the garden is an emblem of a love that is pure and holy; she is the Virgin set against a *millefiore* background of lilies, roses, apples, figs, parrots and turtledoves. And yet the serpent lurks in the garden of paradise. By association with the *Roman de la Rose*, the garden is a place of romantic love, and hence, in the minds of old men, inspires thoughts of lust. The *locus classicus* is Chaucer’s *Merchant’s Tale*, where old January constructs a private, walled garden for

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his sex-games with May. See A. L. Kellogg, ‘Susannah and the *Merchant’s Tale*,’ *Speculum*, 35 (1960: 275–9)” (126n).

- 72 *richest on rone*. PM 818 reads *in rane*, the preferred reading according to Dobson (p. 113), who argues that OF *raim*, *rain*, “branch,” is unknown in English and that the word is simply “rain,” the sense being “richest (most fragrant) in rain.” Turville-Petre follows PM 818 here, but glosses *rane* as “thicket,” noting similar uses of the word in *Alliterative Morte Arthure* line 923: “in ranes and in rosers,” and as *rone* (the form in Vernon) in *SGGK* line 1466 and later Scottish texts.
- 73 *the thorn*. PM 818 reads *thethorn*, “hawthorn,” the reading preferred by Turville-Petre.
- 82 *joyken*, from OF *jouquier*, “to rest, lie in wait, lurk.” The two earliest manuscripts, Vernon and Simeon, adhere to this reading, the sense being that the birds are at peace as they roost or lurk among the pears and pinecones. PM 818 reads *pyken*, thus preserving the alliteration. Turville-Petre follows the latter reading, whereby *pees*, with *pyken*, now means “to pieces,” and observes, “This reading is supported by the sense of the whole passage (lines 82–87) describing the birds eating the fruit on the trees” (p. 127n). One chooses between ingestion and tranquility. I have chosen the latter on grounds that the exemplar upon which Vernon and Simeon are based probably said *joyken*, relying on the fourth stress, *pees*, to satisfy the ear’s desire for alliteration.
- 86 *fees*. Vernon and Simeon read *seetes*, “perches,” which makes better sense than *fees*, but breaks the rhyme. PM 818 reads *fees*; thus the emendation.
- 91 *say*. MS: *sayȝ*.
- 92 *fodemed*. From *fodmen*, “to nourish, grow, produce fruit” (MED). Compare *Alliterative Morte Arthure* line 3246: “All fruities fodmed was that flourished in erthe.”
- 96 *in cuththes*. Dobson derives the word from OE *cypp(o)* ‘kith,’ and translates the half-line “they (the fruit-trees) proceed in families’, i.e., are arranged by species” (p. 113).

Notes

- 97 *thei*. MS: *the*. Simeon, PM 818, HM 114: *thei*.
- 99 *wardons winlich*. A warden is a hard, brown, quince-like pear, good for baking.
- 100 *waled*. From ON *val* n. “the action or act of choosing,” and verb forms meaning to choose, select, pick out, sort. See *SGGK* line 1276, where Gawain tells the lady, “Ye haf waled [chosen] wel better.”
- 105 *chibolle*. Fr. *ciboule*, the *allium fistulosum*; the cheve: “the chief,” i.e., “the best.”
- 106 *chouwet*. Apparently a diminutive of Fr. *chou*, thus, “little cabbage.” *cheverol* (chervil) is tall, and thus would *schaggen on niht*, that is, “waggle in the breeze at night.”
- 115 *averoyne*. *Artemisia abrotanum*, commonly called southernwood; served with honey as medicine for head ailments.
- 118–20 Vulgate (Douay): “And it fell out, as they watched a fit day, she went in on a time, as yesterday and the day before, with two maids only, and was desirous to wash herself in the orchard: for it was hot weather. / And there was nobody there, but the two old men that had hid themselves and were beholding her” (Dan. 13:15–16).
- 118 Amours notes the missing alliterative letter in the first stress position and emends *thing* to *ying*, “young person.” Turville-Petre follows Cotton Caligula A ii to read: *Als this yonge yepply yede in hir yerde*, “this young woman nimbly went into her garden.”
- 119 *that holden with hende*. Amours suggests *with* is a slip for *were*, the reading in Simeon, but makes no emendation in his text. Turville-Petre, following Simeon and HM 114, emends the phrase to *that holden were hende*, meaning “who were highly regarded.”
- 120 *thar us not be ferde*. Susan is addressing her servants. Perhaps the sense is “there is no need for us to be afraid”; but that suggests a worldly confidence that is not in keeping with Susan’s character. *Ferde* can mean “a group of people,” as in *Parlement of the Thre Ages*: “Men of mekyll myghte, / And

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other fele of that ferde, folke of the best”; whereby the sense here in *Pistel of Swete Susan* could be “there is no reason for us to remain together.”

- 121–30 Vulgate (Douay): “So she said to the maids: Bring me oil, and washing balls, and shut the doors of the orchard, that I may wash me. / And they did as she bade them: and they shut the doors of the orchard, and went out by a back door to fetch what she had commanded them, and they knew not that the elders were hid within” (Dan. 13:17–18). Several manuscripts of the Wyclifite translation gloss *smigmata* (washing balls, in Douay) as “sope, or oynement,” which could be the source for the Susan-poet’s “oynement” (line 121).
- 124–30 The Vulgate does not describe her undressing under the laurel tree at noon to relax. Here the situation is akin to that in *Sir Orfeo*, when Herodis sleeps under the ympe-tree at undren and is marvelously seized by the King of Faerie. The Susan-poet creates a similar faery mood as he speaks of the “feole ferlys” — the many marvels — that will befall her by midday, reiterating the location under the laurel tree where the strange event takes place (line 143). Susan is taken by elders, rather than the king of the underworld, but they are about equally shady.
- 131–43 Vulgate (Douay): “Now when the maids were gone forth, the two elders arose and ran to her, and said: / Behold the doors of the orchard are shut, and nobody seeth us; and we are in love with thee: wherefore consent to us, and lie with us. / But if thou wilt not, we will bear witness against thee, that a young man was with thee, and therefore thou didst send away thy maids from thee” (Dan. 13:19–21).
- 134–35 The puns on *worshipe* and *lay* accentuate the perversity of these men of religion who subvert the worship of God and the law (*lay*) of Moses through their sexual aggression.
- 144–56 Vulgate (Douay): “Susanna sighed, and said: I am straitened on every side: for if I do this thing, it is death to me: and if I do it not, I shall not escape your hands. / But it is better for me to fall into your hands without doing it, than to sin in the sight of the Lord. / With that Susanna cried out with a loud voice: and the elders also cried out against her” (Dan. 13:22–24).

Notes

- 157–82 Vulgate (Douay): “And one of them ran to the door of the orchard and opened it. / So when the servants of the house heard the cry in the orchard, they rushed in by the back door to see what was the matter. / But after the old men had spoken, the servants were greatly ashamed: for never had there been any such word said of Susanna. And on the next day, / When the people were come to Joakim her husband, the two elders also came full of wicked device against Susanna, to put her to death” (Dan. 13:25–28).
- 173 *Al wyes . . . were*. MS reads *Onwyse . . . wore*, meaning “entirely ignorant,” as Amours puts it, “not knowing at all what to think.” The emendation “al wyes” is based on Pierpont Morgan M 818. Turville-Petre notes that *wyse*, “men,” is rarely found outside alliterative verse and may have confused the scribes (p. 131).
- 175 *clare*. Either from OF *clairier*, “to make clear, explain, elucidate,” or a shortened form of *declaren*, “to make known, to set forth.”
- 183–95 Vulgate (Douay): “And they said before the people: Send to Susanna daughter of Helcias the wife of Joakim. And presently they sent. / And she came with her parents, and children, and all her kindred. / Now Susanna was exceeding delicate, and beautiful to behold” (Dan. 13:29–31).
- 183–88 These lines raise questions of how many justices are present and who they are. In the Vulgate the wicked judges issue the summons and conduct the trial (Dan. 13:24–41). Amours suggests that according to English law the accuser cannot be the judge; thus other justices are introduced to offer an impartial trial (p. 377). Turville-Petre endorses Amours’ suggestion (p. 131n). Miskimin notes: “There are a number of possible combinations of speakers for these lines, given the two evil (accusing) judges, one or two (*I* or *we*) sympathetic judges, and Joachim himself; the tone may range from tender sincerity to heavy sarcasm, depending on the speaker invoked” (p. 145).
- 195 *bureliche was bare*. Turville-Petre notes that “*was* is probably a northern pl. form,” suggesting the meaning that Susan’s shoulders “were beautifully bare,” or, alternatively, “that excellent lady was bare (to the shoulders)” (p. 132n). The Vulgate does not comment on her nakedness but simply says, “Now Susanna was exceedingly delicate, and beautiful to behold” (Dan. 13:31). Perhaps *bare* (line 195) is a past participle, rather than an adjective,

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and refers to her carriage rather than her nakedness, the sense being that the woman with shapely and lovely shoulders (line 194) bore (in a northern form) herself “bureliche,” that is in a noble manner. Line 197 suggests that her beautiful shoulders are covered with “a selken schert.” Perhaps we are to understand that they clothe her for the trial; or perhaps she had the shirt on before and simply presented herself regally.

- 196–208 Vulgate (Douay): “But those wicked men commanded that her face should be uncovered (for she was covered), that so at least they might be satisfied with her beauty. / Therefore her friends and all her acquaintances wept. / But the two elders rising up in the midst of the people, laid their hands upon her head. / And she weeping looked up to heaven, for her heart had confidence in the Lord” (Dan. 13:32–35).
- 200 In the Vulgate the wicked men command that her face be uncovered so that “they might be satisfied with her beauty” (Dan. 13:32). In *Pistel* they simply use the occasion to fondle her. *Homliche* could mean “familiarly,” or it could mean “roughly.” Turville-Petre suggests “impudently” (p. 236).
- 202–04 *hou thou ever paied.* Turville-Petre glosses *paied* as “rewarded,” hence “punished”; *O sake* he interprets as “Of the accusation,” the sense being “And we shall fully recount the truth of the accusation, just as we have seen it” (p. 132n). This is a good reading. But *paied* may also mean “pleased,” the sense being “no matter how it might please you.” Or the lines could be accusing her of the “covetise” the accusers feel, and *O sake* could be an apostrophe on her alleged wickedness, the sense being, “We shall present the charge, how you eagerly sought pleasure, / And we shall solemnly tell the truth, just as we have seen it, / You wicked (forsaken) creature.” I prefer the latter reading because it dramatizes the false judges’ malicious deceit.
- 209–34 Vulgate (Douay): “And the elders said: As we walked in the orchard alone, this woman came in with two maids, and shut the doors of the orchard, and sent away the maids from her. / Then a young man that was there hid came to her, and lay with her. / But we that were in a corner of the orchard, seeing this wickedness, ran up to them, and we saw them lie together. / And him indeed we could not take, because he was stronger than us, and opening the doors he leaped out: / But having taken this woman, we asked who the young man was, but she would not tell us: of this thing we are witnesses” (Dan. 13:36–40).

Notes

- 223 *sert*. A shortened form of *desert*, “merit.” Amours notes that the use of the shortened form as a substantive is rare, though it does appear in the *Alliterative Morte Arthure*, line 2926.
- 225 *trinet a trot*, “went at a smart pace.” Amours notes that *trinen*, a Norse verb, is a favorite in contemporary alliterative poems (p. 379). E.g., *Alliterative Morte Arthure* lines 3592, 3901, 4055, 4189.
- 231 *Heo ne schunte for no schame*. Compare *Alliterative Morte Arthure*, “He ne schowntes for no schame” (line 3715).
- 235–60 Vulgate (Douay): “The multitude believed them as being the elders and the judges of the people, and they condemned her to death” (Dan. 13:41).
- 235 Miskimin follows Cotton Caligula A ii and emends the line to read: *with dyn they hyr deive*: “with a roar, the crowd condemns Susannah to death,” the point being that “Susannah is not stupefied with grief; she bravely declares her innocence to the end” (p. 157). The Vulgate reads: *Creditit eis multitudo quasi senibus populi et iudicidus; et condemnaverunt eam ad mortem* (“The multitude believed them as being the elders and the judges of the people, and they condemned her to death” — Dan. 13:41). Miskimin suggests that the poet might have confused *creditit* and *crepitit* (“roared, rumbled”), to suggest the deafening “dyn.”
- 240 *sakeles of syn*. Compare *Alliterative Morte Arthure* (line 3992): *sakles of sin*.
- 242 *don out of dawen*. Compare *Alliterative Morte Arthure* (line 2056): *done of dawes*.
- 247 According to Turville-Petre, the idiomatic equivalent to “I don’t care a fig” (p. 134). One wonders, though, if Susan would be so brassy.
- 248 *fand*. MS reads *fond*. The emendation saves the rhyme.
- 252 *Heo kevered up on hir kneos*. Amours glosses the phrase “she recovered (herself), she rose on her knees,” deriving *kevered* from OF (*re)couvrir*; he notes similar usage in *Alliterative Morte Arthure* (line 956): “Coverde up on hir kneesse.”

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- 253 *disparage*, “sully.” “Since the original sense is ‘to marry a social inferior’, the word implies that the disgraced Susan will no longer claim equality with her husband. The touching symbolism of this scene is completed in the ‘wheel’, where Joachim kisses Susan and simply affirms his faith in her innocence in the sight of God. The Vulgate makes no mention of Joachim’s reaction to the trial and condemnation” (Turville-Petre, p. 134n).
- 261–86 Vulgate (Douay): “Then Susanna cried out with a loud voice, and said: O eternal God, who knowest hidden things, who knowest all things before they come to pass, / Thou knowest that they have borne false witness against me: and behold I must die, whereas I have done none of these things, which these men have maliciously forged against me. / And the Lord heard her voice. / And when she was led to be put to death, the Lord raised up the holy spirit of a young boy, whose name was Daniel. / And he cried out with a loud voice: I am clear from the blood of this woman” (Dan. 13:42–46).
- 264 *sette uppon sevene*. Compare *Alliterative Morte Arthure* (line 2131): *settes on seuene*.
- 276 *gyftes*. MS: *gultes*. Amours’ emendation, following PM 818 (p. 382).
- 281 MS: *Yit failed hit of fourteniht ful of the yere*. The emendation, proposed by J. T. T. Brown, *Athenaeum*, 1902, Pt. 2, p. 254, is followed by Turville-Petre, who notes that according to patristic tradition Daniel was fully twelve years old (i.e., at the age of the boy Christ in the Temple) when he first appeared in public with feats of wisdom. On biblical types of the *puer senex*, see Christian Gnilka, *Aetas Spiritalis* (Bonn, 1972), pp. 223–44, and J. A. Burrow, *The Ages of Man* (Oxford, 1986), pp. 95–142. See also Ernst Robert Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages* (New York, 1953), 98–101, on classical sources of the *puer senex*.
- 283 *freoly foode*, “noble youth.” “*Fode*, offspring, child, person, means literally one fed, brought up,” and occurs frequently in alliterative verse (Amours, p. 382). See note to line 17.
- 285 *thei*. MS: *the*.
- 287–99 Vulgate (Douay): “Then all the people, turning themselves towards him, said: What meaneth this word that thou hast spoken? / But he standing in

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the midst of them, said: Are ye so foolish, ye children of Israel, that without examination or knowledge of the truth, you have condemned a daughter of Israel? / Return to judgment, for they have borne false witness against her. / So all the people turned again in haste, and the old men said to him: Come, and sit thou down among us, and shew it us: seeing God hath given thee the honour of old age. / And Daniel said to the people: Separate these two far from one another, and I will examine them" (Dan. 13:47–51).

- 287 *seith*. MS: *seis*, ignoring the rhyme. Even so the grammar of *thou seith* seems irregular. Turville-Petre notes that 2 sg. endings in *-th* are occasionally found in Northern texts and quotes Amours' amusing note: "A Northern poet, accustomed to the forms *thou sayes*, *he sayes*, with the same ending, may have believed that in the South *thou sayth* was as correct as *he sayth*, and have used the word for the sake of the rime. This is not a wild guess of my own: I have read such an explanation of a similar licence; unfortunately I have lost the reference" (p. 383)" (p. 136n).
- 289 *frape*. Amours notes the frequent occurrence of the word to designate a group in the *Alliterative Morte Arthure* — lines 2091, 2163, 2804, 3548, 3740. He derives the term from OF *frapper*, "to throw oneself, to rush," observing that there is no evidence of the word being used as a noun in France except in diminutive forms — *frapaille*, "rabble, army followers," and *frapin*, "multitude, populace" (pp. 383–84). Chaucer uses the word in *T&C* III.411.
- 293 Turville-Petre notes that "the primary sense of *ungreith* is 'unprepared', and this is not impossible here; the judges are to be caught off guard by Daniel's questions" (p. 136). I follow his interpretation of the line in my gloss.
- 300–12 Vulgate (Douay): "So when they were put asunder one from the other, he called one of them, and said to him: O thou that art grown old in evil days, now are thy sins come out, which thou hast committed before: / In judging unjust judgments, oppressing the innocent, and letting the guilty to go free, whereas the Lord saith: The innocent and the just thou shalt not kill" (Dan. 13:52–53).
- 301 *a seneke*. MS: *askede*.
- 305 Doting on one's toes is a sign of senility. The *dismale* (Lat. *dies mali*) equates with evil days. The idiom is ancient, going back to Egyptian astrolo-

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gy and biblical allusions to the plagues against Pharaoh. Medieval calendars designate “Egipcian daies,” or evil days, as times of bad luck, depression, gloom, and disaster. See Chaucer’s *Book of the Duchess*, where the Black Knight, referring to the death of the good fair White, says, “I trowe hyt was in the dismal, / That was the ten woundes of Egipite” (lines 1206–07).

- 313–25 Vulgate (Douay): “Now then, if thou sawest her, tell me under what tree thou sawest them conversing together. He said: Under a mastic tree [*sub scino*]. / And Daniel said: Well hast thou lied against thy own head: for behold the angel of God having received the sentence of him, shall cut thee in two” (Dan. 13:54–55).
- 316 *Under a cyne.* Miskimin’s note is worth quoting in full: “The two trees named in the judges’ conflicting answers to Daniel’s cross-examination have been subjects of debate since the third century A.D., when Origen and Africanus argued over the original language (and hence authenticity) of the parts of Daniel accepted in Origen’s *Hexapla* Old Testament but rejected by the Masoretic text of the Jews. Africanus contended that a pun on the tree names proved that the original ‘Susannah’ could not have been written in Hebrew but must have been Greek; the editors of the 1965 Oxford Apocrypha explain the wordplay by paraphrasing in English, ‘under a clove tree . . . the angel will cleave you,’ ‘under a yew tree . . . the angel will hew you.’ No two biblical versions of the story name the same two trees in the crucial answers: Theodotion’s Greek in the Septuagint is usually translated ‘a mastick tree . . . a holm tree’; Wycliffe’s first translation (c. 1382) reads ‘vndur an haw . . . vndur a blak thorn.’ The Oxford Apocrypha reads ‘mastick . . . evergreen oak.’ *Cyne* is evidently a transliteration of the Vulgate’s *sub schino*” (pp. 178–79).
- 318 *nere.* So in Vernon and Simeon, ignoring the rhyme. Cotton Caligula reads *ful ne*, the reading preferred by Turville-Petre, thus maintaining the rhyme.
- 320 *To marke thi middel*, “to pierce through the middle of the body.” Amours notes the phrase twice in the *Alliterative Morte Arthure* — lines 2207, 4168.
- 326–51 Vulgate (Douay): “And having put him aside, he commanded that the other should come, and he said to him: O thou seed of Chanaan, and not of Juda, beauty hath deceived thee, and lust hath perverted thy heart: / Thus did you do to the daughters of Israel, and they for fear conversed with you: but a

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daughter of Juda would not abide your wickedness. / Now therefore tell me, under what tree didst thou take them conversing together. And he answered: Under a holm tree [*sub prino*]. And Daniel said to him: Well hast thou also lied against thy own head: for the angel of the Lord waiteth with a sword to cut thee in two, and to destroy you" (Dan. 13:56–59).

- 329 *faunt*, short for “infant,” or “youth.”
- 330 *thou Canaan sede!* MS reads: *thou Canaan he sede*. Turville-Petre emends the phrase to *of Canaan sede!* “of the seed of Chanaan,” as in the Vulgate (Dan. 13:56). That is clearly the sense of the passage, though I prefer the Vernon manuscript’s repetition of “thou.”
- 333 *Of thi wit . . . biwiled*. Turville-Petre notes a suggestion of “the anti-feminist commonplace of men duped by women, as in SGGK 2425–6” (p. 138). The suggestion is hinted at in the Vulgate, but less strongly, as Daniel observes: “O thou seed of Chanaan, and not of Juda, beauty hath deceived thee, and lust hath perverted thy heart” (Dan. 13:56).
- 342 *prine*. This is apparently a unique occurrence in Middle English of this word. In the Vulgate the elder says he saw her *sub prino* (Dan. 13:59), which must be the source of the word. The Wycliffite Bible translates the phrase “Vndir a plum tree,” which, given the orchard setting, makes good sense as a gloss on *prine*, though scholars usually gloss the Latin *prino* as “holm-oak.” On the complexity of exactly what trees are meant in the Vulgate, see the note to line 316.
- 352–64 Vulgate (Douay): “With that all the assembly cried out with a loud voice, and they blessed God, who saveth them that trust in him. / And they rose up against the two elders, for Daniel had convicted them of false witness by their own mouth, and they did to them as they had maliciously dealt against their neighbour, / To fulfill the law of Moses: and they put them to death, and innocent blood was saved in that day. / But Helcias and his wife praised God, for their daughter Susanna, with Joakim her husband, and all her kindred, because there was no dishonesty found in her. / And Daniel became great in the sight of the people from that day, and thenceforward” (Dan. 13:60–64).

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- 356–57 Turville-Petre notes that “for particularly heinous crimes the victim was tied to a ‘hurdle’ and dragged behind a cart around the city before execution” (p. 139n).

The Metrical Paraphrase of the Old Testament

Introduction

The Middle English Metrical Paraphrase of the Old Testament is an ambitious retelling of the Bible for lay people. 1531 stanzas long, the complete poem embraces 18,372 verses. Composed in twelve-verse stanzas normally rhyming *ababababcdcd*, the first two quatrains are in four-stress lines, the third in three-stress lines. The poem survives in two manuscripts, MS Selden Supra 52 (fols. 2a–168a) in the Bodleian Library (Bodl. 3440), hereafter referred to as S, and MS Longleat 257 (fols. 119a–212a), in the private collection of the Marquis of Bath, hereafter referred to as L. These two manuscripts were copied independently of each other, and according to Herbert Kalén's calculations, neither is derived from the original manuscript or from a common manuscript, which means that early on there must have been at least five manuscripts of the poem in existence (Kalén, p. xxxiv). Both of the surviving manuscripts derive from the middle of the fifteenth century (1425–75). The original composition of the poem probably took place near the beginning of the fifteenth century, perhaps sometime between 1400–10. The original dialect appears to be Northern, probably from somewhere in Yorkshire. Kalén calculates that the dialect of S is closer to the original than L, which has been deliberately modified by a Midlands scribe to make it easier to read.

The manuscript environments in which the two versions survive are somewhat different, which suggests, in turn, something about the early readership of the poem. In addition to *The Middle English Metrical Paraphrase of the Old Testament* (fols. 2–167), S contains thirty-five “narrationes,” i.e., saints lives from the Northern Homilies collection for the Sundays of the year, and three tales of monks in verse (fols. 172–239). A fifteenth-century love poem with refrain (“Thayr ys no myrth under the sky”) has been inserted on fols. 168^v–169^v. S must have been intended for devotional use, perhaps by a great household or a religious community, or perhaps for private meditational enjoyment and instruction. It once belonged to Samuel Purchas. The compilation of L is more secular in its orientation than S, and somewhat more aristocratic in its appeal. L begins with Lydgate's *Siege of Thebes* and two Chaucerian poems (*Arcite and Palamon* and the *Tale of Grisildis*), and a prose translation in mixed dialect of the romance *Ipomadon*. In L *The Middle English*

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Metrical Paraphrase, which follows *Ipomadon*, is missing the first 1472 lines of the poem (i.e., all of Genesis and the first two and a half stanzas of Exodus). But even though the biblical paraphrase is missing the beginning of the poem, the scribe is a careful copyist. Thus, it seems likely that the manuscript he was working from was also missing the opening lines. This manuscript bears the signature of Richard, Duke of Gloucester, before he became Richard III, which suggests that he once owned the manuscript and that it was in his possession from a period sometime before 1483 when he was crowned.

The order of materials in *The Middle English Metrical Paraphrase of the Old Testament*, which is the same in both S and L, does not always follow that of the Vulgate. The poet omits Leviticus and, in general, excludes sections dealing with laws to concentrate instead upon narrative. He seems committed to shaping a kind of Hebraic epic, a story that runs from Creation to a time after the heroic defenses of Israel by Judas Maccabee and Judith. The quality of the verse in the poem is quite good. The poet has a reasonably good sense of line and often puts together compelling stories. His primary sources are the Vulgate and Peter Comestor's *Historia scholastica*, though he also draws upon popular sources such as *Cursor Mundi* and the York plays. His narrative is pleasantly enhanced with direct speeches that are sometimes vigorous and colloquial, sometimes solemn, aphoristic, or pathetic. The poet mixes into the narrative medieval settings and local detail in presenting warfare and domestic situations, and he often intersperses sententious commentary within the action.

Besides the chronicle narratives from Genesis through IV Kings, the poet includes narratives on Ruth, Job, Tobias, Esther, Judith, and portions of II Maccabees. Given the poet's penchant for dramatic narratives it is odd that he did not include sections on Jonah and Daniel. The absence of Daniel means that there is no story of Susanna and the elders in this poem. But he does include vignettes of most of the other notable Old Testament women. The poem concludes with the story of the mother and her seven sons who are martyred by the wicked Antiochus in II Maccabees 7, thus demonstrating, as the poet says, that the Jews too have their saints. He follows this touching saint's life with a satisfactorily vindictive narrative of God's hideous destruction of the villainous Antiochus as the evil king's body rots and is consumed by worms even before he is dead; so great is the stench that none will attend him in his last days. That story is taken from II Maccabees 9. The fame of the plight of Antiochus had been rendered into the vernacular by Chaucer, who, a half generation earlier, drew upon it in the *Monk's Tale*. Antiochus's wretched death certainly provides a thrilling demonstration of the fate of the one God does not love, though it makes for a rather odd conclusion to the biblical epic.

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The Middle English Metrical Paraphrase of the Old Testament begins with a Prologue of three stanzas, which I have included in this edition since it offers a brief rationale for the making of the poem. It then proceeds to the story of creation. Like *Cursor Mundi* and the York Plays, the poem's creation story combines the two biblical creation stories of Genesis with legendary material of Lucifer's fall from Heaven at the end of the first day, once light and darkness have been separated. The narrative then proceeds to the story of Adam and Eve, which concludes as in Comester with Eve bearing "sixty and more" sons and daughters (21.6-7). As in the York Plays, Cain slays Abel with the jawbone of an ass, Noah's ark settles in the hills of "armynie," and so on. The legendary material adds considerably to the awesomeness of the narrative.

In this poem one is struck by the neutrality with which Eve is presented. There is no raging against her, as is often the case in anti-feministic medieval literature, though she does play her part in a role that is specifically gendered. Given the particular focus of this volume on heroic women let me cite the account at length: God thinks it is not good for "a man alon hys lyf to led" (12.2), so He creates Eve out of Adam's side, "a crokyd rybe, os [as] clerkes can rede, / And ther of formyd He hym a fere [companion], / a female, frutt furth to bred" (12.6-8). The new couple are given "fre wyll to be wyse" and warned against eating of the Tree of Knowledge. Lucifer, "our fellyst foe, / that fallyn was not fer before" is intensely jealous of the worthy new creations, and, fearing "that thei the same sted suld restore / that he and hys felows fell fro," sets out to beguile them (15.1-12). As a serpent "with woman face full fayr and clere" (16.4) the fiend approaches Eve and asks:

- | | | |
|-------------|---|--|
| 16.5 | "What may yt meyn
that ye tent noyght to this tree?"
Scho sayd, "That wold turne us to tene:
God bad that we suld leet yt be."
The fend sayd, "Foyles the more,
by that skyll scornyd ar ye;
God wold not that ye wer
alway so wyse os He. | <i>mean</i>
<i>attend not</i>
<i>anguish</i>
<i>should let</i>
<i>Fools</i>
<i>rationale</i>
<i>as</i> |
| 17.1 | "This frutt may gyf wysdom and wytt,
als godes so sall ye both begyn."
Scho saw that frutt so fayr and fyt,
and eth therof this welth to wyn.
Scho bad Adam to ette of yt, | <i>ate</i> |

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- to bytt theron he wold noght blyne. *desist*
 Hys boldness and that balfull bytt
 cast hym in care and all hys kynd.
 When thei this frutt had takyd,
 qwerfor thei wer both blamyd. *wherefore*
 Thei saw then thei wer nakyd;
 full yll thei were aschamyd.
- 18.1** With lefys ther privates can thei hyd, *leaves; genitals*
 and playnly durst thei not apeyre. *appear*
 God callyd on Adam in that tyd, *moment*
 and he sayd, “Lord, I hyd me heyre, *here*
 I hath so doyn, I der not byd.” *done; dare; abide*
 God askyd why and in what manere.
 “Lord, yf I wer yll occupyd *busyness; companion*
 yt was thrugh fandyg of my fere.”
 God askyd why that schoe went *forbiddon; taste*
 that forbeyd frutt for to fele.
 Scho sayd, “Lord, the serpent *made me do it*
 gart me do ylka deyle.”
- 19.1** God told then unto all thre *should suffer*
 what thei suld feyle for ther forfeytt. *Cursed*
 To the worme He sayd, “Waryd thou be, *believed*
 wend on thy wome ay erth forto eytte;
 And, woman, frutt that comys on the *food; labor*
 sall be broyght furth with paynys grett;
 And, Adam, for thou trowd not me, *believed*
 wyn thou thy foyd with swynke and swett;
 So sall all thyn offspryng *believed*
 unto the uttmast ende.”
 To manys kynd com this thyng *believed*
 thruh falssyng of the fend.
- 20.1** Fro Paradyse thei wer exilyd *did not understand love*
 withoutyn grace agayn to passe.
 So went thei both os bestes wyld, *Soon; conceived*
 thei cowd no lovyng. Bot alase,
 Soyn Eve consavyd and bare a chyld,

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Cayn, that sythyn so cursyd was *afterwards*

Because of Abell meke and myld

that he slow with a cheke of a nase.

slew; jawbone; ass

For the offerand of Abell

was accepte in Goddes syght,

And Caymys went down to Hell

and to God gaf noe lyght.

- 21.1 When Adam wyst withoutyn wer *knew; doubt*
this wekyd werk, he was full wo; *wicked*
He morned ever and mad yll cher, *mourned*
for meke Abell was murtherd so.
Bot aftur that, full mony a yer,
when he tyll Eve agan can go. *to; did*
Then bare scho suns and doyghters sere, *many*
the story says sixty and moe; *sixty*
Then ylke on other toke *each one took another*
and lyfyd be law of kynd, *nature*
Als who so likes to loke
may seke and forther fynd.

In my seeking and finding of tales of heroic women in *The Middle English Metrical Paraphrase of the Old Testament* I have chosen two narratives for this edition, The Story of Jephthah and his Daughter and The Story of Judith, to exemplify contrasting forms of female heroism in medieval ideology. One of the women is docile and obedient, upholding the authority of patriarchy; the other is aggressively active, challenging and instructing the patriarchs, albeit as God's humble instrument. The daughter of Jephthah remains nameless throughout her story. She is a woman who is selflessly devoted to God, her father, and her people. In this regard she functions as an obedient "everyperson" who looks unhesitatingly toward the common good. The poet makes the father somewhat more pathetic than he is in the Vulgate as he falls from his horse in grief when he sees his daughter approach and worries about explaining the situation to her. Likewise, the poet makes the daughter the more generously resolute as she reassures her father that all will be for the best, that he did the right thing, and that he should not grieve. The child consoles the father; the victim, the assailant. The moral of the narrative is rather different from that of the Vulgate. Instead of establishing a Hebrew ritual based upon her lamentation at dying a virgin, the daughter dies as a celebration of chaste obedience, while, at the end, the poet focuses attention on the foolishness of Jephthah's vow and the empti-

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ness of his sorrow. In this regard the tone is not unlike that of Chaucer's *Physician's Tale*.

But the example of heroic virtue projected in the Story of Judith is a different matter. Here we have a woman who takes over when the patriarchy fails, who provides not simply the intelligence for recuperation from a bad situation but the means as well. Judith does it all. She conceives of the plan, instructs the priests and the people in their roles, infiltrates the enemy camp herself alone with only her maidservant, beguiles the enemy's general, restores the besieged city's water supply, slays the general with his own sword, beheads him, brings the head back to the priests, instructs them in how to terrify their enemies and in how to attack, and finally she admonishes the army on how to destroy and when to loot.

This ferocious narrative has a long history in English vernacular literature. It first appears as an Anglo-Saxon poem of the ninth or tenth century. Only about a quarter of the Old English *Judith* survives, the latter part (fitts 10-12) beginning with Holofernes' drunken feast and his murder and concluding with the slaughter of the Assyrian host, the awarding of the spoils to Judith, and her song of praise to God. It is perhaps noteworthy that this poem survives in MS Cotton Vitellius A xv, the late tenth-century codex containing *Beowulf* — two heroes in one place. In the High Middle Ages Judith is regularly cited, along with Sarah, Rebecca, Abigail, and Esther, as example of the good woman who places her love of God first and thus becomes God's chosen instrument to provide leadership and counsel where others fail. For example, Chaucer's Dame Prudence, in *The Tale of Melibee*, uses Judith as a potent foil to Melibee's folly: "Judith by hire good conseil delivered the citee of Bethulie, in which she dwelled, out of the handes of Olofernus, that hadde it besieged and wolde have al destroyed it" (CT VII.1098). At the end of the Middle Ages we find Thomas Hudson's *Historie of Judith* (1584), composed at the command of the "most vertuous Princesse Iean, Queene of Nauarre," as an epic in imitation of "Homer in his Iliades and Virgill in his Aeneidos."

The story of Judith is so bold in its attack on what men have deemed to be their privileges that it makes men nervous to write about it. In *The Merchant's Tale* Chaucer, with brilliant irony, places allusions to her story, along with the stories of Rebecca, Abigail, and Esther, in the mouth of the unhappy Merchant, who praises the "blisful ordre of wedlok precious" and exhorts men to get down on their knees to "thanken his God that hym hath sent a wif," a wife that will last "unto his lyves ende" (CT IV. 1347-54). In a series of apostrophes the Merchant advises men to "do alwey so as wommen wol thee rede": "Lo Judith, as the storie eek telle kan, / By wys conseil she Goddes peple kepte, / And slow hym Olofernus, whil he slepte" (CT IV. 1366-68). But the story is not simply threatening to the male ego; it challenges the political structures of patriarchy as well. Male nervousness concerning

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the politics of the story is perhaps best seen in Thomas Hudson's admonition to the reader in his *Historie of Judith* (1584):

I may not forget that they doe greatly wrong mee, Who thinkes that in discriuynge the Catastrophe of this Historie (truelie tragicall) thinkes that I am becomme a voluntairy Aduocate to these troublesome & sedicious sprites (who for to serue their temerarious passions, and priuate inspirations) conspires against the liues of placed princes. For so much doe I disassent that this example and the like ought to be drawnen in consequence, that I am verily perswaded that the act of Ahud, of Iaell, and of Iudith, who vnder coulour of obeisance and pretext of amitie layde their reuenging handes vpon Aeglon, Sisara, & Holophernes: had beene worty of a hundred gallowes, a hundred fires, and a hundred wheeles, if they had not beene peculiarly chosen of God for to vnlose the chaines, and breake the bands which retainde the Hebrewe people in more then Aegiptian seritude, and expresly called to kill those tyrants with a death as shamefull as their liues were wicked and abhominable. But seing this question is so diffuse that it cannot bee absolued in few words, & that my braine is to weake for so high an enterprise, I send you to those who haue spent more oyle and tyme in turning the leaues of the sacred scriptures, then I haue done for the present. It mee sufficeth for the tyme to admonish the Reader, to attempt nothing without a cleare and indubitable vocation of God against those whom he hath erected aboue vs, and aboue althing, not to abuse the lawe of humaine hospitalitie, and other holy bands for to giue place to these frenetike oppinions so to abolish a pretended tyrannie. (Hudson, pp. 8-9)

The author of *The Metrical Paraphrase of the Old Testament* is less nervous about the behavior of Judith than Thomas Hudson was. Throughout his narrative he has heightened Judith's independence from the patriarchies of the world and at the same time emphasized her religious devotion. Perhaps that is because, in his poem, Judith exists exclusively within a religious context. But in his conclusion he faces the political overtones of the story straight on and proposes without apology that the story demonstrates "how God wyll puppysch his power / In wemen forto fall als fytt / als in men on the same manere" (1479.2-4).

The story of Judith was probably first written in the second century B.C., about the time of the writing of I and II Maccabees. The story has no known basis in history. The author has set the romance several centuries earlier in a mythical time of hardship which conflates stories of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon (605-562 B.C.), with Assyrian Nineveh (c. 612 B.C.), and Holofernes and Bagoas, the generals of the Persian king Artaxerxes Ochus, who made an attack upon Phoenicia and

Metrical Parphrase

Egypt (c. 350 B.C.). The city Judith defends, Bethulia, is apparently a fictitious creation as well. It is unknown outside the book of Judith and has not been identified with any Palestinian site. Like the account of Judas Maccabees's heroic feats in defense of his people against tyranny, the story of Judith serves as an inspiring example to oppressed people. The name Judith is the female equivalent of Judas, and simply means "Jewess." The name implies that she embodies what is good among the Jews. She is the representative of the chosen people, and in this regard the sections of her narrative dealing with the siege of the city are germane to a balanced understanding of the plot.

A reader of the Middle English version of the romance may, initially, at least, find the account of the siege of the city to be digressive. We should note, however, that the author of the poem has greatly reduced these kinds of materials from the Vulgate; but we should also keep in mind their importance to the heart of the story. The harrassment of the city (the poet never mentions Bethulia, only Jerusalem) equates with a harrassment of Judith and her people. When Ozias and the priests threaten to turn the city over to Holofernes if God does not come to their aid in five days, she instantly perceives the blasphemy and takes personal charge of the defense. It is Judaism that is endangered by the old men's decisions. Ironically, it is as if God does act to meet the demands of the patriarchy, but He does so through a woman, since the men have behaved shamefully with their demands. In the Middle English poem, after Judith returns victorious with Holofernes' head and the army has defeated the Assyrians according to her guidance, the booty is all given to her, with the words: "We wott we have it wun / with wyll of God and wyt of the" (1473.3-4). Judith then, like a bountiful ruler, divides the wealth among the poor "be mesure both to man and wyfe" (1474.4). Throughout the story her action has been for the common welfare of the city, and that is what she represents.

The Dialect

Originally written in a Yorkshire dialect at the beginning of the fifteenth century, *The Middle English Metrical Parphrase of the Old Testament* as it appears in the Selden manuscript bears a number of linguistic features characteristic of the northern dialects. One often finds -a- or -ai- where in the midlands one finds -o-; thus we have *lang* rather than *long* and *mair* rather than *more*. Instead of *sh-* we find *s-* as in *sall* and *suld* instead of *shall* and *should*. In some instances we encounter -o- where we might expect -e- as in *whore* and *thore* for *where* and *there*. In verbal inflections one often finds -y- where one might in the more familiar southeast midland dialect find -e-, as in *endyd* and *haldyn* instead of *ended* and *holden*. Participles often appear as -and rather than -ing as in *syttand* for *sitting*, *standand* for *standing*, and *tythand*

Introduction

for *tything*. In this dialect the subject of the sentence does not always agree with the verb according to modern conventions of number agreement. Thus we find *Jews makes* and *thou has*. The pronoun *she* often appears as *sho* or *scho*.

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The Middle English Metrical Paraphrase of the Old Testament

The Prologue

- 1 God, Fader in Hevyn of myghtes most,
that mad this mold and all man kynd,
The Sun that sendes us throwth to tast
wesdom and welth and wytt at wyn,
5 The grace of the Holy Gast
in whom all gudness behoves to begyn
Through mediacy of Mary chast
that helps to safe uus of our syn,
Swylke myght unto me send
10 thys boke ryght to aray,
Begynnyng, myddes, and end,
that yt be to Goddes pay.
- 2 This buke is of grett degré,
os all wettys that ben wyse,
For of the Bybyll sall yt be
the poyntes that ar mad most in price,
5 Als maysters of dyvinité
and on, the maystur of storyse,
For sympyll men soyn forto se,
settes yt thus in this schort assye.
And in moyr schort maner
- 10 is my mynd forto make yt,
That men may lyghtly leyre
to tell and under take yt.
- 3 This boke that is the Bybyll cald,
and all that owtt of yt is drawn,
For Holy Wrytt we sall yt hold
and honour yt ever os our awn.
- made; world
Son; truth; taste
wisdom; intelligence to obtain
goodness must needs begin
mediation; chaste
save us from
Such
correctly to compose
liking
as all know
Bible shall
are made; excellence
By
and also by; story-telling
soon; understand
paraphrase
more brief
easily learn
recite; understand
called
shall; hold
as our own*

The Story of Jephthah and His Daughter

- 5 All patriarches and prophettes yt told,
so ever ther saynges sekerly ar known,
And all wer fygurs fayr to fald
how coymmyng of Crist myght be kawn.
God graunt us Crist to know
10 all our form faders cravyd
And so to lere Is law
that our sawlis may be savyd.
- wherever; certainly
were figures; tell
meditated upon
desired to know
learn His law

The Story of Jephthah and His Daughter

- 292 Jepte was a knyght in armys clere;
fro bayle, he sayd, he suld them bryng.
A fayre lady he hade to fere,
and both thei lyvdy to Goddes lovyng.
5 He had a doyghtur that was hym dere
and no mo chyldder, old ne yyng.
To hyr befell, os men may heyre,
full gret myschefe, a mervel thyng.
He send to cetys and town,
10 to all that myght armys beyre
And bad thei suld be bown
to wend with hym in were.
- bright
confinement; [the Jews]
as companion
according to
young
as; hear
strange
cities
bear
commanded; conscripted
go; war
- 293 Then unto God hertly he hett
and mad a vowe with all his mayne
That yf he myght the maystry geytt,
als sone os he com home agayn,
5 The fyrst qwyke catell that he mett
of his for Goddes sake suld be slain
In sacrifice so forto sett.
Thus sayd he suld be done certayn.
To batell then thei went
10 withowtyn more respyte.
Ther enmys sone was schent,
both slain and dyscumfeytt.
- heartily; promised
might
victory win
as; as
living creature
should
enemies soon were destroyed
defeated

The Story of Jephthah and His Daughter

- 294 Then past thei home with mekyll pride
 because thei wan the vyctory.
 His doyghtur herd, is not to hyde,
 hyr fader suld come home in hy.
 5 Be lyfe scho went, and wold not byd,
 agayns hym with gud mynstralsy.
 When he hyr saw, "Alas!" he cryed,
 "My doyghtur dere, now sall thou dy!"
 To his hors fette he fell —
 10 in sadyll he myght not sytt.
 No tong in erth may tell
 what kare his hert had hytt.
- passed; great
 won
 heard, there's no hiding it
 should; haste
 Quickly; wait
 toward (in anticipation of) him
 shall you die
 horse's feet
 tongue
 grief; struck
- 295 So when he myght hymselfe stere,
 he thoght in hert how he had heyght
 To slo the fyrst that suld apeyre
 and sacrifice yt in Goddes syght.
 5 "Alas," he sayd, "my doyghtur dere,
 for my doyng thi dede is dyght."
 Scho prayd hyr fader to mend his chere
 and mad hym myrth all that scho myght.
 The more that scho mad glee
 10 to comfort hym with all,
 The more sore hert had he,
 for he wyst how yt suld fall.
- restrain
 promised
 slay
 death is doomed
 amend; countenance
 made
 sorrowful heart
 knew; turn out
- 296 "A, doyghtur," he sayd, "I made a vowe
 to God when I to batell wentt:
 Yf I of panyms myght have prow,
 what so com fyrst in my present,
 5 That suld be slone — that same ys thou.
 Alas for my sake now bees thou schent."
 "Fader," scho sayd, "I beseke yow,
 be trew and tornes not your entent.
 For bettur is that I dye,
 10 that may no thyng avayle,
 Then so fayr company
 as ye broyght from batelle."
- over the pagans; victory
 presence
 slain
 will you be destroyed
 true; don't change
 die
 (see note)
 Than

The Story of Jephthah and His Daughter

- 297 "Sen ye heyght sacrifice to make
 to God that goverans gud and yll,
 Leves it not, fader, for my sake,
 bot all your forward fast fulfull.
 5 Bot graunteys me grace two wekes to wake,
 to speke with lades lowd and stylle
 And of maydys leve to take,
 and then do with me what ye wyll."
 10 He gafe hyre leve to gang
 with grefe and gretynge sore.
 All that scho come amang
 ay menyd hyr more and more.
- Since you promised
 Tarry not
 covenant precisely fulfill
 weeks to lament (keep vigil)
 ladies openly and privately
- gave her permission to go
 grief; weeping sorrow
 ever grieved for her
- 298 So went scho furth to mony a frend,
 that for hyr syghyng sayd, "Alas."
 All weped for wo os scho can wend,
 when thei wyst how that it was.
 5 And when the tyme drogh nere the end
 that hyr fader assygned has,
 Scho went agayn with wordes hend
 and proferd hyr with payn to pas.¹
 Therfor hyr fader noyght leved:
 10 his sword in hand he hent
 And swythly swopped of hyr hede
 and bad scho suld be brent.
- woe as she left
 drew near
 courteous
 delayed not
 siezed
 quickly swapped off; head
 ordered; burnt
- 299 Grett sorow yt was this syght to se;
 all weped that wyst of hyr wo.
 Bot most sorow in hert had he
 that heddyd hyr and had no mo.
 5 Swylke folys suld men fayn to flee
 and be abayst or thei vow so.
 Fowle vow is bettur to broken be
 then man or woman sakles slo.
 Sex yere governd Jepte Ebrews
 10 and saved them from all angers yll
- wept; knew; woe
 beheaded; more [children]
 fools; be eager to avoid
 abashed before
 A foolish vow
 than; be slain without guilt
 Six years
 evil vexations

¹ *And presented herself so that the execution might take place*

The Story of Judith

Of Phylysteyns and Cananews,
and then he dyed as was Goddes wyll.

Philistines; Canaanites

The Story of Judith

- 1414 Dame Judyth was a gentyll Jew
and woman wyse whose sho suld wende.
Now wyll we nevyn hyr story new,
for to sum men yt myght amend
5 To see how sho in trewth was trew
als lang als sho in lyf con lend,
And lufed the Law als lele Ebrew
that Moyses tyll hyr kynred kend.
That Law forto mayntene
10 sho ordand in all thyng,
Als insampyll was seyn
and wyttenest in werkynge.
- wise wherever; go
tell; anew
be profitable
she
lived
loyal Hebrew
Moses to; taught
- 1415 Bot to mell this mater more
this lady now wyll we leve of hand,
And tell of fare that fell before,
als our faders before us fand.
5 A kyng, Nabogodhonosour,
in Bablion he was dwelland;
All other kynges and lordes wore
full stably at his stevyn to stand.
All that lufed paynyme law
10 and lyfed by mawmentry
Aftur his dedes con draw
and lowted hym fast forthi.
- speak of; matter
leave for awhile
events
found
- dwelling
- steadfastly; command
loved pagan
lived; idolatry
- bowed to him firmly therefore
- 1416 He had this werld sett at his wyll;
hym thoyght no noye suld neght hym nere,
For all his forwardes to fulfull
all hethyn folke were full fayn in fere.
5 With Ebrews oft hym angerd yll,
for them lyst not his lare to lere.
- annoyance; approach
agreements
glad together
- desired not; teaching; learn

The Story of Judith

- Oft sythys he spyed them to spyll
 with engynys and with sawtes sere.
 By sere cautels he kest
 10 how he myght bryng them down,
 Bot whyls thei lufed God best,
 to beld them ay was He bown.
- times; to destroy them
 machines; many assaults
 many crafty devices
- comfort; ever; committed
- 1417** This kyng was strang in ylke stoure,
 and in all were he wan déré;
 And so he gat to grett honowre
 and conquered kynges in sere cuntré,
 5 Wherfor he fell in fowle errowre,
 als men may be exemplyll see.
 He couth not knaw his creatore
 bot hoped ther was no god bot he.
 On payn of lyf and lyme
 10 he warned his men ylkon
 And bad thei suld hald hym
 ther god and other none.
- powerful; every battle
 warfare; victory
- several
- 1418** So in this errour con he dwell
 als maystur most of more and lese,
 Wherfore fowle vengance on hym fell
 to lyfe als best with grouand grese.
 5 Bot here we have no tym to tell
 the poyntes that proves all the procese.
 Furth with our maters wyll we mell
 how Jewys ware doyne to grett dystrese.
 For then the kyng ordand
 10 his ost with playn powere
 To dystroy ylka land
 that his law wyll not lere.
- live; beast upon growing grass
- ordered
 army; naked power
 destroy whatever
 obey (learn)
- 1419** And to fulfyll all this in dede
 to semble folke he wolde not sese.
 He ordand on his ost to lede,
 a doughty duke heyght Olyfernes,
 5 And bad all men to hym take hede
 and with hym wend in were and pese.
- assemble; cease
 ordered one; army
 named
 heed
 go; war; peace

The Story of Judith

- The folke were fayn and with hym yede,
and for ther cheftan thei hym chese. glad; went
choose
- 10 The kyng bad them not spare
bot dyng down all bedeyne
That wold noyght luf ther lare,
tyll all be conquered cleyne. strike; straight away
love their teaching
utterly
- 1420** This dughy duke that I of ment
fro his werke wold no langer abyde.
With full grett ost furth is he went
with mynstralsy and mekyll pride. alluded to
desist
army
- 5 Cytes and burghes both thei brent,
the Jewys to harme full fast thei hyed.
Cornes and wynes shamly thei shent,
thor was no trews to take that tyde. towns; burned
hastened
shamefully; destroyed
truce; time
living
- 10 The Jewys that were dwelland
in Jerusalem Cité
Myght loke over all that land
and full grett soroyng see.
- 1421** When thei had so dystroyd and strayd
and fuld the folke be fyrth and fell,
A sege to that Cité thei layd
whore Jews was dyght most forto dwell. scattered
despoiled; woods; hills
siege
- 5 "We sall not sese, for soth," thei sayd,
"or all the chylder of Israel
With all ther Godes to ground be grayd.
So sall thei never of maystry mell." were most prepared
stop; they [Holofernes' army]
Until; children
smitten
speak of victory
remain
- 10 Thei loged them thore to lend
and lyfyd at ther lykyng
Full fawtry days tyll end
that burgh in bale to bryng. forty
city; grief
- 1422** Bot folke within full wysly wake
ther Cyté fast forto dyffend
With allablasters and with bows of brake
ay redy bown forto be bend.
5 With gunys grett styfly thei strake,
within ther dynt durst no man lend. wisely are vigilant
their; defend
steel cross-bows; winches and racks
already prepared to be cocked
great cannons powerfully
range; remain

The Story of Judith

- And ever to God ther mayn thei make
 ther morngyn with His myght to mend.
 Within that Cyté ere
 10 prestes to pray plenté
 And knyghtes full wyse of were
 to govern ther degré.
- their complaint (moan)
 their mourning
 are*
- 1423** Bot ther degré was not to deme
 all yf thei were doughty of dede.
 Ther enmyse were so bold and breme,
 to them thei durst not batell bede.
 5 Ther byschope heyght Elyachym,
 and unto hym holy thei yede
 And prayd hym say how yt suld seme
 them forto deme swylka drede.
 He commawnd then that thei
 10 suld both with hert and hend
 Mekly unto God pray
 ther myschefe to amend.
- position; judge
 whether they were all doughty warriors
 fierce
 engage
 was named
 as a group they went
 understand such terror
 hand
 meekly*
- 1424** “For so,” he says, “ye sall encrese
 and no thyng of your rebels reke.”
 He sett ensampyll of Moyses
 and of the grett Abymalech:
 5 “He putt his pepyll fast in prese,
 to fell Goddes folke thei were full freke.
 Bot ay whyls Moyses prayd for pese,
 God sett ther noys in ther enmys neke.
 Yf we werke on swylke wyse
- enemies reckon
 He [Abimalech]; conscription
 destroy; bold
 noise (prayers)
 work in similar manner
 endeavor
 no wicked enemies
 harm*
- 10 and faynd our God to plese,
 Then sall non yll enmyse
 unto us do dysesse.”
- 1425** Thei were full redy, os he red
 forto aray aftur his resoun.
 Full bowsomly, os he them bed,
 on the bare erth thei sett them down.
 5 In hayrys and sekkes sone were thei cled
 and kest powder apon ther crown.
- as he advised
 obediently; commanded
 hairshirts; sackcloth
 dirt; head*

The Story of Judith

- All yf ther enmyse wele were fed,
to fyght then had thei no fusown. *provisions*
- Ser Olyfernes thought
10 they lay ther full lang whyle. *held out*
- Sere soteltes he soyght
to wyn them be sum wyle. *Many subtle tricks
by deceitful strategem*
- 1426** He wyst wele thei wold have no dawt
whyls thei had welth of waters clere.
Therfor he gart spare ylk spowte
whore any wels of watur were.
5 He mad ther bekkes to ryn abowt
that non suld negh that Cité nere.
So menes he forto make them lowt
and be full blyth his lay to lere.
Then were the Jews in wo
10 when thei saw stopped ylke streme
Fro the Cité of Jerico
and fro Jerusalem.
- 1427** Thei saw ther wellys wex all dry,
thei fand no tast in town ne feld.
No wounder yf thei were sory,
for wyn was wasted all that thei weld.
5 Ther price prophett them heught Ozi
that in batell them best wold beld.
To hym thei come with carfull crye
and bad he suld ther bodes yeld.
“Our lyfes so forto save,
10 for, sothly, ser,” thei say,
“bettur is our hele to have
then dye all on a day.” *spoiled; possessed
best; was named Ozias
protect*
- 1428** When Ozi herd them sorowyn so
and lyke to lose all that land, *likely*
He weped and wrang his hend for wo,
and unto them thus he cummand
5 Unto the tempyll all forto go
and pray ther God all weldand *powerful*

The Story of Judith

- “Us forto wyn out of this wo,
 sen all our hele henges in His hand.”
- 10 Full prestly thore thei pray,
 nevenand grett God be name,
 And thus hymself con say,
 for thei suld say that same:
- 1429** “Lord God, that mad kyrnell and corne
 and all may save be land and see,
 That fed our faders fare beforne
 and fro Kyng Pharo mad them free,
 5 Sene The lykes noyght that thei be lorn
 that trewly trows and treystes in The,
 Have mercy on us evyn and morn;
 save Thi servandes and this Cyté!
 We wott full wele us aw
 10 for syn swylke lyf to lede,
 Bot Thi mercy we knew
 is more then our mysdede.
- welfare hangs
 earnestly there
 naming; by
 Ozias himself did say
- 1430** “We wott wele Thou is all weldand
 and all may govern gud and yll,
 Agayn Thi stevyn may no thyng stand,
 all states may Thou steme and stylle.
 5 Chasty us, Lord, with Thi hand
 that our enmyse say not this skyll:
 ‘Ther God was wunt them to warrand;
 now wyll He not tent them untyll.’”
 Then all that pepyll prayd
 10 full lowly, lese and more
 And forto make them payd
 to them thus sayd he thore:
- made seed and grain
 by
 food in former times
- Since You like not; lost
 who; believes; trusts
 night and day
 servants
 know; ought
 because of; such
 greater than our sins
- all-powerful
- Against Thy voice
 contain and silence
 Chasten
 enemies; saying
- Their God used to protect them
 care for them so long
- meekly, the lesser and the greater
 satisfied
 there
- 1431** “I rede we fast fyve days to end
 with all wrschep we may weld,
 And see yf God wyll socour send
 us forto save under his sheld.
 5 And yf no comforthe then be kend,
 this Cyté sone then sall I yeld
- advise
 devotion; wield
- shield (protection)
 shown
 surrender

The Story of Judith

- Our enmyse to have in ther hend,
so that thei hete to be our beld.”
Thei sayd, “We all assent
this forward to fulfull.”
And so ther ways thei went
ylkon at ther awn wyll.
- their power
promise; protection*
- 1432** Bot then this wyse woman Judyth,
when scho herd of ther tythyng tell,
How Ser Ozi had ordand yt
ther Cyté and therselfe to sell,
And how he made that mesure fyt
to dome of God fyve days to dwell,
Sho wold yt wast with womans wytt,
and furth scho went that fare to fell.
To the tempyll rayked scho ryght
and cald tho folke in fere,
And up sho stud on heyght
so that thei suld hyr here.
- heard tell of their plans
Ozias, the high priest; proclaimed
their; themselves*
- demand of God results in five days
it [their plan] destroy; intelligence
plan to squelch
she went steadfastly
called those people together
stood in a prominent place
they should hear her*
- 1433** To Ozi fyrist hyr mone sho mase
als to most maystur tho men amang.
Sho says, “Omyse thou takes thi trace,
and to my wytt thi werke is wrang.
How dere thou sett in certayn space
the wyll of God to come or gang,
Sene He is gyfer of all grace
sone forto leve or to last lang!
This is more lyke to greve
our God, that most may gayn;
Then us ought to releve
to put us fro this payn.
- complaint she makes
most important among those
Amiss; your course*
- dare; specific time
go
Since; giver
terminate; abide
grieve
who may help most
find relief*
- 1434** Therfor is gud that we begyne
of this grevance to geyte relese,
And say: This sorow is sent for syn
that we have wroght and wold not sese,
Als was with elders of our kyn,
Abraham, Ysaac, and Moyses.
- to get release
because of sin
wrought; cease*

The Story of Judith

- Thei had wo, for God wold them wyn
 aftur ther payn to endlese pese
 And also forto prove
 10 with teyne and with trayveyle
 Whedder thei wold last in love
 or fro hym fayntly fayle.
 woe; win them
 their; peace
 suffering; travail
 Whether; abide
- 1435** And for thei wold not groche agayn
 bot schewed ay meknes and more and more,
 Als Job and Thoby dyde sertayn
 that were assayd with seknes sor,
 5 To Goddes bydying ay were thei bayn;
 therfor ther guddes He con restore
 And put them into power playn
 more fast then ever thei wore before.
 The same then sall us fall,
 10 and we this fare fulfyll."
 Then Ozi and thei all
 graunted to werke hyr wyll.
 since; complain
 ever showed meekness
 tried; sickness
 obedient
 did restore
 manifest power
 secure
 shall befall us
 if; mission
- 1436** Thei prayd hyr forto tell them to
 hyr purpose both by nyght and day.
 "Now, sers," sho sayd, "sen ye wyll so,
 all myn entent I sall yow say.
 5 This nyght I wyll wende furth yow fro
 in other place my God to pray,
 And pray ye that God with me go,
 and lokes none wayte estur my way.
 I kepe no cumpany
 10 bot my servand sertayn.
 Kepes this Cyté seurly
 till God send us agayn."
 sirs; since
 make sure that none follow
 Guard; securely
 until; returns
- 1437** Sho sett yng men to yeme the gate
 and bad thei suld be redy bown
 To kepe hyr in the evyn late,
 for that tyme wold scho wend o town.
 5 Then to hyr howse scho toke the gate
 and gart hyr servand in that sesown
 young; guard
 bade; readily prepared
 To attend her; evening
 depart from
 returned home
 made her servant; time

The Story of Judith

- With bawme and with bathes hate
 clese all hyr cors fro fote to crown.
 And sythyn sho hyr arayd
 10 in garmentes gud and gay,
 And ever to God sho prayd
 to wyse hyr in hyr way.
- ointment; hot baths
 body; foot
 then she had herself dressed
 guide*
- 1438** With sylke and sendell and satayn
 and baulkyn bettur non myght be,
 Hyr pellour all of pure armyne,
 with pyrry plett full grett plenté,
 5 With gyrdyll and garland of gold fyne
 to make hyr semly unto se.
 Hyre maydyn bare both bred and wyne
 to fynd them fode for days thre.
 God wyst wele that sho went
 10 to save His pepyll exprese.
 Therfor to hyr He sent
 both favour and fayrnese.
- silk; fine silk; satin
 brocade
 furs; ermine
 precious stones adorned
 girdle*
- 1439** When hyr aray was all redy,
 down on hyr knesse sho kneled then,
 And sayd, "My Lord God Almighty,
 That wyll and thoght may clerly kene,
 5 Sen in The lygges all vyctory,
 to me, Thi servand, myght Thou lene
 Forto overcom our yll enmy
 and save this Cyté and Thi men."
 Scho prayd to God thus gaite
 10 tyll lyght of day con sese.
 Then wentt scho to the gate
 full prevely to prese.
- knees she kneeled
 Whose; understand
 Since in Thee lies
 incline
 wicked enemy
 Thy people
 in this way
 was gone
 secretly to hasten forward*
- 1440** When sho com ydder, redy sho fand
 Ozi and other to tent ther toure.
 Sho bad that thei suld stably stand
 that Cyté to save and socoure,
 5 And that prestes suld pray with hert and hand
 that God suld be hyr governoure.
- thither; found
 attend their tower
 ordered; steadfastly
 help*

The Story of Judith

- So sent sho furth with hyr servand
to enmys that were strang in stoure.
Ever to God sho prays
10 to be hyr helpe and beld.
Wach men that kepes ways
toke them sone in the feld.
- So she sallied forth
powerful in battle*
comfort
Watchmen who patrol the ways
captured; field
- 1441** They merveld of hyr rych aray
for so semly had thei sene none.
Sum of them ware proud of that pray,
5 for gay geyre had sho full gud woyne.
They asked wher scho was o way
and why sho welke so late allon;
And to them sothly con scho say,
“Sers, fro my frendes thus am I gone.
I com to yow in trewse,
10 and that sall ye here and see.
I am on of the Ebrows
that wuns in this Cyté.
- prey*
fancy dress; great plenty
going
walked; alone
truly she said
from
truce
hear
one
dwells
- 1442** To fle ther fro I am full fayn
and leve both catell, kyth and kyn.
For wele I wott myself certayn
5 that ye and yours sone sall yt wyn.
To your prince is my purpose playn,
and I sall tell hym, or we twyn,
To wyne yt wele withoutyn payn
and dystroy all that ere therin.
Sen thei wyll not them yeld
10 to men that may them save,
Yt is no boyte to beld
them that no helpe wyll have.
- eager*
abandon; property; family; kin
soon shall conquer it
before we depart
How to win it easily
are
Since; surrender themselves
profit in helping
- 1443** Unto my hele I wyll take hede
and to my servand that is here.
And, sers, I pray yow me to lede
5 unto your prince that has no pere.”
Thei herd hyr spech was for ther sped;
therfor thei were full fayn in fere.
- welfare; heed*
lead
peer
good fortune
glad together

The Story of Judith

- | | | |
|------|---|--|
| | To Olyfernes so thei yede
and fand hym syttand with solace sere. | went
found; sitting; apart |
| 10 | That lady in thei lad
and told thei fand hyr flayd
And fro hyr frenschep fled,
and how sho to them sayd. | led
terrified
people |
| 1444 | When Olyfernes saw this syght
and herd ther tayles how thei con tell,
In hyr hys hert was ravyscht ryght
and demed that sho suld with hym dwell. | heart; utterly ravished |
| 5 | Than forto marre hym more in myght
full flatt unto the grownd sho fell.
He commawnd men that wer full wyght
to take hyr tyte up them omell. | in order to deceive him |
| 10 | Then on hyr knese sho kneled
and prayd his helpe to have.
He sayd he suld hyr beld
in oght that scho wold crave. | strong
quickly up between them
knees she kneeled
comfort
whatever; desire |
| 1445 | Sho thanked hym frendly, noyght at hyde,
and ryght glad in his hert was he.
He saw hyr geyre of so heygh prid,
he trowed sho was of grett degré. | there's no hiding it |
| 5 | He made hyr sytt hymself besyd,
that was ryght semly syght to see.
Thei fell in talkyng so that tyde
that mery sho mad als his meneyé. | apparel; high
believed |
| 10 | Yt was solace sertayn
to se them syt togeydder,
And fyrst he con hyr frayn
cause of hyr comyng ydder. | time
company |
| 1446 | Sho sayd, "Ser, and yow lyke to here,
I am an Ebrew ald and yng.
My menyng is to mend your chere
by gud bodword that I yow bryng.
I wyll maynteyn in my manere
Nabogodhonosour, your kyng, | if you wish to hear
old; young
intention
good advice
adhere; behavior [to] |

The Story of Judith

	And his law wyll me lyke to lere when we have endyd other thyng. And, ser, fully I fynd how thou has in his sted Power to lowse and bynd als lord of lyfe and ded.	learn have; place loose; bind life; death
1447	And, ser, I se the soth certayn: Ebrews, whyls thei may wepyns weld, Wyll hold yond Ceté the agayn and never assent yt forto yeld. Therfor to fle I am full fayn to the, that best may be my beld. For wele I wott thei sal be slain, for fawt of fode fall fayn in feld. And sen thei wyll not crye to the, that may them save, I hald them wele worthy swylk hydows herm to have.	speak the absolute truth weapons carry against you surrender protection lack of food fall dead such hideous harm
1448	And therfore come I to the here, by certayn sygnes the to say How thou sall all that kynd conquere lyghtly withoutyn lang delay. Thei may not last, thus I the lere, because ther watur is haldyn away. I herd them say with sympyll chere that all suld fayle or the faurt day. And I saw, or I yode, how thei ther bestes slought For thyrst to drynke the blood, bot non had half enogh.	to you signs to tell you people advise you withheld before the fourth before I left beasts slaughtered
1449	And when I saw that thei dyd so and that yt wold no bettur be, I hyde me fast to fle them fro so to save my servand and me. Sen thei wyll not be ware with wo to save themself and ther Cyté,	hastened

The Story of Judith

- Yt was Goddes wyll that I suld go
 and tell ther tythynges unto the. *their circumstances*
- 10 Lo, ser, this is," sho sayd,
 "the cause of my comyng."
 Then was the prince wele payd:
 the wyn he bad them bryng. *well pleased*
wine
- 1450** He dranke and bed hyr furth by raw;
 sho thanked hym with hert and hende:
 "Ser, me behovys lyfe eftur my law
 tyll this bargan be broyght tyll ende.
 5 We have ordand, als Ebrews aw,
 fode thes four days forto spend.
 And, ser, by that day sall we knew
 how wele our myrrh sal be amend.
 For als lang als I dwell
 10 His law sadly to save,
 Then wyll my God me tell
 how we sall helpyng have.
- 1451** And, ser, so sall I tell the tyll
 to make a sawt by sotell gyne
 To weld the Cyté at thy wyll
 and esely forto entur therin.
 5 And, ser, than may thou spare or spyll
 the Ebrews ylkon or thou blyn,
 And, yf the lyke, to lend thor stylle
 or home agayn with wrschep wyn."
 With gawdes thus scho hym glosed
 10 to have hyr purpose playn.
 Hyr sawys soth he supposed,
 And thus he glosed agayn:
tell you when
assault by subtle device
conquer
- 1452** "I gyfe the leve to make thi mese
 of mete and drynke at thy lykyng,
 For thou ow wele thi God to plesse
 That out of bale wyll the bryng.
 5 And when we sall the ceté sese,
 thou sall have chose of all thyng
permission; prepare your food
ought
Who out of grief
capture
choice

The Story of Judith

- And lyfe ever then at thin awn ese
 with Nabogodhonosour, the kyng.
 For and I fynd yt fyne
 10 that thou says in thi saw,
 Then sall thi God be myne,
 and I wyll luf thi law.
- For if I find; true speech*
- 1453** And all that unto Hym may heve
 byd I thou do both nyght and day.
 Yt is not gud that thou Hym greve,
 sen He all soth to the wyll say."
 5 Sho sayd, "Then bus thou gyfe me leve
 forto have rowm and redy way
 Ever more at myd nyght forto meve
 to certayn place my God to pray."
 Of hyr wyll noyght he wyst;
 10 therfor he graunt sone
 To lyf at hyr awn lyst
 tyll all thier dedes be done.
- pertain*
grieve
must; give; permission
leeway; ready access
go (move)
he knew nothing
live according to her own desire
- 1454** And to his kepers cummand he
 o payn to lose both lyf and land
 That thei suld to hyr bowsom be
 and holy held unto hyr hand
 5 And make uschew and entré,
 so that no stekyll agayn hyr stand.
 Thei graunt ylkon in ther degré
 kyndly to do als he them cummand.
 Full mery was ylk man
 10 and full glad of ther gest.
 So depart thei than
 And rede them all to rest.
- guards*
upon pain of loss of
be obedient
wholly
exit (issue); entrance
doorbar against
each person
guest
prepare themselves
- 1455** Then to a chamber thei hyr led
 that was with alkyns wrschewe wroyght.
 All bewtese both for burd and bed
 with mekyll blyse was ydder broyght;
 5 And in that sted so was sho stede
 with alkyns solace sere unsoght.
- all manner of splendor*
beauteous things; board
placed
all manner of unsought comforts

The Story of Judith

- Bot to slepe was sho never unclede;
of other thyng was mare hyr thought.
Ylke nyght scho toke hyr way
10 ferre down into a dale.
Thor menys sho, and sho may,
to hald the Ebrews hale.
- for sleep; undressed
more
Each night
far
There she intends if she may
keep; healthy*
- 1456** In that ylke dale was dyght a well
with Ebrews that before had bene.
Thorof thei dranke where thei con dwell,
and thorin ware thei weschyn clene.
5 And thore scho and hyr damsell
trayveld so them two betwene.
Thei mad a spryng that fro yt fell
at the Cyté syde forto be sene,
So that thei that wund within
10 ware warescht wele of thryst.
Thus myght sho wende with win
and lend at hyr awn lyst.
- same; a well had been dug
by; in years past
Thereof; where; went
therein were
labored
dwelt
were relieved
return with joy
remain; own pleasure*
- 1457** So trayveld scho be tyms thre
into that place hyr God to pray.
Scho had fre eschew and entré.
And so befell on the fourt day,
5 Olyfernes bad his men suld be
ay redy in ther best aray.
For on the fyft day hoped he
the Ebrews folke to fell for ay,
For so had Judyth sayd.
10 he gart ordan forthi
A soper gudly grayd
for hyr sake soveranly.
- journeyed
exit (issue)
to destroy forever
gave orders therefore
superbly prepared
majestically*
- 1458** When all was poynted with pomp and pryd,
a knyght then unto hyr sent he
Fortho com and sytt hym besyde
thar maner of solace forto se.
5 The knyght hyr told so in that tyd.
Sho thanked hym with wordes free
- appointed
at that time*

The Story of Judith

- And sayd, "I sall not lang abyde,
for at his bydyng wyll I be."
Rychly sho hyr arayd
10 to seme fayr in ther syght.
The pepyll were full wele payd,
and the lord was most lyght.
- their sight
pleased
wantonly cheerful*
- 1459** Befor hymself hyr sett was wroyght
full presciosly forto apere.
Hyr ryalnes rayvyschyd his thoght;
he bede hyr mete with meré chere.
5 Sho ete mete that hyr maydyn broyght,
and toke that coupe with wyn full clere
And made semland and dranke ryght noyght.
Bot Olyfernes for that fere
Of myghty wyne dranke more,
10 for myrth that thei were mett,
Than ever he dranke before.
So hymself he oversett.
- her chair; prepared
queenliness
ordered her to feast; merry cheer
ate food*
- semblance but drank nothing
companion
strong wine
joy; together
overwhelmed*
- 1460** When Judyth saw that yt was so,
of that werke was sho wele payd.
Sho made talkyng betwyx them two
tyll he wyst noyght wele what he sayd.
5 He bad all men to bed suld go
and radly to ther rest arayd,
And that none suld take tent hym to,
for at hys lyst he wold be layd.
He thynkes that he sall have
10 that lady hym forto plese.
Bot God wyll evermore save
his servand fro dysese.
- well pleased
promptly
pay attention to him
desire
distress*
- 1461** Unto his bed fast con he hye
hys foly fare forto fulfill.
He bad that lady com lyg hym by,
for all the doreys ar stokyn styl.
5 Sho sayd, "Ser, I sall be redy
with word and werke to wyrke thi wyll.
- did he hasten
foolish fancy
lie
doors are firmly barred*

The Story of Judith

- | | | |
|------|---|--|
| | Bot to my chamber wend wyll I,
and full sone sall I come the tyll." | go
come to thee |
| 10 | To hyr chambre scho wentt
and prayd God specially,
Als he knew hyr entent,
to kepe hyr fro velany. | villainy |
| 1462 | Unto God thor sho prayd and wepe
forto vouchsave hyr sorow to slake.
Sone Olyfernes fell on slepe,
for dronkyn man may not wele wake. | there; wept
vouchsafe; allay |
| 5 | Sho warnd hyr servand to take kepe
that no kyns noyse suld sho make,
And prevely als sho couth crepe
hyr way to his bed con sho take. | pay attention
no kind of noise
quietly as she could creep |
| 10 | Thor kneled sho on the ground
and prayd God with Hys wyll
To strength hyr in that stownd
hyr forward to fullfill. | There she kneeled
strengthen; moment
promise |
| 1463 | Sho drogh his sword full sone sertayn,
qwylke sho fand standand in that sted,
And with that brand sho brest his brayn;
so with that dynt sone was he dede. | drew
which; place
sword; burst
blow |
| 5 | Then cutted sho sunder synow and vayn,
and fro hys halse hewed of hys hed
And putt yt in a poket playn,
whore thei befor had born ther bred. | asunder sinew; vein
neck cut off
simple bag
their bread |
| 10 | Sho bad hyr maydyn yt bere
whore als thei were wont to pray.
Thei geydderd sayme ther geyre
and wyghtly went ther way. | to the place where; wont
gathered together their gear
manfully |
| 1464 | To have ther hele thei hastyd fast
and made no tareyng in that tyde.
Tyll tyme thei were all perels past,
thei wanst yt was no boyte to byde. | To secure their welfare
time
perils
use to tarry |
| 5 | Yf yt were late, so at the last
thei neghited nere to the Cyté syde. | approached near |

The Story of Judith

- To the kepers a crye scho cast
 and bad them opyn the wekett wyde. *wicket*
- 10 Hyr voyce full wele thei knew;
 for fayn full fast thei wepe. *joy; wept*
- Full mony a bold Ebrew
 com thore hyr forto kepe.
- 1465** Thei lete hyr in with torches lyght
 and lowtyng low, is not to layn, *bowing; it is no lie*
 Thei were full glad to se that syght,
 for wele thei wend sho had bene slayn.
- 5 Sho stud up in a sted of hyght
 that all men myght se hyr certayn. *thought*
 And thore scho schewed hyr releke ryght,
 the hede out of hyr poket playn. *high place*
 “Loves God,” sho sayd sadly, *see her for sure*
 10 “That for you hath ordand *relic*
 To sett your vyctory *head*
 in a wake womans hand.” *weak*
- 1466** Then all the pepyll in that place
 down on ther knese low thei knele. *knees*
 Thei thanked grett God of his grace
 That kyndly so thar care wold kele. *Who; relieve (cool)*
- 5 When thei saw Olyfernes face,
 no wonder yf thei lyked yt wele. *should do each and every detail*
 Then Judyth spake furth in that space
 how thei suld do ever ylke dele.
- 10 Sho sayd, “In this same day
 belyve loke ye be bowne *quickly; ready*
 All in your best aray
 to dyng your enmys downe. *strike down your enemies*
- 1467** Set up this hed over the gate,
 so that your enmyse may yt se. *For when they know; know*
 For fro thei wyt, full well I wayte,
 that ther prince so perysched be,
- 5 His men wyll make no more debate
 bot fayn to cayre to ther cuntré. *be eager to go*

The Story of Judith

- Then sall ye folow on them fote hate
and fell them or thei ferre flee.
Thei sall lefe welth gud woyne,
10 bot lokes non tent thertyll.
When thei ere fled and sloyn,
then may ye fang your fyll.
- pursue them hot-foot
destroy; before; flee far
leave much desirable wealth
pay no attention to that
are; slain
seize*
- 1468** Evyn als sho demed was done in hye:
the hede was sone sett up on the heught.
Then mad thei myrth and melody
5 with bemys, als thei were bown to fygth.
And when the hethyn hard them crye
And saw a sygne sett in ther syght,
Thei ware full yll abayst therby.
To warne ther prince thei went full wyght.
10 To his chambre they hyed
and bad his servandes say
How the Ebrews them ascryde
Fortho have dede that day.
- Even as; quickly
trumpets; prepared
abashed
quickly
hastened
cried out to them
battle*
- 1469** The chamberer durst make no dyne
for ferd yt suld turn hym to tayne.
He wend the woman were within,
5 and that thei both on slepe had beyne.
Bot with hys handes he con begyn
to wakyn them be countenance cleyne.
And sythyn he come to the curtyn,
thore was no segne of solace seyne.
10 Then nere the bed he yode
and fand rewfull aray:
A body laped in blod,
bot the hed was away.
- noise
fear; get him in trouble
thought
been
seen
went
rueful
lapped*
- 1470** Full lowd he cryd, "Alas! alas!
Our lyves ere lorn, my lord is ded."
"How is yt so?" ylkon thei asse.
5 He sayd, "Se here, he has no hede."
To Judyth chamber con thei pase
and saw hyr stollyn out of that sted.
- are lost
ask*

The Story of Judith

- Then wyst thei wele that werkynge was
 by hyr wyles and hyr wekyd red.
 Thore was no boyte to byde
 there welthes oway to wyn,
 Bot ylkon to ryn and ryd
 and forsake kyth and kyn.
- wiles; evil counsel
 no use to take time
 their loot to take away
 each one did run; ride*
- 1471** Thus of the rest thei were remeved,
 ther ryche robes all rafed and rent.
 Ther restyng thore full sore them rewed,
 withoutyn welth away thei went.
 The Ebrews prestly them persewed,
 all lost ther hedes that thei myght hent.¹
 Thor tho all that this bargan brewed,
 full shortly were thei shamed and shent.
 Then come Ebrews agayn
 whore ther enmyse had beyne.
 Thei fand all safe certayn;
 ther was no solpyng seyne,
- tattered and torn
 sorely; rued
 swiftly; pursued*
- 1472** Bot only of Olyfernes blod
 that out of his body was bled.
 Thor ware garmentes of gold full gud
 and gold in bages abowt that bed.
 The body thei kest to bestes fud
 and fowles therwith forto be fede.
 Thresour thei toke and hame thei yode,
 non other welth with them thei led.
 Non other thyng thei broght
 bot of gold full gud woyn.
 To Judyth sone thei soyght
 and thanked hyr everylkon.
- cast out as food for beasts
 Treasure; home they went
 in abundance
 each and everyone*
- 1473** Thei broyght hyr gold in bages bun,
 and bed themself at hyr wyll to be.
 Thei say, "We wott we have yt wun
- bound
 offered themselves
 won*

¹ All they were able to seize lost their heads

The Story of Judith

- | | | |
|------|---|--|
| | With wyll of God and wyt of the." | your intelligence |
| 5 | Scho says, "Sen God thus has begun
to save your selfe and your Cyté,
His tempyll sall therwyth be fun
and goveren ever in gud degré." | supplied |
| 10 | Thei say, "We have leved thore
of ertly welth to wyn
To make us mery evermore
and comforth all our kyn." | |
| 1474 | Sho bad them wyghtly wend ther ways
to steyr tho folke that thei not stryfe.
"And partyes the mobyls, sers," sho says,
"be mesure both to man and wyfe." | bade; quickly go
guide |
| 5 | And so thei dyd by thirty days
or thei that ryches myght up ryfe.
Tho that before were pore to prayse
wer then relyfed for all ther lyfe. | divide; moveable goods
just proportions |
| 10 | Grett myrrh was them amang;
thei loved God of His grace
With solace and with sange
full specially that space. | divide up
Those who
relieved |
| 1475 | And when that space was sped and spend
that thirty days were fully gone,
Then Judyth bad them with hyr wend
unto ther tempyull everylkon | over and past |
| 5 | And love God thor with hert and hend,
that swylke thressour had to them toyne.
And thei dyd evyn als sho them kend,
Thei offerd gold ther full grett wone. | treasure; given
advised |
| 10 | Sho bad them love only
God, that is all weldand,
That sett Hys vyctory
and ther helpe in hyr hand. | abundance
powerful |
| 1476 | Als sho wold deme, thei dyd in dede,
als worthy was withoutyn were.
Then home to hyr hows scho yede, | deed
doubt |

The Story of Judith

- and pepyll past to ther places sere.
 5 A lades lyfe then con sho led, *lady's*
 and Goddes law lyked hyr ever to lere.
 And furth sho weryd hyr wedow wede
 bot in soverane sesons of the yere.
 Then wold sho be more gay
 10 to syght and more honest
 In purpas God to pay *please*
 for wrschepe of that fest.
- 1477** Sho had enogh of rent and land
 in ylke sted whore sho was sted
 Aftur Manasses, hyr husband,
 that lordly lyf before had led.
 5 And of all that sho had in hand
 over honest spence that suld be sped,
 Ther with pore folke sho fed and fand
 and beldyd both to bake and bede.
 Sho occupied so hyr sted
 10 in pennance and in prayer
 Fro hyr husband was dede
 a hundred and fyve yere. *From the time
a hundred and five years*
- 1478** Hyr servandes, man, maydyn, and knave,
 mad sho to goveren gud degré.
 Then dyed scho as God voched save,
 for fro that fyt may no man flee.
 5 By hyr husband thei can hyr grave
 full solemplly in that Cyté,
 And by sevyn days sorowyng thei have,
 als costome was in that cuntré.
 The Jews makes hyr in mynd
 10 evermore to be on ment, *remembered*
 For scho comforth ther kynd
 when thei in bale were bent. *misery; afflicted*
- 1479** Now be this werke wele may we wytt
 how God wyll puppysch his power
 In wemen forto fall als fyt *by; know
make known (publish)
women; fitting*

The Story of Judith

als in men on the same manere.
5 Thus endes the Boke of Judyth,
als clerkes may knaw by clergy clere.
God graunt hym hele that hath turned yt
in Ynglysch lawd men forto lere!
Insampyll may men here se
10 to be trew in trowyng.
God graunt us so to be
and to His blyse to bryng!

learning
health
into; unlearned people to teach
Example
true in belief

Notes

S = MS Selden Supra 52, the manuscript on which this and the Kalén-Ohlander edition are based. L = MS Longleat 257, the only other known manuscript of the paraphrase. O = Ohlander's edition. Citations are by stanza number and line number within the stanza.

The Prologue: Since L is missing the first 1472 lines of the poem (i.e., all of Genesis and the first two and a half stanzas of Exodus) the Prologue in this edition is based exclusively on Selden Supra 52. Because of the great length of the poem and because I have selected only three disparate sections, lines commented on in the notes are indicated by stanza number in the Kalén-Ohlander edition (which is basically the same stanza arrangement as one would find in the Selden MS). Both manuscripts of the poem are written in long lines (two verses per line), with stanzas usually marked every six lines, either in the margin or by capitalization.

- 2.6 *on, the maystur of storyse.* The *one* referred to here is Peter Comestor, “magister historiarum,” whose *Historia scholastica* (c. 1170) was a principal source for legendary events for this poet and other Northern writers such as the authors of *Cursor Mundi*, the York Plays, the Northern Cycle, and Genesis and Exodus (MS Corpus Christi College, Cambridge 444, which is based on a Northern original of the late twelfth century) as well. When the poet refers to the “storyse,” he means Comestor’s *Historia*.
- 2.8 *schort.* S: *schortes*. Kalén’s emendation.
- 3.6 *ever.* S: *ouer*. Kalén’s emendation.
- 3.8 *kawn.* Heuser (p. 4) would emend to *knawn*, but Kalén suggests that *kawn* is the past participle of OE *ceowan* in the ME sense of “meditate on” (I.4n).

The Story of Jephthah and His Daughter: For the Story of Jephthah and His Daughter and the Story of Judith, I follow Kalén-Ohlander in using S as the primary text, with emendation derived mainly from L. The story is found in stanzas 292–99 (lines 33493–588)

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of the Middle English poem. The narrative loosely follows the Vulgate account in Judges 11. The most radical divergences occur in the dialogue between Jephthah and the daughter. See the note to stanzas 294 ff., which provides the Douay translation of the Vulgate for comparison.

- 292.1 *Jepte.* S: *Septe*; L: *Iepte*.
- 292.10 S: *all that armys beyre*. Kalén emends to: *[to] all that [myȝt] armys beyre*, following L: *all to men that myght armes bere*.
- 293.1 S: *herthy*; L: *hertly*.
- 294 ff. The poet alters several details of the Vulgate text by developing Jephthah's concern for his daughter, his falling from his horse in grief, his daughter's self-sacrificing responses to his vow; by deleting the daughter's lament for her virginity; and by adding details of Jephthah's execution of the vow with beheading and cremation. The Vulgate reads: "And when Jephthah returned into Massepha to his house, his only daughter met him with timbrels and with dances: for he had no other children. / And when he saw her, he rent his garments, and said: Alas! my daughter, thou hast deceived me, and thou thyself art deceived: for I have opened my mouth to the Lord, and I can do no other thing. / And she answered him: My father, if thou hast opened thy mouth to the Lord, do unto me what soever thou hast promised, since the victory hath been granted to thee, and revenge of thy enemies. / And she said to her father: Grant me only this which I desire: Let me go, that I may go about the mountains for two months, and may bewail my virginity with my companions. / And he answered her: Go. And he sent her away for two months. And when she was gone with her comrades and companions, she mourned her virginity in the mountains. / And the two months being expired, she returned to her father, and he did to her as he had vowed, and she knew no man. From thence came a fashion in Israel, and a custom has been kept: / That from year to year the daughters of Israel assemble together, and lament the daughter of Jephthah the Galaadite for four days" (Judges 11:34–40 — Douay translation).
- 294.4 *home*. Omitted in S; supplied according to L.
- 294.5 *byd*. S: *hyd*. L: *noght abyde*.

Notes

- 294.6 *agayns*. This word carries connotations of expectation, the sense here being that the daughter comes out joyously in anticipation of Jephthah's triumphal arrival.
- 294.7 *saw*. Omitted in S. L: *hire saw allas*.
- 294.10 *not*. Omitted in S. L: *myght not sytt*.
- 295.6 *dyght*. With *dede* (death), *dyght* bears the sense of something being destined, predetermined, foredoomed, or caused. See MED *dighten* 2b, 2c, 3a(d).
- 296.10 *that may no thyng avayle*: “who may accomplish nothing”; or, “who [compared to the soldiers who were saved] am of no value.”
- 297.3 *fader*. Omitted in S. Emendation based on L.
- 297.5 *two wekes*. In the Vulgate she gets a two-month respite to lament that she dies a virgin, thus establishing a Hebrew ritual. The Christian paraphrase places a premium on virginity and alters both the time interval and the details of her lament (that is, she laments her death with her friends, but not that she dies a virgin). Compare Chaucer's *Physician's Tale*, where Virginia likewise cites Jephthah's daughter to celebrate her virginity in death rather than lament it.
- 299.4 S: *that he heddyd hyr*; L: *that heded hire*. I follow L for the sake of meter.
- 299.7 S: *ffeyle bow*; L: *ffowle vow*. K: *ff[e]lle [v]ow*.
- 299.11 S and L begin the line with *Both*; Kalén deletes it to preserve the three-stress line, which makes sense to me.
- The Story of Judith*: Stanzas 1414–79 (lines 16957–17748) of the Middle English poem.
- 1415.1 L: *mell with this*. O follows L here.
- 1415.4 S omits *our*. L and O include it.
- 1416.7 S omits *them*. L: *theym* and O: *them*. O's emendation maintains the dialect.

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- 1420.9-12 Perhaps the Jews in Jerusalem overlooking *that land* are to be understood as looking out upon Bethulia, the city under siege in the Vulgate. But Bethulia is never mentioned in the paraphrase, and the sense here is ambiguous. It seems that the poet means that the holy city of Jerusalem is under attack. See 1421.3, where the *Cité* seems to be Jerusalem. In S the scribe regularly capitalizes the references to the City in the Judith story, perhaps to focus attention on the Jews' special dwelling place. But n.b. 1426.11-12, where the poet refers to the water conduits *from* Jerusalem and Jericho being cut off, which suggests that some other *Cité* could be intended.
- 1421.4 S omits *dyght most*. Included in L and O.
- 1421.7 S omits *ther*. Included in L and O.
- 1423.8 L: *do in such a*; O: *deme in swylka*.
- 1424.3 S omits *of Moyses*. Included in L and O.
- 1424.4 *Abymalech*. The Vulgate reads: “Remember Moses the servant of the Lord, who overcame Amalec that trusted in his own strength, and in his power, and in his army, and in his shields, and in his chariots, and in his horsemen, not by fighting with the sword, but by holy prayers” (Judith 4:12 — Douay translation). See also Exodus 17:8. The poet seems to have confused Amalec with Abimelech in Genesis 20, 21, or 26.
- 1425.1 L: *as he theim red*. O follows L.
- 1425.9 *thoght*. S: *toyȝt*, the spelling throughout S, which I have universally emended to *thoght*, following L.
- 1426.1 *thei*. S: *the*; L: *they*.
- 1428.6 S omits *God all*. Included in L and O.
- 1429.2 *land*. S: *sand*; L: *land*. S enhances the alliteration and maintains the sense, though L is the more likely juxtaposition with “sea.”
- 1430.5 *hand*. L: *wand*, in the sense of rod, is perhaps the preferable reading in that it picks up the alliteration.

Notes

- 1433.11 S omits *us*, which is supplied from L, as the sense of the line requires.
- 1433.12 S: *at put us fro this payn*. *At* appears to be a relative pronoun, the sense being “that will put us away from this agony.” But L is more clear: *to put us fro this Payne*.
- 1435.3 Job and Tobias survive by meekness and patience. In the Book of Tobias the younger Tobias, through prayer and patience, defeats a fiend who has slain Sarah’s first seven husbands, and then weds her himself (chapters 6–9).
- 1436.2 S omits *both*, which is supplied from L.
- 1436.8 *wayte*. L: *espy*.
- 1437.6 *gart*. L: *made hire seruant*.
- 1437.12 *wyse*. L: *help*.
- 1438.3 *pellour*. O’s emendation. S: *plessour*; L: *pelure*. O notes that S could be correct, however, citing NED *pleasure* sb B3 Torkington: “they Caryed with them Riches and plesurs, As clothe of gold and Crymsyn velvett.”
- 1438.3 L: *pured*.
- 1439.10 S: *tyll*; L: *to*.
- 1440.12 S: *sho fand them sone*; L: *toke theym sone in the felde*. O emends to: *[sone] fand them in the feld*.
- 1441.1 *They*. S: *The*; L: *they*. So also in line 5.
- 1441.2 *semly*. S: *sembly*; L: *semely*.
- 1441.6 S: *solace*. L: *so late*, which is more likely.
- 1442.8 S: *ther ere ther in*; L: *that er therin*.
- 1442.12 S: *have*; L: *creve*.

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- 1445.3 *geyre*. S: *gyrde*; L: *gere*. O's emendation.
- 1445.8 S omits *sho*. L: *mery she made as his menye*. O follows L.
- 1445.10 *them*. S: *then*; L: *theim*.
- 1446.10 *how thou has*. S: *how that has*; L: *how thou haves*.
- 1447.8 S: *for fawt fell fay in feld*; L: *for faute of foode fall they shal in felde*.
- 1450.6 *thes*. S: *ther*; L: *thes*.
- 1451.1 L: *And ser I shal tell the a skill*.
- 1451.3 S omits *thy*. L: *at thy will* is preferable metrically.
- 1453.1 O emends the line to read: *And all that to [hym] may [be] [l]eue*.
- 1454.10 S: *gest*; L: *kest*.
- 1454.12 *rede*. L: *went*.
- 1455.1–6 In the Vulgate Judith is sent to the place where Holofernes keeps his treasures, thus the beauteous things of line 3. See Judith 12:1.
- 1456.1–10 In romance tradition the woman normally needs a guardian for her well (e.g., Chrétien de Troyes' *Yvain*). Here Judith tends the well herself for the benefit of the whole city.
- 1458.2 The knight is identified in the Vulgate as Bagao, Holofernes' eunuch (Judith 12:10). See stanza 1469 (below), where he is identified as "the chamberer" but is still left unnamed. Bagoas and Holofernes were the chief Persian generals under the command of Artaxerxes Ochus in the expedition against Phoenicia and Egypt in 350 B.C., a fact that neither our poet nor the original author of Judith probably knew.
- 1462.6 *suld sho*. S: *suld no man*; L: *shuld she*.
- 1465.11 *To* mistakenly cancelled in S; L: *To sett*.

Notes

1471.2 S: *all rafed*; L: *they raced*. O emends to *thei rafe*.

1471.12 *solpyng*. L: *spoiling*.

1472.9 *broght*. S: *brogh*; L: *broght*.

Glossary

als <i>as</i>	est <i>east</i>
anon(e) <i>soon, immediately</i>	evyn <i>evening</i>
apeyre <i>appear</i>	
arayd <i>arrayed</i>	fayn <i>glad; eager</i>
atteynt <i>touched, marked, stained</i>	feld <i>field, battlefield</i>
aw <i>ought</i>	fere <i>companion; in fere, together</i>
assayd <i>tried</i>	fode <i>food</i>
assynged <i>assigned</i>	forward <i>agreement</i>
awn <i>own</i>	fourt <i>fourth</i>
	fro <i>from</i>
bayn <i>obedient</i>	frut <i>fruit</i>
be <i>by</i>	fun <i>founded</i>
beld <i>protection, comfort</i>	
bestes <i>animals</i>	gatis <i>gates</i>
bown(e) <i>ready, prepared</i>	gomes <i>people, men</i>
bows of brake <i>crossbows with</i>	gud <i>good</i>
<i>racks and winches</i>	
bred <i>bread</i>	hastyd <i>made haste</i>
byde <i>abide</i>	hed(e) <i>head</i>
	he(ygh)t <i>promised</i>
char <i>chariot</i>	hem <i>them</i>
chere <i>countenance, mood</i>	hend(e) <i>gracious, courteous;</i>
con <i>did</i>	<i>power; hand; courtesy</i>
	heo <i>she</i>
dede <i>deed; death</i>	heore <i>their</i>
deme <i>judge</i>	here <i>her; their; (v.) hear</i>
demers <i>judges</i>	hert <i>heart</i>
dome <i>doom; judge; demand</i>	hewe <i>hue, complexion</i>
dyght <i>prepared; set; doomed</i>	heygh <i>high</i>
enmys <i>enemies</i>	hie <i>hie; hasten</i>
	his <i>his; its</i>

Glossary

hyr <i>her; herself</i>	ordand <i>ordered; ordained</i>
	os <i>as</i>
inow <i>enough</i>	owtt <i>out</i>
iwis <i>indeed, surely, truly</i>	
	payd <i>pleased</i>
kare <i>care, grief</i>	price <i>excellence</i>
kend <i>known; shown</i>	
kynd <i>nature; people</i>	rial(le) <i>royal</i>
kyth <i>family</i>	ryght <i>just; (adv.) righteously, steadfastly; utterly</i>
lad <i>led</i>	
lakke <i>lack</i>	sakles <i>guiltless, innocent</i>
lang <i>long</i>	sall <i>shall</i>
leve <i>dear, beloved; (v.) leave</i>	saynges <i>sayings; writings</i>
ligge <i>lie</i>	scho <i>she</i>
lorere <i>laurel tree</i>	seghe <i>saw</i>
lorn <i>lost</i>	seknes <i>sickness</i>
lowd <i>loud; beloved</i>	semelich <i>seemly</i>
lyg <i>lie</i>	sen(e) <i>since</i>
	sere <i>several; apart</i>
mad <i>made</i>	serwe <i>sorrow</i>
mayn(e) <i>might, strength; moan, complaint</i>	sese <i>cease</i>
marre <i>mar; deceive; spoil</i>	seurly <i>assuredly</i>
mase <i>makes</i>	seyn <i>seen; said</i>
maystur <i>master; masterful, important</i>	sho <i>she</i>
mervel <i>marvel, wonder; (adj.) marvelous, strange</i>	siht(e) <i>sight</i>
mold <i>world</i>	sikerly <i>with certainty</i>
	sle <i>slay</i>
nevyn <i>name; tell</i>	slone <i>slain</i>
nou <i>now</i>	so(y)ne <i>soon</i>
noyght <i>not</i>	sothly <i>truly</i>
nyht, nyth <i>night</i>	souhte <i>sought</i>
	stablyd <i>established, made stable</i>
o <i>of; on; upon; one</i>	sted <i>place</i>
on <i>one</i>	stere <i>guide, restrain</i>
or <i>or; before, ere</i>	stollyn <i>departed</i>
	suld <i>should</i>
	swylke <i>such</i>
	syn <i>since</i>

Glossary

sythyn *then, since*

te(y)ne, tayne *suffering, trouble*

the *thee, you*

tho *those*

thore *there; their*

throwth *truth*

tofore *before*

trace *path; course; evidence*

trow *true; (v.) believe*

twyn *part; separate*

tythyng *tiding; plan(s)*

tyt(te) *quickly*

wast *waste, destroy*

weeshe *wash*

weld *wield; conquer*

weldand *powerful, wielding*

wend *go*

wer(r)e *warfare*

wete, whete *wheat, grain*

wettys *know*

whore *where; wherever*

wordle *world*

wore *were*

wo(y)ne *hope, expectation; abundance, plenty, wealth; dwelling; (v.) dwell; live*

wyn(e) *joy; wine; win; victory*

wyse *guide*

wytt *wit, intelligence, intellect*

yeme *guard*

yere *year*

ylkon *each one*

yede *went*

yode *departed*

yyng *young*