

Notes to The Merchant's Tale

1. If, as is probable, this Tale was translated from the French, the original is not now extant. Tyrwhitt remarks that the scene "is laid in Italy, but none of the names, except Damian and Justin, seem to be Italian, but rather made at pleasure; so that I doubt whether the story be really of Italian growth. The adventure of the pear-tree I find in a small collection of Latin fables, written by one Adoiphus, in elegiac verses of his fashion, in the year 1315. . . .

Whatever was the real origin of the Tale, the machinery of the fairies, which Chaucer has used so happily, was probably added by himself; and, indeed, I cannot help thinking that his Pluto and Proserpina were the true progenitors of Oberon and Titania; or rather, that they themselves have, once at least, deigned to revisit our poetical system under the latter names."

2. *Seculeres*: of the laity; but perhaps, since the word is of two-fold meaning, Chaucer intends a hit at the secular clergy, who, unlike the regular orders, did not live separate from the world, but shared in all its interests and pleasures -- all the more easily and freely, that they had not the civil restraint of marriage.

3. This and the next eight lines are taken from the "*Liber aureolus Theophrasti de nuptiis*," ("Theophrastus's Golden Book of Marriage") quoted by Hieronymus, "*Contra Jovinianum*," ("Against Jovinian") and thence again by John of Salisbury.

4. *Mebles*: movables, furniture, &c.; French, "*meubles*."

5. "Wade's boat" was called Guingelot; and in it, according to the old romance, the owner underwent a long series of wild adventures, and performed many strange exploits. The romance is lost, and therefore the exact force of the phrase in the text is uncertain; but Mr Wright seems to be warranted in supposing that Wade's adventures were cited as examples of craft and cunning -- that the hero, in fact, was a kind of Northern Ulysses, It is possible that to the same source we may trace the proverbial phrase, found in Chaucer's "*Remedy of Love*," to "bear Wattis pack" signifying to be duped or beguiled.

6. *Stopen*: advanced; past participle of "step." Elsewhere "y-stept in age" is used by Chaucer.

7. They did not need to go in quest of a wife for him, as they had promised.

8. Thilke tree: that tree of original sin, of which the special sins are the branches.
9. Skinked: poured out; from Anglo-Saxon, "scencan."
10. Marcianus Capella, who wrote a kind of philosophical romance, "De Nuptiis Mercurii et Philologiae" (Of the Marriage of Mercury and Philology) . "Her" and "him," two lines after, like "he" applied to Theodomas, are prefixed to the proper names for emphasis, according to the Anglo- Saxon usage.
11. Familiar: domestic; belonging to the "familia," or household.
12. Hewe: domestic servant; from Anglo-Saxon, "hiwa." Tyrwhitt reads "false of holy hue;" but Mr Wright has properly restored the reading adopted in the text.
13. Boren man: born; owing to January faith and loyalty because born in his household.
14. Hippocras: spiced wine. Clarre: also a kind of spiced wine. Vernage: a wine believed to have come from Crete, although its name -- Italian, "Vernaccia" -- seems to be derived from Verona.
15. Dan Constantine: a medical author who wrote about 1080; his works were printed at Basle in 1536.
16. Full of jargon as a flecked pie: he chattered like a magpie
17. Nearly all the manuscripts read "in two of Taure;" but Tyrwhitt has shown that, setting out from the second degree of Taurus, the moon, which in the four complete days that Maius spent in her chamber could not have advanced more than fifty- three degrees, would only have been at the twenty-fifth degree of Gemini -- whereas, by reading "ten," she is brought to the third degree of Cancer.
18. Kid; or "kidde," past participle of "kythe" or "kithe," to show or discover.
19. Precious: precise, over-nice; French, "precieux," affected.
20. Proined: or "pruned;" carefully trimmed and dressed himself. The word is used in falconry of a hawk when she picks and trims her feathers.

21. A dogge for the bow: a dog attending a hunter with the bow.
- 22 The Romance of the Rose: a very popular mediaeval romance, the English version of which is partly by Chaucer. It opens with a description of a beautiful garden.
23. Priapus: Son of Bacchus and Venus: he was regarded as the promoter of fertility in all agricultural life, vegetable and animal; while not only gardens, but fields, flocks, bees -- and even fisheries -- were supposed to be under his protection.
24. Argus was employed by Juno to watch Io with his hundred eyes but he was sent to sleep by the flute of Mercury, who then cut off his head.
25. "My beloved spake, and said unto me, Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away. For lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone: The flowers appear on the earth, the time of the singing of the birds is come, and the voice of the turtle is heard in our land." -- Song of Solomon, ii. 10-12.
26. "That fair field, Of Enna, where Proserpine, gath'ring flowers, Herself a fairer flow'r, by gloomy Dis Was gather'd." -- Milton, Paradise Lost, iv. 268
27. "Behold, this have I found, saith the preacher, counting one by one, to find out the account: Which yet my soul seeketh, but I find not: one man amongst a thousand have I found, but a woman among all those I have not found. Lo, this only have I found, that God hath made man upright." Ecclesiastes vii. 27-29.
28. Jesus, the son of Sirach, to whom is ascribed one of the books of the Apocrypha -- that called the "Wisdom of Jesus the Son of Sirach, or Ecclesiasticus;" in which, especially in the ninth and twenty-fifth chapters, severe cautions are given against women.
29. Roman gestes: histories; such as those of Lucretia, Porcia, &c.
30. May means January to believe that she is pregnant, and that she has a craving for unripe pears.
31. At this point, and again some twenty lines below, several verses of a very coarse character had been inserted in later manuscripts; but they are evidently spurious, and are omitted in the best editions.

32. "Store" is the general reading here, but its meaning is not obvious. "Stowre" is found in several manuscripts; it signifies "struggle" or "resist;" and both for its own appropriateness, and for the force which it gives the word "stronge," the reading in the text seems the better.