

## Ling 103

### Practice with reading Chaucer

The following pages contain lines 445-476 of Chaucer's General Prologue to the Canterbury Tales (description of the Wife of Bath), taken from the four oldest major manuscripts which are usually used as the basis of modern editions (Ellesmere, Hengwrt, Cambridge and Petworth manuscripts).

Where / appears it indicates a line break in the manuscript where there is no line break in the poem. The letter þ represents 'th' and the letter ȝ represents modern 'y'. Sometimes 'u' represents modern 'v' and vice-versa; 'i' may substitute for modern 'j'.

The following words all have stress on the first syllable and end in a schwa syllable *scáthe, hádde, shólde, díde, álle, fýne, wéren, dórste, swére, hósen, stréite, shóes, móyste, néwe, héwe, lýve, chírche, dóre, fýve, yóuthe, spéke, nówthe, thríes, Róme, Jáme, kóude, wéye, séye, tárge, hípes, lárge, páire, spóres, shárpe, láughe, cárpe, lóve, chánce, ólde, dáunce*

1. Determine where stresses appear on the remaining polysyllabic content words, paying careful attention to cases involving retraction. Try to figure out which vowels were long and which were short. Try to find each word (except the place names) in the on-line Middle English dictionary (Note: some will be difficult to locate; remember the *y* may substitute for *i*).

*makyng* (= ModE *making*, from ME verb *maken* 'to make')

*Ypres*

*parisshe*

*offrynge*

*certeyn*

*charitee*

*coverchiefs*

*weyeden* (= ModE (they) *weighed*)

*sonday*

*scarlet*

*y-teid* (*y-* is a stressless prefix added to past participles)

*worthy*

*womman*

*housbondes*

*oother*

*compaignye*

*nedeth* (= ModE *needs*, archaic *needeth*)

*Ierusalem*

*muchel*

*wandrynge* (= ModE *wandering*)

*tothed* (= ModE *-toothed*)

*soothly*

*amblere*

*esily*

*y-wympled* (*y-* is a stressless prefix added to past participles)

*bokeler*

*mantel*

*felaweshipe*

*remedies*

2. Identify all schwas (short *e* vowels) which are discounted for the meter.
3. Make sure you understand how each line is matched to the iambic pattern.
4. Compare the four manuscripts. Which manuscript is the easiest to read? Which has the most logical system of spelling?
5. In the Petworth manuscript the editor has added some letters (in brackets). Why?

**Ellesmere manuscript.**

A good wif was ther of biside Bathe *wif:* woman  
But she was som del deef and þat was scathe *som del:* somewhat, *scathe:* a pity  
Of clooth makynge she hadde swich an haunt *swich:* such, *haunt:* habit, practice  
She passed hem of ypres and of Gaunt 448 *ypres:* city in Flanders  
In al the parisshe / wif ne was ther noon  
That to the offrynge / bifore hire sholde goon *goon:* to go  
And if ther dide / certeyn so wrooth was she *certeyn:* certainly  
That she was / out of alle charitee 452  
Hir couerchiefs / ful fyne weren of ground *ground:* texture of fabric  
I dorste swere / they weyeden ten pound *dorste:* dare  
That on a sonday / weren vpon hir heed  
Hir hosen weren / of fyn scarlet reed 456  
fful streite yteyd / and shoes ful moyste and newe  
Boold was hir face / and fair and reed of hewe  
She was a worthy womman al hir lyue  
Housbondes at chirche dore / she hadde fyue 460  
Withouten oother compaignye in youthe  
But ther of / nedeth nat to speke as nowthe *as nowthe:* now  
And thries / hadde she been at Ierusalem  
She hadde passed / many a straunge strem 464  
At Rome she hadde been and at Boloigne  
In Galice at Seint Iame / and at Coloigne  
She koude muchel / of wandrynge by the weye *koude:* knew, *muchel:* much  
Gat tothed was she / soothly for to seye 468 *gat tothed:* with teeth wide spread  
Vp on an Amblere / esily she sat *soothly:* indeed, *Amblere:* saddle-horse  
Ywympled wel / and on hir heed an hat  
As brood / as is a bokeler / or a targe *bokeler:* small round shield, *targe:* light shield  
A foot mantel / aboute hir hipes large 472  
And on hire feet a paire of spores sharpe *spores:* spurs  
In felawshipe / wel koude she laughe and carpe *carpe:* talk  
Of remedies of loue / she knew per chaunce *per chaunce:* by chance  
For she koude of that Art the olde daunce 476 *daunce:* way of doing something

## Hengwrt manuscript

A good wyf was ther / of bisyde Bathe  
But she was som del deef and that was scathe  
Of clooth makynge / she hadde swich an haunt  
She passed hem / of Ipres / and of Gaunt 448  
In al the parysshe / wyf ne was ther noon  
That to the offrynge / bifore hire sholde goon  
And if ther dide / certeyn / so wrooth was shee  
That she was / out of alle charitee 452  
Hir Couerchiefes / ful fyne weere of grownd  
I dorste swere / they weyeden ten pownd  
That on a Sondag / weeren vp on hir heed  
Hir hosen weeren / of fyn Scarlet reed 456  
fful streyte yteyd / and shoes / ful moyste & newe  
Boold was hir face / and fair and reed of hewe  
She was a worthy womman / al hir lyue  
Housbondes at chirche dore / she hadde fyue 460  
With outen oother compaignye / in yowthe  
But ther of / nedeth nocht to speke as nowthe  
And thries / hadde she been at Ierusalem  
She hadde passed / many a straunge strem 464  
At Rome she hadde been / and at Boloyne  
In Galyce at Seint Iame / and at Coloyne  
She koude muchel / of wandrynge by the weye  
Gattothed was she / soothly for to seye 468  
Vp on an Amblere / esily she sat  
Ywympled wel / and on hir heed an hat  
As brood as is / a Bokeler / or a Targe  
A foot mantel / aboute hir hypes large 472  
And on hir feet a peyre of spores sharpe  
In felawshipe / wel koude she laughe. and carpe  
Of remedies of loue / she knew par chaunce  
ffor she koude of that art the olde daunce 476

## Cambridge manuscript

A good wif was there of beside bathe  
But sche was sundel def & þat was skathe  
Of cloth makyng sche hade swich an hand  
Sche passed hem of ypres & of gaunt 448  
In al the parich wif was there non  
That to the offerynge to fore her schulde gon  
And ʒif þere dede serteyn so wroth was sche  
That sche was out of alle charite 452  
Here couercheis ful fyne were of ground  
I durste swere þey weyedyng a pound  
That on a sunday weryn vp on here hed  
Here hosyn weryn of fyn skarlet red 456  
fful streyte I-teyede & schois ful moyste & newe  
Bold was here face & fayr & red of hewe  
Sche was a worthi woman al here lyue  
Husbandis at cherche dore sche hadde fyue 460  
With-outyn opere compayne in ʒouthe  
But þerof nedith not to speke as nouthe  
And thryes hadde sche ben at Ierusalem  
Sche hadde passed manye a strong strem 464  
At rome she hadde ben & at boloyne  
In galis at seynt Iame & at coloyne  
Sche couthe meche of wonderyng be þ<sup>e</sup> weye  
Gat-toped was sche sothly for to seye 468  
Vp-on an aumbelere ful esily sche sat  
I-wympeled wel & on here hed an hat  
As brod as is a bokeler or a targe  
A fot-mental a-boute here hepis large 472  
And on here fet a peyre of sporys scharpe  
In felauschepe wel coude sche lawe & carpe  
Of remedijs of loue / sche knew per schauce  
ffor sche coude of that art / the olde daunse 476

### **Petworth manuscript**

A Good wiff ther was of besides bathe  
But she was somdel def and þat was scathe  
Of cloth makynge sche hadde such an haunt  
She passid hem of ypres and of Gaunt 448  
In alle the parisch wif ne was ther noon  
That to the offrynge toforn hir shulde goon  
And yf ther dide / certeyn wroth was she  
That she was out of al[le] charite 452  
Hir couerchefes ful fyne were of ground  
I durste swere they weyeden ten pound  
That on a Sondag weren vpon hire hede  
Hir hosen weren of fyne scarlet rede 456  
fful streight I-teied / and shoes ful moist and newe  
Bold was hir face and faire / and red of hiewe  
She was a worthi womman al hir lyue  
Housbondes atte chirche dore she hadde fyue 460  
With outen othir companie in youthe  
But ther of nedith nouht to speke as nouthe  
And thries hadde she bene at Ierusalem  
She had[de] passed many a strange strem 464  
At Rome sche had ben / and at boloyne  
In Galice at saint Iame and at Coloigne  
She koude moche on wandrynge bi the weye  
Gat tothid was she sothely for to seie 468  
Vp on an Amblere esily she satte  
I-wympled wel and on hir heed an hatte  
As brood as is a bokellere or a targe  
A fot mantel abouten hire hipes large 472  
And on hire feet a paire of spores sharpe  
In felaschipe wel couthe sche lawhe and carpe  
Of remedies of loue she kneuh parchaunce  
ffor she couthe of that art the daunce 476