An English Translation of “Le Chastoiement des Dames” by Robert de Blois:
Courtly Conduct Books and What They Assume About Medieval Women

An Honors Thesis (FR 498 and HONR 499)

by

Jaidyn Williams

Thesis Advisor

Dr. Ellen Thorington

Ball State University
Muncie, Indiana

May 2023

Expected Date of Graduation

May 2023
Abstract

For my senior honors thesis, I wrote a translation of the thirteenth century courtesy text *Le Chastoiement des Dames* by Robert de Blois, from the original Old French to modern English. This text deals with proper courtly conduct for women, through the lens of finding love. Providing 756 lines of advice, Robert instructs women on how to present themselves, behave themselves, and approach social situations with men. To contextualize my translation, I also wrote an essay discussing medieval courtesy texts and their significance to women. Looking at the *Chastoiement*, as well as some other similar texts, I discussed how perception of women influenced them, and how that came to change.
Acknowledgements

I’d first like to thank Dr. Thorington for being my advisor and guiding me so well through this process. This would have never been possible without her, and I am eternally grateful.

I would also like to thank my best friend Savannah Baird and my boyfriend James Roysdon for being my biggest cheerleaders. Even when I did not think I could do it, they always had faith in me and pushed me to keep going. Their love and support made all the difference in my progress.

Thank you to my family for sending me on this journey, and the continued support over the last four years. It was not always easy, but now I am a first-generation college graduate.

Thank you to the Modern Languages and Classics department, and to Ball State University and the Honors College for the knowledge and the opportunities afforded to me.
Process Analysis Statement

Going into my honors thesis, I had no idea what I was getting myself into when I said I wanted to write a translation of an Old French text. To complete this project, I started with John Howard Fox’s transcription of the original Old French *Chastoiement des Dames*. Going line by line, and with a lot of trial and error, my translation to English was done using William Kibler’s *An Introduction to Old French*, the *Dictionnaire de l’ancienne langue français* by Frédéric Godefroy, the *Dictionnaire du Moyen Français*, and *A Dictionarie of the French and English Tongues* by Randle Cotgrave. Because Old French is so very different from Modern French, it felt like learning a brand-new language. The process required identifying subjects that were not always explicitly stated, discovering who or what exactly the verbs were modifying, and differentiating between the parts of speech when they were all very similar in spelling.

In order to complete my translation, I handwrote the original text by sections. I did this not only to double space the lines, but to also engage more deeply with the text. The careful reading and writing required for this helped immensely in my understanding of the text. From there, I took notes under every single word to identify its function and meaning. Then I was able to attempt full phrasing in English. While my first translations almost never right the first time, or even the second time, these attempts were a great place to start, and to make corrections going forward. Every week, Dr. Thorington and I read through it together and made notes everywhere that needed work. With her help and a lot of digging through dictionaries, I revised the translation and improved its accuracy.

For the essay portion, I wanted to contextualize the *Chastoiement*, so researched about the role of courtesy in medieval society, women’s roles, other courtesy texts for women, and
societal perception of women. First looking at the concept of courtesy, I found that it often teaches good behavior and good morals as one, and to have these qualities meant one could have honor and a good reputation. Women had great influence over their families’ honor and reputation, and as such there were a number of courtesy texts for women, typically written by men. For further research I took a look at two other texts outside the Chastoiement. The first was from fourteenth century, Le Livre pour l'enseignement de ses filles du Chevalier de la Tour Landry by Geoffroy de la Tour Landry. The second, also from the fourteenth century was Le Ménagier de Paris. These texts enforced the idea that only by means of a male interdiction could women be moral and reach their fullest potential. As explained by Simone de Beauvoir, “man is defined as a human being and woman as a female – whenever she behaves as a human being she is said to imitate the male” (The Guardian). Good women were thus defined by male behaviors. However, looking forward to the fifteenth century, Christine de Pizan changed this with her works Le Livre de la Cité des Dames and Le Trésor de la Cité des Dames. The first of these served as a plea for the reputation of women, which argues that women are inherently good-natured and moral. The second was a courtesy text, by a woman for women, no male intermediary required. Christine left a great impact on the perception of women.
Courtly Conduct Books and What They Assume About Medieval Women

Throughout the later Middle Ages, the concepts of courtesy and courtly conduct were prevalent in the minds of noble men and women. Good reputation and nobility were important to upper-class society, and later to the bourgeois class. In what appears as an effort to standardize correct social and courtly practices, the genre of courtesy literature arises, influenced by Christian ideals, providing various teachings, advice, and morals regarding proper conduct and behavior. By offering direct instruction to readers, these texts aimed to blur the lines between what it means to behave well versus what it means to be a good person. Both of these qualifications were required to have a noble reputation. Within this genre is a subgenre specifically pertaining to women’s conduct in medieval society. A woman’s reputation affected not just herself, but her family’s image as well. As such, courtesy literature offered women instruction on how to conduct themselves in a way that would bring honor to themselves and their families. Examples of such texts include Robert de Blois’ *Le Chastoiement des Dames* [Instructions for Ladies, XIII century], Geoffroy de la Tour Landry’s *Le Livre pour l'enseignement de ses filles du Chevalier de la Tour Landry* [Book of the Knight of the Tower, ca. 1372], and *Le Ménagier de Paris* [Parisian Household Guide, ca. 1393]. While these texts gave the sense that women are capable of being good-natured, moral beings, nevertheless, many gave the impression that women were inherently foolish and deceitful seductresses, not to be trusted. They could of course amend themselves, but only through male guidance. However, in the fifteenth century, Christine de Pizan, using her noble status and exceptional literary skills, made a plea for the reputation of women in her work *Le Livre de la Cité des Dames* [Book of the City of Ladies, 1405], and in her following courtesy text for women *Le Trésor de la Cité des Dames*
[The Treasure of the City of Ladies, also called The Book of the Three Virtues, 1405]. Despite the limitations of being a woman herself, Christine’s writings held lasting influence over society’s perception of women.

As a genre, courtesy literature addressed a vast audience including both men and women. While originally intended for the upper-classes, it gained popularity among the bourgeois as well. The umbrella term “courtesy” pertains both to good manners and to good morals. However, often the genre teaches these qualities as one and the same (Ashley 100). Jonathan Nicholls explains how courtly practices were created on the basis of courtesy, and that “at the heart of each poem lies the conviction that observable gestures of human behavior are indicative of inner virtue, and that courtesy displayed in human affairs goes a long way to defining the nature of a good society” (1). Thus, the demand for courtesy literature, which taught such behaviors and virtues, makes perfect sense for the ideal medieval society. Furthermore, the variety of subtopics within the genre, such as gendered practices or courtly love, allowed its popularity to grow. Nicholls notes that “courtesy was taught and practised in the courts, monasteries, and schools” (3-4). He also notes that such texts are reproduced in the vernacular, meaning a wider audience had access to them (12). Therefore, rather than existing subconsciously among people, courtesy was actively practiced in society. Kathleen Ashley, in discussing the medieval courtesy text Miroir des Bonnes Femmes (Mirror of Good Women/Wives XIII century), explains that generally society believed that “social graces ease your path to heaven as well as your way in this life” (101). Courtesy was thus essential to maintaining honor, and living a morally right life, which for medieval Christians meant the possibility of eternal life.

In addition to courtesy, good individual and familial reputations were critical. Women had great influence over the reputations of their families, especially of their fathers and
husbands. As stated by Eileen Powers, “the superior condition of the medieval lady was further exemplified in her importance as a wife. It is permissible to take the wife as strictly typical, for there was no place in feudal society for women who did not marry” (40). Consequently, this paved the way for women’s courtesy texts, which explained precisely how women can have honorable reputations. What is more, it is generally believed by scholars that these texts reflect real medieval women’s lives, social roles, and status (Ashley and Clark XII). Thus, medieval women did in fact hold great influence. As Kathleen Ashley argues:

That books shaping female conduct to earn ‘bonne renomée’ (a good name or reputation) address not just the individual woman but also her family’s social aspirations, and indeed, in the *Miroir des bonnes femmes* an overwhelming concern is with female behaviors that can cause a woman and her family to gain or lose their reputation. (97)

Broadly speaking, these texts standardized acceptable women’s behavior, but within this subgenre lies a variety of texts pertaining to certain aspects of women’s lives, especially that of married life. Often addressed to daughters, or “the good wife,” certain texts offered specific advice to women on love, or managing a household, or just simply courtly practices. Glenn Burger explains that “just as Books of Hours bring monastic culture into the layperson’s individual experience, so too a conduct text teach[es] a young wife to realize as fully as possible her role as wife and mother and manager of the domestic sphere” (13). Women’s courtesy texts served to help women reach their full potential.

As the focus of my thesis project, I worked with *Le Chastoiement des Dames*, which translates to “instructions” or “advice for ladies.” This is a thirteenth century courtesy text for upper-class women by Robert de Blois. Robert held a reputation “as one of the best spokesmen for courtly etiquette” of his time (Krueger 109). In this text, focusing on one of the more secular
aspects of courtesy, he advised ladies on how to conduct themselves in order to find and keep a husband. Consisting of 757 lines, the *Chastoiement* provided an introduction and nineteen different teachings detailing how a woman should present herself, behave herself, and approach social situations with men. In Robert’s view, it is through moderation and temperance that a woman can honorably find love. For example, in his first teaching “about her breast,” he said “Be mindful to allow no man / To place his hand on your breast, / Except he who has the right” (Robert 97-99). By this, he means the lady must be modest and let no one but her husband do this, for she “owe[s] him obedience / Like that of the monks to the abbot” (Robert 108-109). In his “Teachings about her gaze,” he explains that the ladies must be careful about where they look because somebody may mistake it for love, and then this falsity will disappoint him. Robert emphasized throughout the entire text that the ladies would face great blame if they deceived or disappointed others, and as such must always be mindful of not only what they are doing, but also how others will perceive them. Susan Udry describes it as so: “in a world where revealing clothing, wandering eyes, plunging necklines or smiling lips could all lead to ‘le surplus,’ a chaste woman must be extremely careful to control her gaze in public” (93). In this context, “le surplus” refers to sex, and is thus very unchaste. This awareness should apply to both their behavior, as well as their appearance. For example, in his “Teachings about being welcomed and dismissed,” in first person he wrote,

In all ladies, the beautiful face

Is the most pleasant, this is my view,

Never will she be beautiful

The lady who does not have a beautiful face. (Robert 357-359)

---

1 All translations of Robert’s text are mine (see following translation).
As for the ladies without beautiful faces, he advised that they try to cover their flaws, but not in a way that would come across as closed off or rude to someone else. The lady must be moderate, and not do too much or too little of anything. Roberta Krueger explains “the contradiction in Robert’s poem reflects the inherent paradox of the chaste aristocratic woman. The ideal woman must repress, contain, cover the body and bodily functions, but must also be attractive, engaging, solicitous, socially graced” (123). In this way, he emphasized moderation and temperance in women, so that they can live and love honorably. He ended this text by creating a scenario in which a man was pleading the lady for her love, and then provided an appropriate rejection from the lady. Known as the expert of courtesy, Robert de Blois gave the women a lot to think about in terms of courtly love.

To contextualize the Chastoiement, I also looked at similar courtesy texts from medieval France. The first is a fourteenth century text, Le Livre pour l'enseignement de ses filles du Chevalier de la Tour Landry, which means in English “the book for the teaching of the daughters of the knight of the Landry tower.” Geoffroy de la Tour Landry wrote this one for the courtly education of his daughters. Although originally written for Geoffroy’s daughters, by the end of the fifteenth century this text had been translated into both English and German and had gained a vast audience across Europe (Burger 89). Whereas Robert de Blois advised ladies to pay great attention to their appearance, Geoffroy warned against the dangers of vanity, and advised greater focus on courtesy (Udry, 91). Despite their differing views, both authors emphasize societal perception of women. Assembled as a compilation of sorts, the text is made up of bits of advice, poems, and Biblical, popular, and personal stories from Geoffroy’s life. Each story was meant to serve as an example and provide a moral to understand. For instance, Geoffroy recounts a story of a woman who wore a fur hood, something not yet established as popular in France, and
associated with prostitution in England. As such, the woman is mocked and assumed immoral. Through this anecdote, Geoffroy aimed to warn his daughters against being the first to adopt new fashions, so they would never be “associated with idle or deceitful behavior” (Udry 96). He also recounts a few stories warning against beauty practices, including makeup, because beauty could only truly come from God. In one story, a woman had plucked her eyebrows and hairline in an effort to make her face more pleasing. Then in a vision, she is shown being tormented by a demon placing needles and daggers into each place she plucked a hair. Altering her appearance was an act of vanity, and thus was displeasing to God (Udry 98). In warning his daughters against vanity, as well as unchastity and other immoral behaviors, Geoffroy placed the highest importance on pleasing God. As is clear from this example, Christian influence is common in medieval courtesy literature. Glenn Burger argues: “we might more usefully think of late medieval conduct literature as a continuum that ranges from those texts that especially emphasize spiritual direction” (76). Courtesy was to be practiced in the same way as religion. Conduct books should be read like devotionals, and since the Geoffroy ensured his daughters were literate, they could do so. Udry notes this text “is often seen as a turning point in medieval views on the education of women because of the author's recommendation that his daughters be taught to "roumancier" (to read)” (95). It was important that his daughters be able to read and practice his teachings.

Also from the fourteenth century, is Le Ménagier de Paris, [the Parisian household guide]. While the author is unknown, it is written from the perspective of an older Parisian man with noble status to his young and naïve wife. The writer instructed her not only in household responsibilities, but also in preparation for her next husband after the narrator’s death. Compared to other conduct books, this text is considered the most “comprehensive program of education”
for medieval women (Greco and Rose 1). It consists of instructions on running the household, handling household staff, social protocols, recipes, gardening tips, good Christian practices, various stories and morals, advice on pleasing and obeying a husband, and more. On the surface-level, the narrator provided his wife this manual for her own good, as it detailed anything and everything she would need to know in her domestic role. However, as noted by Greco and Rose in their translation of this text, “above all, it seems, he desires his own happiness in a prosperous, bountiful, and peaceful residence with an obedient spouse attending to his needs, overseeing management of his home, and guaranteeing his good name” (2). The husband ensured his own ease in life by placing all this responsibility with his wife. Furthermore, the model wife is one who “willingly submit[s] to authority reshape[ing] femininity into something to be valued and emulated as a model for right action in the world” (Burger 5). So, to fulfill her role a “good wife,” she must adhere to these rules. In this way, as husband and wife, they showed marital affection to each other by “the care of their affective/ethical nature and focuses on attempts to help them remedy failings;” he in teaching her, and she in tending to her duties (Burger 19). Her role held great importance in the household, and if she did it well, she would maintain her family’s honor and nobility. According to Greco and Rose, “A woman who learned all the book had to teach would be, by medieval standards, a most accomplished chatelaine and hostess, as well as a moral, obedient, and attentive wife” (8). In terms of courtesy, she would have good manners and good morals, as well as honor and a respectable reputation.

The majority of courtesy texts for women were written by men, who saw women as naturally prone to sin. Women were assumed to be foolish and deceitful, and men needed to be on guard against them, so as to not lose their honor. As Eileen Powers notes, contemporary opinions regarding the nature of women “came from two sources – the Church and the
aristocracy” (9). Thus, the reputation of women was never based on women themselves, but rather on the popularized stories of “bad women” provided by society. Also, often in women’s courtesy literature, “the nature of such a good wife is necessarily articulated in relation to and through the intervention of male guardians – clericals, advisers, fathers, and husbands – who will properly husband her true nature. (Burger 6). So, only through a male interdiction could a woman become good-natured and moral, as we saw in the Chastoiement, as well as the other examples. However, in the fifteenth century, Christine de Pizan challenged all of this with her work Le Livre de la Cité des Dames, or in English, “The Book of the City of Ladies.” In the words of Eileen Powers, “Christine was, of course, in many ways exceptional. She was a master of all the courtly conventions and was also able to make a living by her pen,” (13). Despite being widowed, having children, and facing financial burdens, Christine maintained her noble status and worked as a writer. With honor and good reputation on her side, Christine was able to make a plea for the reputation of women, which no longer would rely on the interdiction of men.

In Le Livre de la Cité des Dames, with the help of ladies Reason, Rectitude, and Justice, Christine constructs a metaphorical city based on the virtues and goodness of women. While addressing the reasons for women’s negative image, she was able to prove that did not represent most women. At first, she flattered her male precedents, saying:

Nevertheless, I argued strongly against women, saying that it would be unlikely that so many famous men, such solemn-scholars of such vast understanding, so clear-sighted in all things as these men seemed to be, could have lied in so many places that I could hardly find a book on morals, no matter who was its author, in which, even before finishing it, I would not find some chapters or certain sections speaking ill of women.

(Pizan 120)
However, being a woman herself, this bothered her immensely. After pondering and praying about it, the three ladies appeared before her. They comforted her and helped her to realize this folly, for she already knew of the goodness in women. The ladies then gave her the task of building the City of Ladies. With each of the ladies, Christine paved and built the city from the ground up, fully founded on the good image of women. In the same year as this text, Christine wrote an accompanying courtesy text for women called *Le Trésor de la Cité des Dames*, which translates to “the treasure of the city of ladies,” keeping with the same ideas regarding the goodness of women. Christine thus created literature that celebrated women, rather than criticized them, and eliminated the requirement for a male intermediary as a means to women’s good manners and good morals. Despite the limitations of being a woman in the Middle Ages, Christine was very influential in changing the perception of women.

Courtesy was an essential social practice for medieval society, especially for women who had great influence over their family’s reputation, and could easily ruin it with so much as a lingering glance. Thus, it was important that the ladies be well-learned, and “in this widest sense education comprised the inculcation of good manners, good religion and good housecraft” (Powers 76). Women were often perceived as being inherently sinful, but through the intervention of noble men, they could better themselves, as seen with Robert de Blois in *Le Chastoiement des Dames*, as well as the other examples from the fourteenth century. Though just the romantic advice of one man, the *Chastoiement* represents well the expectations of women in medieval society. Furthermore, despite its clear historical importance, there is only one published English translation from 1971, which only consists of selections from the text. My full translation will serve as a contribution to medieval women and gender studies, a subject I’ve grown passionate about over the course of this project.
"Le Chastoiement des Dames" by Robert de Blois

English Translation by Jaidyn Williams

Introduction (lines 1-96)

1. Ladies, if they may profit by it,
2. Will value this little book.
3. Listen all together
4. To one beautiful, shared lesson,
5. And if you want to retain it
6. For all days, you will know
7. Such good sense prized
8. By God and by humanity.
9. For this, I want to teach,
10. Most courteously, the ladies
11. How they must behave themselves
12. In their coming, and in their going,
13. In their speaking, and in their staying silent.
14. They must moderate what they do,
15. Because they say that one who speaks too much
16. Has received bad instruction,
17. If it can be that one says
18. She speaks too much; this is a great mistake
19. For which, she is blamed by many.
20. For this, each lady must be
21. Moderate in speaking,
22. So that she is not blamed for it.
23. And on the other hand, if she is too silent
24. She does not bring pleasure to many,
25. Because many value less
26. Those who do not know how to converse with people.
27. For this reason, the ladies do not know what to do.
28. When she is good-natured,
29. And when she is by her courtesy,
30. By her comfort and by her beautiful company,
31. And in her coming and in her going,
32. And in her serving each according to his worth,
33. Whether he is a knight or a squire.
34. And these persons are so poorly educated,
35. That they immediately boast of her to many.
36. Thus, they say that she is in love,
37. But she does not think them worth a button,
38. Except by her courtesy.
39. Not in a hundred years would she think of them.
40. For this reason, she does not know what to do,
41. Because if she does not make good cheer,
42. Then they say that she is too proud,
43. Or arrogant, or simple, or foolish,
44. Disdainful with her words.
45. Thus, the wretches humble her with blame.
46. And you know well that a number of ladies
47. Often hesitate to serve,
48. To comfort, to treat people kindly.
49. There are many that she would
50. Welcome properly if she provided this.
51. Thus, for this reason she must let it be,
52. For too quickly it can lower her worth,
53. She who does not take enough care
54. To comfort reasonably,
55. If she has done too much of one or another,
56. They will now immorally twist it,
57. And they will say that this is great insolence,
58. And hastily they will have put her beneath them.
59. If ever one holds her in a private place,
60. She soon will have succumbed to the good game.
61. They do not know what they are saying,
62. As this does not depend on one or another.
63. Many ladies, by their generosity,
64. Welcome properly, so that in no way
65. Would one want to think evil
66. About that which she says and does.
67. Listen, I will tell you,
68. As I have promised you,
69. And if you want to believe me,
70. If it is not wrong, I will have no blame
71. If you go to church or elsewhere.
72. Be mindful of the trot and of the race,
73. Go straight ahead, with a beautiful gait,
74. And if you do not pass
75. Too far ahead of your company,
76. Which one would hold as villainy,
77. In your heart you may think
78. That neither the race, nor the trotting
79. By a lady will never be good.
80. If you do not contemplate about it, you will never be left behind.
81. Look straight ahead of you.
82. Greet amiably
83. Each that you will encounter.
84. This does not cost you much,
85. And many hold in much greater regard
86. One who greets willingly.
87. One who is miserly with his greetings
88. Is not generous with his giving.
89. He who is miserly towards me with his greetings

90. Gives me the desire to speak ill of him.

91. Do not despise poor people,

92. But reason with them sweetly,

93. One who has given them nothing of his own,

94. If he welcomes them kindly.

95. Our Lord accepts it willingly

96. When one shows their humility.

Ensoignement de son soin – Teaching about her breast

97. Be mindful to allow no man

98. To place his hand on your breast,

99. Except he who has the right.

100. Know he who first invented the brooch,

101. That for this reason he did it,

102. So that no man place his hand

103. On the breast of a lady, where he did not have the right,

104. As he has not married her.

105. He can without offense put his hand there,

106. Who, what is more, takes his pleasure;

107. When he wants, you endure it well,

108. For you owe him obedience

109. Like that of the monks to the abbot.
110. For this (brooch) encloses her breast,
111. So that no other may place his hand there.
112. Thus the word testifies to us,
113. He whom the lady wants to consent
114. Her naked breasts to feel
115. And her flesh to touch over and under,
116. Do not tempt yourself with the rest.
117. How can this touching
118. Heat him and her up more?
119. And by this, it is hot and heavy,
120. Immediately, they engage in the rest

Ensoignemanz de sa boiche – Teachings about her mouth

121. After I tell you that
122. No man should touch your mouth,
123. Except he, for whom you are his entirely.
124. He is not wise who doubts this,
125. That, what is more, places into submission
126. The lady who takes pleasure in kissing.
127. The kissing attracts other things,
128. And when he is pleasing to the lady
129. So that she wants him and desires him,
130. And there is nothing more to say;
She wants more without fail,
In this way, it is not the place which fails them.
When they kiss each other from the heart,
Know that they are not at ease,
Except in kissing, which makes them tremble
And burns the flesh,
So that each is impatient to begin,
For which reason they kissed each other.
And as long as this burning endures,
There can be no temperance.
They will never respect
Loyalty, nor faith, nor marriage, nor dignity,
Except that they only have this place.
Do not forbid them other things.

Ensoignemanz de son regart – Teachings about her gaze
You must not frequently gaze upon
Any man if you do not love him,
For right love; this prohibition,
Remember it well; there is much good sense
In containing one’s gaze,
Because all blame her too much.
When the lady frequently gazes at someone,
And he notices her glances,
Quickly in poor judgement, he attributes importance to them,
He believes this is by love;
It is no wonder, if he believes it,
Whether it is wrong, or it is right,
Because it often feels so: where I suffer,
Where my heart is, there go my eyes.
The gaze is love’s messenger;
If she does it with a giddy heart.
Then quickly she will disappoint others,
With foolish gazes like these,
Certainly, ladies who have vain hearts,
Do not have a stable gaze,
Thus the eyes turns more quickly
Than the sparrowhawk who seizes the lark;
Thus it also happens that by their gaze
Many ladies are often blamed.

De vantance – About boasting
If someone pleads with you for your love,
Keep from boasting about it.
It is villainy to boast,
And if you want to love him,
This love will never be hidden
To whom you have boasted about it,
And soon, they will know about it.
Ladies do not know what they do
Who do not love very secretly,
So that one often sees it happen
As a man values such a little thing,
That can please and charm many.
There are ladies to whom it has happened,
That she held someone as unworthy,
Who then loved her intensely.
If they had done it secretly,
First that she must love him,
And believe him absolutely.
For this reason, I pray you to silence your praises,
As one does not know what must happen.

De sa char mostrer – About showing her skin
Of this the lady is blamed,
Who knew to show her white flesh
To those whom she is not intimately close,
Leaving nothing enclosed,
Her breast for them to see
Her white skin in this manner;
Another willingly leaves all
Her skin of her side showing;
One of her legs further uncovered.
Proud men do not praise this work,
Because covetousness deceives every
Foolish heart of another when he sees it.
For this the sage has the habit of saying
That the eyes do not see, nor does the heart suffer.
White throat, white neck, white face,
White hands, they show, it seems to me,
That she is beautiful under her clothes;
About this, she is not mistaken,
If once uncovered, ugliness is seen.
And if the lady must well know,
She who often undresses herself
Upon seeing people, does villainy.
They say that this is a sign of debauchery,
For this reason, one holds her as unwise.

Ensoignemanz de dons refuser – Lesson about refusing gifts

Do not take any jewels from anyone,
If you do not deserve them
Or do not desire to deserve them.

Such a jewel must not be kept by

Any lady that has desired for honor

And who does not want to be blamed.

And you well know that if she takes them,

He who gives them to her boasts of her dearly.

For quickly they cost him is his honor,

The jewels given by love;

They are not completely in vain,

But rather the gift costs greatly,

So that the lady makes a very expensive bargain,

Thus the body, and the soul are burdened.

And when the lady values such a jewel,

Know that this comes from covetousness.

When covetousness has taken her,

It cannot be long defended against,

Without doing this damage,

And by God and by detriment to humanity,

Because to take them thus deceives her,

That she cannot know her right,

Thus it makes her do such outrage,

That she betrays her marriage.

Thus the jewels are sold for too much;
238. For this reason, they are forbidden to you.
239. If a relative wants to give you jewels
240. You must not refuse
241. A beautiful belt, or beautiful knife,
242. Purse, adornment, or ring,
243. But that he did not have good intention
244. Between the two of you.
245. Take it completely in secret
246. If you give kind thanks about it,
247. And thus hold onto it for love,
248. It is more dear than that it is worth;
249. But great and intimate gifts
250. Take all of your defenses.
251. Secretly giving and taking
252. Quickly makes for foolish thinking.
253. And such folly pleases so much,
254. That it does not proclaim sin nor wrong.

Chastoiemanz de tancier – Instructions about quarreling

255. About all things of quarreling,
256. I want you, oh ladies, to amend.
257. Never will they be good ladies,
258. Whom the quarrel debases,
No good lady is she,
But he is wrong who calls her “lady.”
By right, you do not call a prostitute
A woman who is joyful about quarreling.
Quarreling cannot be without anger,
And she disgraces you so much.
A lady is neither beautiful nor pleasant
When she quarrels fiercely,
But rather it seems she is crazy
The lady fired up by quarreling.
About your valor, you are full of much
Anger, when only the heart is left.
Nothing remains without courtesy,
My cruelty and wickedness,
Arrive there with the anger
Who takes all the goods,
And quickly makes you say such a thing,
That your worth is immensely disgraced.
Because they see it entirely,
When you speak with the insults,
That you yourself are guilty of
The sins for which you reprove others,
And this, which you know in yourself,
282. You reprove others by anger.
283. If one speaks to you ugly, endure it,
284. Certainly, you will never be worse,
285. But rather you will know about God’s willingness,
286. And about the truth of His humanity,
287. And all who hear his wisdom,
288. To good they will turn you.
289. Whoever speaks shame to you by anger
290. Is he himself shamed, but not you,
291. And you cannot silently shame
292. Ladies that quarrel by silencing.
293. You burst her heart or her belly.
294. When you do not want to respond to her,
295. The mouth of each lady who speaks evil
296. Is terribly disgraced.
297. Dirty insults I would like better
298. In another’s mouth than in mine.
299. Neither God nor humanity will ever hold dear
300. Ladies who make habit of quarreling.

Chastoiemanz de Glotenie – Instructions about gluttony

301. Afterwards I tell you of getting drunk
302. You must, oh ladies, be very careful.
For this, you want very much to be amended
Of drinking too much, and of eating too much.
In a lady, I do not know any evil
Greater than that of gluttony.
Whoever carries such badness in their mouth,
Know well that it weighs one down.
Drunk over and drunk under,
Cursed be he who honors such a lady!
The lady who drinks too much cannot have
Courtesy, beauty, nor knowledge.
Absolutely no righteousness
Has the lady caught in drunkenness.
All the good things in her,
When she is drunk, they perish;
By drunkenness are many men lost,
That she quickly takes their virtues.
Drunkenness does not know right from wrong;
By drunkenness many have died.
He who gets drunk, sins too strongly;
Drunkenness is such a villainous stain
That it harms inside and out,
And disgraces the soul and the body.
You cannot say anything so awful about intoxication,
326. That to be drunk is not worse.
327. Fie on the lady who gets drunk,
328. She is not worthy of living!
329. This is too great an evil vice
330. For God and for the stinking century.
331. And whoever stinks of it willingly,
332. No one should bring them honor.
333. I say to whom it often happens,
334. This shames them terribly;
335. That then she knows well her manner
336. And if she is not mindful of it, few hold her dear.
337. And who willingly wants to shame herself,
338. We must not hold her as dear.
339. And men and ladies who drink too much
340. Their goodness is shamed, and they are shamed.
341. Those who feel the wine is not their friend,
342. Must mix it with water, or drink less.

Ensoignemanz de saluer et de soi desboicher – Teachings about being welcomed and dismissed
343. The lady who does not move,
344. When a great lord greets her,
345. And if she holds herself distant,
They say that she is poorly educated.
And one can say of all complaints
That she is slow to speak at all,
Thus it seems that she is unwholesome
With bad teeth or bad breath.
I do not say that this burden closes her off,
That this is not befitting of her.
Never hold as foolish the lady
Who knowingly covers her flaws;
Nor hold as wise
She who covers her beautiful face too much.
In all ladies, the beautiful face,
Is the most pleasant, this is my view.
Never will she be beautiful
The lady who does not have a beautiful face.
Yellow, plain faced, snub nosed
Must often be closed off.
Beautiful mouth, beautiful teeth, beautiful nose,
Beautiful eyes, bright face in the open.
If it happened that you were horseback riding
And you are closed off from your path,
Go to church if you are closed off,
At the entrance you are in the open,
And before all worthy people,

If you have an unpleasant laugh,

Without blame you can place your hand

Before your mouth when you laugh.

Ensoignemant de covrir sa paule color et sa maule oudor – Teaching about covering her pale complexion and bad odor

The lady who has pale complexion

Or who does not have good odor,

Must break fast by morning.

Good wines give color to the face,

And whomever eats well and drinks well

Should have a better complexion.

You who have bad odor,

When you take communion at church

While you focus on

Doing well to hold your breath;

Often break morning fast

With anis, with fennel, with cumin.

When you talk to anyone that is,

If you hold yourself lower than him

So that your breath does not reach him;

And I leave you one thing to remember;
389. Fight through it to not kiss anyone,
390. Because bad odor bothers more,
391. When you are more heated.
392. Know that this is a proven fact.

**Comant l’on doit ester au mostier – How one must be at church**

393. Another good sense I will teach to you;
394. Do not disdain it,
395. So that it is not held in contempt:
396. Take care that at church
397. You comport yourself very wisely.
398. Because many people see you there
399. Who notice the bad and the good.
400. And this you all know well:
401. The witnesses that you have at church,
402. Good or bad, you will have it for all days.
403. Sit up straight to be beautiful in church:
404. Courteously kneel to pray
405. And by beautiful devotions,
406. Make prayers from the heart.
407. One must be mindful in church,
408. Of laughing too much, of talking too much.
409. The church is the house of prayer,
410. There one must not pray if not to God.

411. Do not let your eyes wander foolishly,

412. That they do not linger.

413. About she whose eyes are too distracted,

414. They say her heart is not stable.

**Au lire l’avangile – on reading the Gospel**

415. When you hear the reading of the Gospel,

416. You must stand up straight,

417. Thus you take care courteously

418. At the end and at the beginning.

419. When you must go to make an offering,

420. Thinking about your beautiful behavior,

421. So that by laughing nor musing

422. You do not make a fool of yourself.

423. At the rise of the body of the Lord

424. You must draw yourself up in the same way,

425. Join hands, turn this part

426. Inclining the head and the heart.

427. And then you must kneel down

428. And pray for all Christians,

429. Thus do not stans back up again

430. Until they say “Forever.”
431. And if you are too burdened
432. By sickness or by children,
433. You can read your Psalter
434. While seated, if you know it.
435. This which the man cannot do,
436. Leave his obligation without blame.

**De la revenue du mostier – About the return from church**

437. When the Mass has been sung
438. And the benediction has been given
439. And you must return from church,
440. Let the crowd leave.
441. Go to all of the alters one by one
442. Thus bow to each.
443. And if you have the company of ladies,
444. Wait for them well.
445. Bring great honor to all of them,
446. To the greatest, to the lowest.
447. As the more you are great mannered,
448. More courteous, more good-natured
449. You will be: When they go out,
450. And so you go out; And so do
451. All the ladies that love honor
And hate all villainy.

**De chanter par raison – About singing within reason**

453. If you have a good instrument

454. For singing, sing boldly.

455. Good singers in the right place and time

456. Are a thing that please many;

457. But know that by singing too much

458. One can well devalue beautiful singing.

459. For this many people say:

460. Good singers often annoy.

461. Of all things moderated,

462. And he who is moderated is wise.

463. If you are in the company

464. Of worthy people, and they pray your singing,

465. You must not leave.

466. Singing is not forbidden to you,

467. For your own amusement

468. When you are in private.

**De tenir ses mains natemant – About keeping her hands clean**

469. Keep your hands very clean,

470. Cut the fingernails often.
They must never pass the skin
So that dirt cannot build up there.
It is bad of a lady,
When she does not keep them clean;
Comportment and cleanliness
Are better valued than dirty beauty.
All the times that you pass
Before another’s house, be mindful
That you do not ever look inside
Do not stop; it is not wise
Nor courteous to envy
Nor linger in another’s house.
One does such a thing often
Privately in their home,
That they would not want one to see,
If someone would come before their door.
And if you want to enter there,
Cough at the entrance
So that they know of your coming
By talking or by coughing.
Know this quickly, no one should
Enter if unexpected;
It seems that this is spying,
And when one can look in peace
The lady without compliant, without villainy,
Does very well to value her life.

Ensoignement de estre au maingier – Teaching about being at dinner

Be mindful, oh ladies, most certainly,
That at dinner you are very civil.
This is a thing that one much values;
That should be, oh lady, well learned.
Such a thing turns to villainy
Which not all people know;
Thus he can be despised
Whom is not courteously learned.
At dinner you must be mindful
Of laughing too much, of talking too much.
If you are eating with someone,
Pass the most beautiful pieces before them;
Do not pick up
The best one, nor the biggest one
For your own benefit, it is not courteous.
And if one says, that in gluttony
No good piece will be eaten,
Because it will be too big or too hot;
515. Too big can choke someone,
516. And too hot can burn.
517. If all the pieces swallowed were so,
518. That one is hardly bettered by them,
519. And he can suffer from it well
520. Who wants to retain his honor.
521. All the times that you drink,
522. Wipe your mouth well,
523. That the wine is not made greasy,
524. Which displeases many of those who drink.
525. And this time that you drink
526. Be mindful that you do not wipe your eyes,
527. Nor your nose on the tablecloth,
528. Because too much you will be blamed;
529. If you are mindful about sweating
530. And smudging your hands too much.
531. In someone’s house do not be
532. Too greedy, if you are eating there.
533. It is not courteous nor righteous
534. Of someone to do something greedily.
535. Never blame someone else eating,
536. How this turns him from you;
537. If it does not agree with you, do not taste it,
You will never know blame for this.

**Deveemanz de mentir – Interdiction of lying**

539. I want to forbid you at the end

540. To lie is also to be a thief.

541. Lying is too great a vice;

542. No one must love nor serve

543. A lady who lies by habit;

544. She does too much to blame shamefully.

545. Good men would prefer to be sorry,

546. Than to be proven a liar.

547. Certainly, he is not wrong,

548. That God strongly hates liars

549. That neither God nor humanity will ever hold dear

550. Whoever lies consistently.

551. One can well heal from the mortal wound,

552. But he who does not have shame about lying,

553. He loses terribly his honor

554. Which is seen by God and by humanity.

555. Good men do not love nor value it at all,

556. And when his life is put on a bad path,

557. That he has no point of truth there,

558. I do not know any other goodness there.
Since the truth is necessary there,
I know no goodness there, unless God saves me.
For this reason I tell you, if you love
The soul, keep yourself from lying,
Because the soul is killed by the mouth
Who willingly tells lies.

Des dames que ne sevent escondire quant on les prie d’amors – About ladies that do not know how to refuse when one pleads for their love
Many ladies, when one pleads for her love,
If she is surprised by it,
So that she does not know what she must say,
Nor knows how to refuse;
So she is quiet that no word is said,
No pushback nor refusal,
And this appears to him simpleness;
Then he is convinced he has found
Easily this which he pursues.
But such is on the right track
Which does not take any time at all;
Also he is near to failing.
For this reason if she does not refuse him,
Soon enough it is worth little.
And know, this is not enough,

Because if you want to love him well,

Thus you must at first

Make your love concede

And refuse him clearly,

That love, which comes to them easily,

Is not as pleasant, nor as desirable at all

As that which it is compared;

Because as a pain is more relentless,

Sweeter is the feeling afterwards.

After the rain, the good weather

Is more desirable and more pleasant.

On the other hand, love exceeded

Too soon, is not as valued

As the love which one has by submission.

Because her lover could be convinced

That another had her as quickly as he,

And for this reason he will hold her unworthy,

And this which she quickly does to one

And will also do quickly to each one.

And this you do not want to love,

Know well that you are making a mistake,

When you do not refuse at all.
Thus to be silent is foolish,
Because the silence makes him desire you,
And convinces him to secure you.
Hear me now and understand
How you must refuse.
Now whoever is to come to you,
If made more anxious,
And more overwhelmed by your love,
Thus will say: “Oh lady, night and day
Your beauty makes me languish.
I cannot rest nor sleep;
I cannot drink, nor can I eat;
My joy makes me change
To complaints, to sighs, to tears.
To you I complain of my pain
Which makes my face become pale,
And thin and afflicted.
If I did not find your mercy,
I could not otherwise live.
When I see you, I have such great joy,
That it appears to me that I am seeing God.
Her sweet gaze delights me entirely
That all other pleasure leaves in a blink.
625. My heart has nothing that pleases it so much
626. Nor that gives it such great joy.
627. When I do not see you, I think about
628. My whole heart turning to you.
629. When I think more, the thoughts break me,
630. And torment me more,
631. Making me suffocate, complain, sigh,
632. And stay awake and fast.
633. Thus, oh lady, for you I languish;
634. From day to day it worse and worse.
635. Now I perish there from what you do;
636. You can pull me back from death.
637. You are my life and my death,
638. And my sorrow and my comfort.
639. All which comes from you and your silence
640. That this can help and grieve me.
641. For this reason, I pray to God for mercy.
642. Thank you, oh lady, from your lover.
643. Thank you, thank you, that is the end,
644. As if my heart has gone to your ends,
645. If God grants me of pleasing you,
646. Because of other things I have no desire.”
647. Hope that he has a good voice
When singing, and in this way he will complain.

Li complainte des amanz – The lover’s lament

“Lady, for whom I often sigh,
Night and day you make me suffer.
Many heavy sighs come about you;
For you I suffer without consolation.
If you should never have mercy
On me, do not let me languish,
Because I am yours without deceit.
Your graceful body, your bright face
Which please me so much to look at,
Have put my heart in a bad state,
Because it cannot be fulfilled.
My eyes must be to blame,
Because by them my heart is betrayed;
The entire body must compare it.
When I see the birds joyous
For the sweetness of the season,
Their song for concealing my pain,
Has no other reason to be sung.
Graceful body, unburdened heart, clear way
For you, it will be fitting for me to die,
669. Unless I am healed by you.
670. Lady, if I suffer for you,
671. I want to undergo it without regret.
672. When my eyes can look
673. By opportunity at your great beauty,
674. It cures me of all my ails,
675. Never complaining nor wanting to do so.
676. Make me your pleasure.
677. Plainly, lady, you can
678. Sell, give, and engage me.
679. Seeking your mercy by faith,
680. When I am yours entirely.
681. For pain, nor for sorrow nor torment
682. Must a lover be troubled.
683. Cursed is whomever repents of love!”

Li response contre l’amant – The answer to the lover

684. When you will have heard his plea,
685. Quickly respond to him this:
686. “Handsome sir, certainly by my will
687. You will never have suffering from me,
688. And if you yourself suffer for me,
689. Know well that you have a foolish heart.
690. About your wellbeing, about your joy,
691. You will be happy without fail;
692. Your ills will weigh on me.
693. As I must love so much by right,
694. Your love and all good people;
695. And certainly know well
696. That I have not loved otherwise any day,
697. Nor will I ever, if it pleases God.
698. I love he who I must love,
699. To he whom I have promised my faith,
700. My love, my body, and my service,
701. By loyalty of the Holy Church.
702. Never will any part of me be false towards
703. The love that God has commanded me;
704. He who must have it will have it.
705. The devil never had any power
706. That I should commit such villainy,
707. So that he who should love me, would hate me.
708. He could well hate my life,
709. If he knew such villainy of me.
710. He is well worthy of my love,
711. If he is certain of better.
712. To him alone I will console myself;
If he praises me about it, I will do it knowingly.

I do not know what you have seen in me,

But it well appears that you hold me

As the most simple, as the most foolish,

When you have told me such words.

I am not half of such beauty,

That it makes one think foolishly.

And certainly if I am as such,

I will keep myself more clean;

More I will hate this beauty,

By which I will be made empty.

Never has God given me such beauty,

Because of that I am in bad state.

For beauty, do not say anything,

But for trying and for modesty,

Thus it weighs me down, if God had me,

That you value me so little,

That you want to mock me.

But now I will let him go,

And if never you talk about it,

Thus you will have lost my heart,

That I will know too much bad will in you.

I will not go into the place where you will be;
736. But rather I will complain about you to my friends
737. By all the Saints of Heaven.”
738. Do not say it while laughing,
739. But also not by anger.
740. Of this I want to chastise you well,
741. So that you do not respond with aggression
742. Nor something which is wrong or to outrage,
743. Thus it will hold you as more wise,
744. If you contain yourself.
745. If it is not wrong, you will never have blame,
746. But rather you will have worth and honor.
747. And if you desire for his love,
748. When you will have made him at your mercy,
749. He will go to all places where it will be granted.
750. If he loves you as much as he says,
751. He will not leave for any refusal
752. That he does not come back by her prayer.
753. It is the manner of all people,
754. That he who feels the greatest anguish,
755. Complains more intensely,
756. Than does he who feigns,
757. Because when more restricted, he is more constrained.
Works Cited


“Simone de Beauvoir: 10 key quotes.” *The Guardian*, 2014,

https://www.theguardian.com/books/2014/jan/09/simone-de-beauvoir-google-doodle-quotes.