

# Bèrenger of the Long Arse

From Larry D. Benson and Theodore M. Andersson, *The Literary Context of Chaucer's Fables*. Indianapolis and New York, 1971. Pp. 11-25.

I have told so many tales and fables  
Which I have found, old and new,  
That I have not finished for the past two years;  
By the faith that I owe Saint John  
I don't believe that I will compose another,  
Except this -- of Bèrenger of the Long Arse.  
You have never heard it before,  
And, upon my soul, I shall tell it now;  
I don't intend to be slow nor long.  
Hear what Guèrin would relate  
Of what happened in Lombardy  
(Where people are not very brave),  
Of a knight who had taken as a wife,  
As I have heard, a noble lady,  
Daughter of a rich nobleman,  
Whereas he was the son of a churl,  
Of a rich and prosperous usurer  
Who had plenty of wine and grain;  
Sheep and cattle and coins  
He had by bushels and barrels;  
And the nobleman owed him  
So much that he could not pay,  
And so he gave his daughter to the usurer's  
[son.  
Thus good heritage is abased,  
And noblemen and counts

All decline and come to shame.  
Those who marry beneath themselves for  
money  
Ought to be ashamed of it,  
And great harm they have from it.  
Evil and lowborn knights  
And cowards issue from such folk,  
Who covet gold and silver  
More than doing chivalrous deeds.  
Thus does nobility perish.  
  
But to return to that which I began,  
From the beginning to the end, as I have  
[gathered it:  
The knight without delay  
Had his daughter well decked out  
And married her to the churl.  
Thus he made him a knight with his own  
[hands  
And raised him in rank, as I have heard.  
More than ten years they were together.  
The new knight loved repose;  
He did not consider the praise and fame  
Of chivalry worth two cloves of garlic.  
He loved tarts and hot custards,  
And he greatly despised the lower classes.  
Then the lady perceived

That her lord was so bad  
That there was never a worse one than he  
For taking or using arms;  
He loved pressing a mattress better  
Than wielding a shield or a lance;  
And she knew well without doubt,  
Because he was such a boaster,  
That he was not at all a knight  
Descended from noble lineage.  
Then she reminded him of her noble  
family,  
In which there were so many valiant  
knights,  
Who in arms are hardy and brave  
And do not at all love to be idle.  
The knight well understood  
That she said all this for his benefit.  
"Lady," he said, "I have great renown;  
You do not have so bold an ancestor  
That I don't have a braver one,  
More valorous and of more prowess.  
I am a knight without peer,  
The best of all by my own hand.  
Lady, you will see tomorrow;  
If I can find my enemies,  
Tomorrow you will see the proof.

They have defied me out of envy;  
Because of that, I can no longer endure  
[this life;  
I will put them in such a bad state  
That I will chop off all their heads;  
All will be dead, whatever the difficulty."  
They stopped then for the night,  
And the next morning at dawn  
The knight rose early.  
He had his arms brought  
And his body richly armed,  
For he had very beautiful weapons,  
All fresh and new.  
When the knight was armed  
And mounted on his horse,  
He thought about what he could do  
In order to trick his wife  
Into considering him a good knight.  
Into a large and deep wood  
That he sees near his house  
Went the knight spurring,  
Straight into the forest,  
Without making any stop.  
When he arrived in the middle of the  
forest,

He stopped under a tree;  
He reined his horse and tied it,  
And hung his shield from a tree  
By a chain attached to the wood.

Now hear what this fool did:

He drew out his sword,  
Which was polished and bright;  
He beat on his shield as if he were mad --  
I tell you, more than a hundred blows --  
So that all is hacked and mistreated;  
Then he took his stout lance  
And broke it into four pieces.  
Then he mounted on the bows  
Of the saddle of his horse;  
Spurring hard he goes through the middle of  
[the valley,  
Right straight to his house.  
He holds a piece of his lance;  
Of his shield he has only a quarter  
That he had brought back whole.  
He reins up his horse,  
And his wife comes toward him.  
She holds the stirrup for his descent;  
The knight pushes her back with his foot,  
For he had a very high and haughty manner.  
"Get yourself back," he said;  
"For you should know it is not right  
That you should touch such a good knight

Nor one so covered with glory as I am.  
There is no one in your family so bold  
Or so daring as I am;  
I have not been vanquished nor defeated;  
Rather I have the prize of chivalry."

The lady was completely astonished  
When she saw his pierced shield  
And the broken wood of his lance;  
Because of what he had made her believe  
She did not know what to say or what to think;  
She was afraid he would beat her,  
For the knight so menaced her  
That she did not dare go toward him or touch  
[him.  
The lady kept her mouth shut.  
Not a word could she answer him.

What should I say to you? Thus  
The knight served her with this guile,  
And held the lady as a peasant  
And despised all her ancestors,  
Which she did not think right.

One day again from the woods  
This knight returned, and his shield  
He brought back hacked and pierced.  
But he was not wounded nor harmed,  
Nor did his helm show any injury,

And he is untouched from head to toe;  
He is not at all tired or fatigued.  
This time the knight  
Is not believed by the lady  
When he says he has killed his antagonists  
And confounded his enemies,  
Taken them by force and hanged them.  
The lady perceived and well knew  
That he had deceived her by some stratagem,  
And she determines that if he goes again  
To the woods she will follow him  
And thus see what he does  
And how he conducts himself there.

Thus the lady is determined;  
When morning comes,  
The knight has himself armed  
And says he is going to kill  
Three knights who menace him  
And thus have greatly annoyed him;  
They go looking for him -- of this he  
[complains.  
The lady tells him that he should take with him  
Three or four of his servants;  
Thus he could be more secure in battle.

"Lady, I shall take no one there.  
By myself I shall inflict on them such damage  
That none shall escape alive."

Immediately he set out on his way.  
In a great fury he made for the woods.  
And the lady found a suit of armor;  
She armed herself like a knight,  
And then mounted on a war-horse.  
She did not delay at all,  
But set out straight after her lord,  
Who had already plunged into the woods  
And had hung his shield  
From a chain, as he usually did,  
And was hacking at it with his sword.  
He made such a noise and raised such  
[havoc

That he who heard it would say  
There were eleven hundred devils there.  
Don't take this for a fable;  
He raised a great noise there and a great  
[uproar,

And the lady stopped for a moment.  
And when she saw what was going on,  
She was amazed, struck speechless;  
And when she had heard enough,  
She straightway galloped her horse  
Toward her husband, and she cried:  
"Young man, young man! What is this  
folly?  
Why are you cutting down my woods?  
I'll be cursed if you escape me

Without being cut into pieces!  
Why do you mistreat your shield,  
Which has never done you any harm?  
You have started a crazy business today;  
God's hate on him who prizes you  
When you thus make war on it!"

When he heard these words,  
He was astonished and speechless.  
He did not recognize the lady;  
The naked sword fell from his hand,  
And straightway his senses fled;  
"Sire," he said, "for the mercy of God,  
If I have done you wrong in any way,  
I will make it up to you without argument;  
Willingly -- as much as you want --  
I will give you riches and money."

The lady says: "As God may save me  
You will speak of another Bernart  
Before you leave this place,  
For I will offer you a bargain:  
Either you joust with me --  
And I swear to you and guarantee,  
If you fall, without fail  
Straightway you lose your head,  
For I will have no pity on you --

Or I will dismount on foot,  
And I will bend over  
And you will come and kiss my arse,  
Exactly in the middle, if you please.  
Decide now which you prefer  
Of these choices that I offer you."

Then he who was so badly frightened  
And who is filled with cowardice  
Says that he will not joust.  
"Sir," he says, "I have vowed  
Not to joust with any living man.  
So dismount, if it is no trouble,  
And I shall do what you please."  
The lady would grant no respite  
But immediately put foot on ground  
And raised her robe  
And bent over in front of him.  
"Sir, put your face here."

And he looked at the crevice  
Of the arse and the quim, and it seemed  
To him that it was all one.  
He thinks and says to himself  
That he has never before seen so long an  
arse.  
Then he kissed her with a hearty kiss,  
In the manner of an evil cowardly man,  
Right at the hole there;

She has well brought him to what he  
[deserved.

Straightway the lady turned around,

And the knight cried to her:

"Good sir, I beg that you tell me your name,  
And then you can leave here entirely  
[satisfied."

"Young man, my name will never be  
[concealed;

But such a name was never found;

None of my family bears it but me.

I am called Bèrenger of the Long Arse,

Who puts all cowards to shame."

As soon as her speech was finished,

The lady went back to her house

And disarmed herself as fast as she could,

And then she sent for a knight

Whom she loved and held dear;

In her bedchamber well at ease

She led him and embraced and kissed him.

Straightway, behold the husband who comes

From the wood. She, who little feared him,

Did not deign to move for him;

She had her lover sit next to her.

The knight, much chagrined,

Entered into the bedroom;

When he saw the lady and her lover,

You know he was not at all pleased.

"Lady," he said quickly,

"You serve me churlishly

To bring a man in here;

You will pay for it, by my teeth

"Be quiet," she said, "good-for-nothing

And watch out that you don't say anything  
[more,

For, if you speak wrong to me in any way,

By the faith that I owe the Holy Spirit,

Straightway I shall complain of you

For the scorn that I have had from you,

And you will become a jealous cuckold."

"To whom will you complain of me,

Where make your plea?"

"To whom? To your dear friend

Who had you in his power;

That is my Lord Bèrenger

Of the Long Arse, who will put you to shame."

When he heard what she said,

He had great shame and great anger,

But he did not dare to say anything against  
[her.

He felt himself discomfited and defeated;

And she did what she pleased,

She who was neither foolish nor lowborn.

"When the shepherd is weak, the wolf shits  
[wool."

Here ends Bèrenger of the Long Arse.