Some Quotations on the Seven Deadly Sins from the Parson’s Tale

De Superbia

388: The root of these seven sins, thanne, is Pride the general root of all harms. For of
388: This root spryngen certein braunches, as ire,
388: Envye, accidie or slewthe, avarice or coveitise
388: (to commune understondynge), glotonye, and
389: Lecherye./
392: Another twig that I kan nat declare./ Inobedient
392: is he that disobeyeth for despit to the comandementz
392: of god, and to his sovereyns, and
393: To his goostly fader./ Avauntour is he that
393: Bosteth of the harm or of the bountee that he
394: Hath doon./ Ypocrite is he that hideth to
394: Shewe hym swich as he is, and sheweth hym
395: Swich as he noght is./
416: As to the first synne, that is in superfluettee
416: of clothynge, which that maketh it so deere,
417: To harm of the peple;/
430: Now, as of the outrageous array of wommen,
430: God woot that though the visages of somme of
430: Hem seme ful chaast and debonaire, yet notifie
430: They in hire array of atyr likerousnesse and
431: Pride./

Also the synne
32: Of aornement or of apparell is in thynges that
32: Apertenen to ridynge, as in to manye delicat
432: Horses that been hoolden for delit

Pride of the table appeareth
444: Eek ful ofte; for certes, riche men been cleped
444: To festes, and povre folk been put awey and rebuked./
445: also in excesse of diverse metes and
445: Drynkes,

now myghte
450: Men axe wherof that pride sourdeth and
450: Spryngeth, and I seye, somtyme it spryngeth
450: Of the goodes of nature, and somtyme of the
450: Goodes of fortune, and somtyme of the
451: Goodes of grace./ Certes, the goodes of
451: Nature stonden outhere in goodes of body
452: Or in goodes of soule.

Eek for to pride
461: Hym of his gentrie is ful greet folie; for
461: Ofte tyme the gentrie of the body binymeth
461: The gentrie of the soule;

Now been ther generale signes of gentillesse,
464: As eschewynge of vice and ribaudye and servage
465: Of synne, in word, in werk, and contenaunce;/
465: And usynge vertu, curteisy, and clennesse, and
465: To be liberal, that is to seyn, large by mesure;

Now sith that so is that ye han understonde
475: What is pride, and whiche been the speces of it,
475: And whennes pride sourdeth and spryngeth,/  
476: now shul ye understonde which is 
476: The remedie agayns the synne of pride;
477: And that is hymylitee, or mekenesse./ That is 
477: A vertu thurgh which a man hath verry 
477: Knoweleche of hymself, and holdeth of hymself 
477: no pris ne deyntee, as in regard of his 
478: Desertes, considerynge evere his freletee. Now 
478: Been ther three maneres of hymylitee: as hymylitee 
478: in herte; another hymylitee is in his 
479: Mouth; the thridde in his werkes./

De Invidia

Certes, thanne is envye the worst
488: Synne that is. For soothly, alle outhere synnes 
489: Been somtyme oonly agayns o special vertu;/ 
489: But certes, envye is agayns alle vertues and 
489: Agayns alle goodnesses.

For
490: Wel unnethe is ther any synne that it ne hath 
490: Som delit in itself, save oonly envye, that 
491: Evere hath in itself angwissh and sorwe.

Now wol I speke of remedie agayns this
516: Foule synne of envye. First is the love of god
516: Principal, and lovyng of his neighebor as hymself;
516: for soothly, that oon ne may nat been
517: Withoute that oother
Loo, thus commaundeth us oure lord
528: Jhesu crist to do to oure enemyes./ For smoothly,
528: Nature dryveyh us to loven oure freinds, and
528: Parfey, oure enemyes han moore nede to love
528: That oure freendes; and they that moore nede
529: Have, certes to hem shal men doon goodnesse;

De Ira

For soothly, whoso hath envye upon his
534: Neighebor, anon he wole comunly fynde hym
534: A matere of wrath, in word or in deed, agayns
535: Hym to whom he hath envye./ And as wel
535: Comth ire of pride, as of envye; for soothly,
536: He that is proud or envious is lightly wrooth
the goode ire is by jalousie of goodnesse,
540: thurgh which a man is wrooth with wikkednesse
540: and agayns wikkednesse; and therfore
541: seith a wys man that ire is bet than pleyn.

Now understondeth
542: That wikked ire is in two maneres; that is
542: To seyn, sodeyn ire or hastif ire, withouten
543: Avisement and consentynge of resoun. / The
543: Menyng and the sens of this is, that the resoun
543: Of a man ne consente nat to thilke sodeyn ire;
544: And thanne is it venial.

Another ire is ful
544: Wikked, that comth of felonie of herte avysed
544: And cast biforn, with wikked wil to do vengeance,
544: and therto his resoun consenteth; and
545: Soothly this is deadly synne.

Of ire comen thys stynkyng engendrures:
563: First, hate, that is oold wrathte; discord, thurgh
563: Which a man forsaketh his olde freend that he
564: Hath loved ful longe;/ and thanne cometh
564: Werre, and every manere of wrong that man
565: Dooth to his neighebor, in body or in catel.

After this,
588: Thanne cometh **sweryng**, that is expres agayn
588: The comandement of god; and this bifalleth
589: Ofte of anger and of ire. / God seith: thow
589: Shalt nat take the name of thy lord God in
589: Veyn or in ydel.

   For cristes
592: Sake, ne swereth nat so synfully in **dismembrynge**
592: of crist by soule, herte, bones, and
592: Body. For certes, it semeth that ye thynke that
592: The cursed jewes ne dismembred nat ynough
592: The preciouse persone of crist, but ye dismembre
593: hym moore.

What seye we of hem that bileeven on **divynailes**,  
606: as by flight or by noyse of briddes, or  
606: Of beestes, or by sort, by nigromancie, by dremes,  
606: By chirkynge of dores, or crakkynge of houses,  
606: By gnawynge of rattes, and swich manere  
607: Wrecchednesse?

609: Now wol I spoken of **lesynges**, which generally  
609: is fals signyficaunce of word, in entente to  
610: Deceyven his evene-cristene./ Som lesynge is  
610: Of which ther comth noon avantage to no wight;  
610: And som lesynge turneth to the ese and profit  
610: Of o man, and to dise and damage of another

And how that **chidynge** be a  
632: Vileyns thyng bitwixe alle manere folk,  
632: Yet is it certes moost uncovenable bitwixe a  
632: Man and his wyf; for there is nevere reste

Speke we now of **wikked consei**; for he that  
640: Wikked conseil yeveith is a traytour. For he deceyveth  
640: hym that trusteth in hym

Now comth **janglynge**, that may nat been  
650: Withoute synne. And, as seith salomon, it is  
651: A sygne a apert folye./ And therfore a  
651: Philosophre seyde, whan men axed hym how that  
651: Men sholde plese the peple, and he answerde  
651: Do manye goode werkes, and spek fewe  
652: Jangles./  
652: After this comth the synne of **japeres**,  
652: That been the develes apes; for they maken
Folk to laughe at hire japerie as folk doon at the gawdes of an ape. Swiche japes defrendeth seint paul

The remedie agyns ire is a vertu that men clepen mansuetude, that is debonairaette; and eek another vertu, that men callen pacience or suffranc.

Debonairetee withdraweth and refreyneth the stirynges and the moevynges of mannys corage in his herte, in swich manere that they ne skippe nat out by angre ne by ire.

Pacience, that is another remedie agyns ira, is a vertu that suffreth swetely every mannes goodnesse, and is nat wrooth for noon harm. That is doon to hym. The philosophre seith that pacience is thilke vertu that suffreth debonairely alle the outrages of adversitee and every wikked word.

Of pacience comth obedience, thurgh which a man is obedient to crist and to alle hem to whiche he oghte to been obedient in crist.

De Accidia

After the synne of envye and of ire, now wol I spoken of the synne of accidie. For envye blyndeth the herte of a man, and ire troubleth a man, and accidie maketh hym heavie, thoughtful, and wraw. Envye and ire maker bitternesse in herte, which bitternesse is moother of accidie, and bynometh hym the love of alle goodnesse.

But accidie dooth no swich diligence. He dooth alle thyng with anoy, and with wrawnesse, slaknesse, and excusacioun, and with ydelnesse, and unlust; thanne is accidie enemy to everich estaat of man; for certes, the estaat of man is in three maneres. / outh
It is the state of innocence, as was the state of Adam before that he fell into sin; in which state he was held to works of grace as in heriynge and adowrynge of God. Another state is the state of sinful men, in which state men are held to labour in prayer to God for amendment of their sins, and that he would grant them to arise out of their sorrow. Another state is the state of grace; in which state he is held to works of penitence.

The fourth thing is that *accidie is lyk*

**687: Hem that been in the peyne of helle**, by cause of her slothe and of her heynesse; for they that been damned been so bounded that they ne may neither wel do ne wel thynke.

thaneth cometh **negligence**, thanne cometh **ydelnese**, that is the yate of alle harmes. An ydel man is lyk to a place that hath no walls; the devils may entre on every syde, or sheten at hym at discovert, by temptacion on every syde.

**Agayns this horrible synne of accidie**, and the branches of the same, ther is a vertu that is called *fortitudo or strentthe*, that is an affectioun thurgh which a man despiseth anoyouse thinges. This vertu is so myghty and so vigerous that it dar withstonde myghtily and wisely kepyn hymself fro perils that been wikked, and wrastle agayn the assautes of the devel.

**De Avaricia**

after accidie wol I speke of avarice and of *Coveitise*, of which synne seith seint paul that the roote of alle harmes is coveitise. Ad Thimotheum sexto.

and understandeth that avarice ne stant nat oonly in lond ne catel, but somtyme in science and in glorie, and in every manere
745: Of outrageous thyng is avarice and coveitise.

and therfore seith
749: Seint paul ad ephesios, quinto, that an avaricious
750: Man is in the thraldom of *ydolatrie*. /
750: what difference is bitwixe an ydolastre and
750: An avaricious man, but that an ydolastre, per
750: Aventure, ne hath but o mawmet or two, and
750: The avaricious man hath manye?

A cherl hath no temporeel thyng that it ne is his
755: Lordes, as they seyn. / but certes, thise lordshipes
755: Doon wrong that bireven hire bondefolk
755: Thynges that they nevere yave hem. Augustinus,
756: De civitate, libro nono. / sooth is
756: That the condicioun of thraldom and the firste
756: *Cause of thraldom is for synne*. Genesis,
757: Nono.

now shul ye understonde that the *releevynge*
805: Of avarice is misericorde, and *pitee* largely
805: Taken.

Thanne is misericorde, as seith
807: The philosophre, a vertu by which the corage
807: Of a man is stired by the mysese of hym
808: That is mysese. / upon which *misericorde*
808: *Folweth pitee in parfournynge of charitable*
809: Werkes of misericorde.

the speces of misericorde been, as
811: For to lene and *for to yeve, and to foryeven*
811: And relesse, and for to han pitee in herte
811: And compassioun of the meschief of his evene-cristene,
811: And eek to chastise, there as nede
812: Is

another manere of *remedie agayns*
812: *Avarice is resonable largesse*; but soothly,
812: Heere bihoveth the consideracioun of the grace
812: Of jhesu crist, and of his temporeel goodes,
812: And eek of the goodes perdurables, that crist
813: Yaf to us;

**De Gula**
Glotonye
819: Is unmesurable appetit to ete or to drynke,
819: Or elles to doon ynogh to the unmesurable appetit
819: And desordeyne coveitise to eten or to
drynke he that is
822: Usaunt to this synne of glotonye, he ne
822: May no synne withstonde. He moot been in
822: Servage of alle vices, for it is the devoteles hoord
823: Ther he hideth hym and resteth.

agayns glotonye is the remedie abstinence,
832: As seith galien; but that holde I nat meritorie,
832: If he do it oonly for the heele of his body.
The felawes of abstinence been attemperaunce,
834: that holdeth the meene in alle thynges;
834: Eek shame, that aschueth alle deshonestee; surfisance,
834: that seketh no riche metes ne drynkkes,
834: Ne dooth no fors of to outrageous apparaialynge
835: of mete;/ mesure also, that restreyneth
835: By resoun the deslavee appetit of etynge; sobrenesse
835: also, that restreyneth the outrage of
836: Drynkke;/ sparynge also, that restreyneth the
836: Delacaat ese to sitte longe at his mete

De Luxuria

After glotonye thanne comth lecherie, for
837: Thise two synnes been so ny cosyns that ofte
838: Tyme they wol nat departe./ God woot, this
838: Synne is ful displesaunt thyg to god; for he
838: Seyde hymself, do no lecherie

And certes, if it be
850: A foul thyng a man to waste his catel on wommen,
850: yet is it a fouler thyng whan that, for
850: Swich ordure, wommen dispenden upon men
851: Hir catel and substaunce.

This is that oother hand of the deovel with
853: Fyve fyngres to cacche the peple to his vileynye./
854: the firste fynger is the fool lookyng
854: Of the fool womman and of the fool man, that
854: Sleeth, right as the basilicok sleeth folk by the
And for that many man weneth that
He may nat synne, for no likerousnesse that
Fals. God woot, a man may sleen hymself with
His owene knyf, and make hymselfe dronken
Of his owene tonne./ Certes, be it wyf, be it
Child, or any worldly thyng that he loveth biforn
god, it is his mawmet, and he is an
Ydolastre. / Man sholde loven hys wyf by
Discrecioun, paciently and atemprely; and
Thanne is she as though it were his suster.
Fifth the fynger of the develes hand is the stynkynge
dede of leccherie./ Certes, the fyve fyngres
of glotonie the feend put in the wombe
Of a man, and with his fyve fingres of lecherie
he gripeth hym by the reynes, for to
Throwen hym into the fourneys of helle

Another
Synne of leccherie is to bireve a mayden of
Hir maydenhede, for he that so dooth, certes,
He casteth a mayden out of the hyeste degree
That is in this present lif/ and bireveth hir
Thilke percius fruyt that the book clepeth the
Hundred fruyt.

Understoond eek that avowtrie is set
Gladly in the ten comandementz bitwixe thefte
And manslaughtre; for it is the gretteste thefte
That may be, for it is thefte of body and of
Soule.

The thridde spece of avowtrie
is somtyme bitwixe a man and his wyf, and
That is whan they take no reward in hire assemblynge
but oonly to hire flessly delit,

Now comth the remedie agayns leccherie,
And that is generally chastitee and continence,
that restreyneth alle the desordeyne
Moevynges that comen of flessly talentes.