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Who Painted the Lion?—

A Gloss on *Dollhouse's* "Belle Chose"

[1] In Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*, the Wife of Bath asks her fellow pilgrims, "What is the purpose of genitals?"¹ She then offers her own interpretation:

Trusteth right wel, they were nat maad for noght.

[Trust you right well, they were not made for nothing.]

Glose whoso wole, and seye
bothe up and doun

[Gloss whoever will and say both
up and down]

That they were maked for
purgacioun

[That they were made for passing]

Of urine, and oure bothe thynges smale

[Of urine, and our two small things]

Were eek to knowe a female from a male,

[Were also to tell a female from a male]

And for noon oother cause—say ye no?

[And for no other cause—say you no?]

The experience woot wel it is noght so.

[Experience knows well it is not so.] (WBP 118-24)

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The *Wife of Bath's Prologue* is not only "the most heavily glossed section of the *Canterbury Tales*" but also, in terms of scribal revisions, "by far the most altered piece" (Desmond 135; Kennedy, "Contradictory" 23). Beverly Kennedy believes "the primary reason for this is that [the Wife's] Prologue is both contentious and ambiguous" ("Contradictory" 23). The Wife has been called "an icon of aggressive female sexuality" (Kennedy, "Withouten" 28); she has been classed among "nymphomaniacs" and diagnosed with "sociopathic personality disturbance" (Rowland 145; Sands 171). Yet she has also been described as a "medieval feminist tycoon" who exhibits "an acute awareness of [...] 'sexual economics'" (Rowland 146; Delany 72). Barrie Ruth Straus outlines the "virulence" and "extremity of critical reaction" to the *Prologue* observing that "[the Wife's] critics have not only been polarized, but have occasionally lost the measured tone of professional response" (527). The same might be said of certain reactions to Joss Whedon's *Dollhouse*:² "I fucking HATE this show. Watching it leaves me shaken and nauseated, not in some 'Oh, Joss is so edgy and provocative' way, but in [a] 'this is violent, aggressive misogynist bullshit' way" (Holly). On the other hand, *Dollhouse* has been described as "the best show on TV" and, even more emphatically, as "the most intellectually engaging television series in the history of American television" (Moore; Burke). So, which is it? Is *Dollhouse*, as one writer claims, "the ultimate misogynistic fantasy" or is it, as another writer contends, "the most cerebrally significant series in history" ("Welcome"; Burke)? "Glose whoso wole" [Gloss whoever will] (WBP 119), the answer depends on who's painting the lion.

[2] Chaucer's Wife of Bath is both quoted and glossed in the *Dollhouse* episode "Belle Chose" (2.3).³ In this episode, Dollhouse client Professor Edmond Gossen hires a Doll for a so-called "romantic" engagement. Consequently, Echo is imprinted as Kiki Turner, a student in a medieval literature class taught by Gossen. Kiki learns that her paper on the Wife of Bath's "economics of love" has received an "F" and immediately seeks to remedy this error by pleading her case to the professor: "Okay, so I probably never shoulda taken this course to begin with. But I figured it was mid-evil lit, not advanced evil. How hard could it be? So I skipped intro to evil or whatever. But how is it that I get an 'F' when this guy that we're reading—Chauncey—can't even spell?" Though played for its humour, this

passage also reflects a critical thematic component of the episode. Kiki misinterprets the word "medieval" as "mid [hyphen] evil"; she confuses the name "Chaucer" with "Chauncey"; and she mistakes Middle English for misspelled modern English. Kiki is the epitome of the incompetent reader. Arguably, the entire episode revolves around the issue of interpretation—or as it is referred to in *The Canterbury Tales*, glossing.

[3] The Middle English verb "glosen" literally means "'to explicate, interpret'" (Dinshaw 122). The gloss of a manuscript refers to scribal marginalia, which offers the reader varying degrees of interpretation ranging from the translation of "individual words to explanatory sentences to running commentaries on entire books" (Dinshaw 121).⁴ In its more figurative sense, glossing means to "'to give a false interpretation, flatter, deceive'—thus, as we say, 'to gloss over'" (Dinshaw 122). Chaucer refers to glossing repeatedly in *The Canterbury Tales*, including on three occasions in the *Wife of Bath's Prologue*.⁵ Additionally, manuscripts of the *Tales* contain scribal glosses which Kennedy categorizes into "two diametrically opposed" sets ("Contradictory" 34): one paints the Wife as "outrageously rude and coarse," the other as "courteous and...pious" ("Contradictory" 23).⁶ A gloss "aims to shape the response of subsequent readers" (Schibanoff 73); it can be both informative and manipulative. On occasion, as Carolyn Dinshaw illustrates, "[t]he gloss crowds out the text"; yet it can also "[preserve] the text from oblivion" by "becom[ing] the very condition of the primary text's existence"; in some cases, the gloss itself "becomes the text" (121). According to Dinshaw, the Wife paradoxically "oppose[s] herself to glosses" but also "argu[es]...precisely like a glossator herself" (113, 123). Whereas "[t]he gloss undertakes to speak (for) the text," Dinshaw argues, the Wife "maintains that the literal text—her body—can speak for itself" (115). Arguably, in *Dollhouse* imprinting is glossing at its most extreme, a new text figuratively crowding out—glossing over—the original. Thus, like the Wife, Echo can be said both to oppose and to embrace the gloss as she strives to control her body, to speak for herself, to construct her own "text." Furthermore, like the Wife's *Prologue*, "Belle Chose" both critiques the practice of glossing as potentially abusive while simultaneously inviting its audience to gloss its text—to determine meaning amidst diametrically opposed responses. Indeed, as Susan Schibanoff notes regarding *The*

Canterbury Tales, with *Dollhouse* “we find ourselves in the ironic position of having to gloss the glosses” (72).

[4] “[W]hat we have in the Wife’s *Prologue*,” argues Martha Fleming, “is a gloss on interpretation and misinterpretation” of textual authority—the Wife, for example, offers unique glosses of scripture as a means of asserting her authority (155).⁷ *Dollhouse*’s “Belle Chose” likewise presents several examples of textual interpretation, thus repeatedly reminding the audience of the inherent relationship between text and gloss. Even the title of the episode requires interpretation: the French term “Belle Chose” literally means “beautiful thing,” but the Wife also uses the same term to refer to her genitals (WBP 510). As she repeatedly illustrates throughout her *Prologue*, language is ambiguous—the text is open to interpretation—evidence for which also abounds within the dialogue of “Belle Chose.” For example, when Adelle describes to Boyd the situation regarding Terry Karrens’s “slight medical situation” (itself a euphemistic interpretation of his comatose state) as one that involves “working to reunite a desperate family with their wayward loved one,” Boyd responds, “And by ‘wayward’ do you mean that they’ve been looking for him since he skipped his last bail hearing?” When Adelle then explains, “A bail hearing over a minor matter which has since been resolved,” Boyd replies, “And by ‘resolved,’ do you mean—?” At this point, Adelle interrupts him with a swift, “Yes, yes! A judge was bought off. There is no need to continue to translate me.” When Ivy tells Paul that Echo’s engagement is designated “R” for “Romance,” Paul reinterprets the designation as an “R-rated...sex fantasy.” When Adelle threatens to return Terry Karrens to Mercy hospital, Bradley Karrens responds, “A return to mercy—that has a poetry.” And when Ivy tells Kiki that Paul is taking her on a “spree,” Kiki responds, “Shopping or killing?” She then immediately clarifies: “Joke!” On these and numerous other occasions, the verbal play throughout this episode illustrates the ambiguity of language, its inherent potential to be glossed, and, arguably, an authorial invitation for us to join the play and interplay of glossing.⁸

[5] “Glossing is a gesture of appropriation,” argues Dinshaw; the gloss “undertakes to assert authority” (122). Schibanoff describes the “conflict” between the Wife of Bath and the glossator of the fifteenth-century Egerton manuscript (which includes the *Wife of Bath’s Prologue* and *Tale* among other

Canterbury Tales) as a “battle over who shall control the text” (80).⁹ Thus we see Paul struggle to interpret a text prior to his interrogation of Terry Karrens (whose memories have been imprinted onto Victor) regarding the abducted women: “I don’t see a pattern here,” he says to Bradley Karrens, referring to photos of the women. “For some reason, you do. Who are these women? Who are they to him?”¹⁰ Once Paul has glossed the text—interpreted the purpose of the women—he is able to confront the author. Figuratively speaking, Terry Karrens is both a glossator and an author; he glosses the original women in his life by replacing them with his interpretations; but he also manipulates the gloss to construct a new story: a summer picnic and croquet match with his mother, aunt, and sisters. During the subsequent confrontation, Paul accuses Terry of “decid[ing] real people weren’t worth it.” “You pushed them away,” he says, “so you could surround yourself with the fakes, the copies. Made you feel like you had some control. You’re not in control.” As Paul analyzes Terry, Terry finds himself in danger of losing control of his own constructed text to a glossator. “This is a trick,” Victor/Terry says to Paul as he struggles to interpret the image of his comatose self. The editing of this scene emphasizes the multiplicity of viewers and, thereby, the potential for a multiplicity of glosses. Through our screen, we watch Adelle who watches Victor/Terry who watches the comatose Terry. Each image is projected through multiple screens and is thus watched and interpreted simultaneously by multiple viewers on multiple levels. As the first line of *Dollhouse*’s first episode informs us, “Nothing is what it appears to be” (“Ghost” 1.1).¹¹ Repeatedly, *Dollhouse* reminds us that everything—both text and image—is subject to glossing.

[6] Intertextual glossing in *Dollhouse* is best illustrated by a shot taken from behind Professor Gossen as he lectures, in which we see a folder opened to an image of the Wife copied from the fifteenth-century Ellesmere manuscript. Gossen holds in his line of sight both a paper facsimile of the Wife—or “Alisoun” as she is known (WBP 804)—and a physical facsimile in the form of Kiki, to whom he later says, “I think I can detect a little Alison in you.” Of course, manuscript images of the Wife are themselves interpretations by glossators, which are in turn interpreted by readers. Kennedy argues that the Ellesmere image “emphasize[s] the Wife’s sexual and aggressive qualities” (“Contradictory” 34). She compares the Ellesmere

(26C9, fol. 72r.) and Cambridge (Gg 4.27, fol. 222r.) images explaining, "Both portray her with whip in hand, but the Ellesmere illustration also portrays her in a sexually suggestive position, sitting astride her horse," whereas she sits side-saddle in the Cambridge version ("Contradictory" 34-35).¹² Marilyn Desmond also compares these two manuscript images, arguing that they both "offer a visual interpretation of the Wife's sexual skills precisely as she describes them in the *Prologue* when she characterizes her dominance of her first three husbands with the words, 'myself have been the whippe'" (Desmond 122). Gossen quotes this line (WBP 175) when he glosses the *Prologue* for Kiki during her private lesson. He interprets the Wife as "a lusty, bawdy, self-aware woman," as signified for him by the manuscript image. "'Myself have been the whippe,'" he quotes, and then immediately glosses the line: "She is the whip. She's the one in control."¹³ But the entire scenario is designed to give Gossen control over Kiki; *he* is the glossator. Though perhaps coincidental, the name "Gossen" sounds like the Middle English verb "glosen." In addition to fulfilling his sexual desire via his reading of the Wife, Gossen's fantasy may include fulfilling his desire to be a successful academic glossator, who, as Schibanoff argues regarding the Egerton glossator, "steps in to wrest control away from [the Wife]" (80).

[7] The relationship between power and glossing is emphasized by the scene's editing. Gossen's gloss of the Wife to Echo/Kiki is cross cut with Paul's interview of Victor/Terry. "They're whores," says Terry to Paul. Cut. "No, she is not a whore," says Gossen to Kiki. "She knows she's the one with the real power." "What power?" asks Kiki. Gossen replies, "Well, the same power that *all* women have." Cut. "[Y]ou make a nice day," says Terry. "You make shade. You put the little umbrellas in the drinks. It doesn't matter. It never matters." Two cross-cuts later, we hear Victor/Terry explain, "She made me. It's not my fault. She made me." Though Terry bludgeoned to death his constructed copy of "Aunt Sheila" in the episode's opening scene, here he blames her for his fatal abuse. Thus the editing highlights the connections among power, abuse, sex, and glossing, which are likewise connected by the Wife in her description of Jankyn, her fifth husband:

But in oure bed he was so fressh and gay,

[But in our bed he was so fresh and gay,]
And therewithal so wel koude he me *glose*,
[And therewithal so well could he me *gloss*,]
Whan that he wolde han my *bele chose*,
[When he wanted to have my *belle chose*,]
That thogh he hadde me bete on every bon,
[That though he beat me on every bone,]
He koude wynne agayn my love anon.
[He could win again my love anon.] (WBP 508-12)

Jankyn is such a manipulative glossator that he is able to seduce the Wife despite his physical abuse of her. Though Gossen does not physically abuse women in the same way that Jankyn and Terry do, he is nonetheless abusive in that he aims to elicit sexual compliance from a failing student.¹⁴ Gossen intends his gloss of the Wife to convince Kiki that she too can “[use] sex to get what she wants”—in her case, “to get the ‘F’ on her chest turned into an ‘A.’” The Kiki imprint is not designed to interpret the gloss beyond its authorial intention of seduction. Echo (as opposed to Kiki) *may* one day call to mind a different aspect of Gossen’s gloss: that, as Gossen explains to Kiki during her private lesson, the Wife “doesn’t allow men to define her.” As the series reveals, Echo comes to recognize that self-empowerment requires her both to remember and to redefine the definitions imprinted upon her. Unlike Kiki, Echo gradually becomes empowered as a competent reader and glossator of the increasingly complex, layered “text” she has become.

[8] Both Echo and the Wife have experienced the loss of personal author(ity) at the hands of male glossators.¹⁵ The “texts” of their bodies have been written by men: “Who peyntede the leon, tel me who?” asks the Wife of the misogynistic literature Jankyn reads aloud from the “book of wikked wyves” (WBP 692, 685). This question implies that depictions of men triumphing over lions are painted by the men; thus, she figuratively acknowledges the misogyny of men who construct stories of wicked women. As Mary Carruthers explains, “The fable of painting the lion teaches that the

'truth' of any picture often has more to do with the prejudices and predilections of the painter than with the 'reality' of the subject" ("The Wife" 209). In what Robert Hanning calls "an act of rage and an assault on clerical traditions oppressive to her," the Wife tears three pages from the book and then hits Jankyn so hard that he falls into the fire (596).¹⁶ Robert Burlin argues, "When the Wife of Bath attacks Jankyn's book, which is both her enemy and the source of her being, it is as if she were usurping the role of creator, destroying the 'original' so that she might recast herself in her own image" (227). A parallel act of rebellion is made by Echo in "Needs" (1.8) when she threatens Topher with a gun. "I'm just the science guy," he says. Echo rebuts, "Up here. Looking down on everyone. Playing God." She then shoots the imprinting technology behind the chair and one of the nearby hard drives. This early attempt by Echo to gain control over the imprint is not wholly successful. Just as the Wife is struck deaf in one ear when Jankyn retaliates (GP 446; WBP 668, 795-96), Echo is again silenced by Topher when he repairs the technology and performs subsequent imprints.

[9] However, a shift occurs in "Belle Chose": the fight for control between gloss and text or imprint and self occurs *within* Echo (rather than between her and the imprinting hardware). After being accidentally imprinted as Terry Karrens, she gradually evolves from Echo/Terry to Echo *and* Terry. She embodies both the self (albeit a developing self) and the imprint. In this plotline, we witness each of the primary glossators lose control of their figurative texts. Topher loses control when he makes the critical error causing the Terry and Kiki imprints to switch bodies. Gossen loses control when Echo, after being imprinted as Terry, stabs him in the neck with a letter opener. His glossing of both the Wife and Echo/Kiki has failed. Though the weapon may have been chosen by the writers because a professor could reasonably possess one, the symbolism is nonetheless notable—the letter opener figuratively provides access to the text.¹⁷ "We thought you were him," one of the abducted women says to Echo/Terry when she returns to the place of their imprisonment; "I am him," she responds. But as the scene progresses, Terry begins to lose control. Echo, temporarily able to separate herself from her imprint, begins to speak of Terry in the third person: "He wants to kill you," she tells the women. She is glossing the imprint of Terry for the women. "You have to kill him first!" she pleads. Though Dollhouse

agents arrive in time to save everyone, this scene reveals Echo's efforts to gain control over herself by controlling the imprint or glossing the gloss.

[10] In both "Belle Chose" and the Wife's *Prologue*, the metaphor of dance acts as yet another ambiguous "text"—a seductive performance open to glossing and interpretation. "Don't you just feel like dancing?" Kiki asks on three occasions in this episode. (First, the question comprises Echo/Kiki's opening words as she hops out of the imprinting chair; second, it is asked by Echo/Kiki to Gossen; third, it is asked by Victor/Kiki at the dance club.) Shortly before asking Gossen this question, Echo/Kiki reads aloud a description of the Wife: "Of remedies of love she knew per chance, / For she koude of that art the olde daunce" (GP 475-76). As Kennedy outlines, this couplet "allows two contradictory interpretations" ("Withouten" 21). On the one hand, explains Kennedy, "[the Wife] was able to seduce all the men she desired"; on the other "she could recognize [...] the ploys of would-be seducers" ("Withouten" 22).¹⁸ Figuratively, the Wife is both the dancer and the interpreter of the dance. For Kiki, the text merely prompts her to dance seductively for Gossen rather than to interpret his ploys. Similarly, during the dance scene at the club, Victor/Kiki only partially comprehends the text he quotes: "As help me god, I laughe whan I thynke / How pitously a-nyght I made hem swynke!" (WBP 201-02). Victor/Kiki tells his audience of onlookers that he "has no idea" what this means "but it's wicked filthy."¹⁹ Once again, Kiki reads and enacts only the seductive implications of the text. Yet, notably, the lyrics of the song playing during Victor/Kiki's dance provide a textual link back to the Wife's "remedies of love" and "olde daunce": "I can read those velvet eyes, and all I see is lies. [...] I will not be frozen, dancing is my remedy. [...] [D]ance with the enemy. / I've got a remedy" (Little Boots). The lyrics emphasize not only dancing but also interpretation. Both dances in "Belle Chose" begin with Kiki enacting seduction but end with a disruption of the dance followed by a gesture of interpretation. "What did you call me?" Echo/Terry asks immediately after stabbing Gossen. This question indicates an attempt to interpret. "You suck—trying to hit a girl!" says Victor/Kiki after knocking out the man who had threatened to hit him. This declaration is likewise an act of interpretation. Like the Wife's "olde daunce," the dance scenes in "Belle Chose" emphasize for the audience not

only the performance of seduction but also the power of an individual to disrupt performance and proffer a gloss.

[11] Echo takes another step toward becoming the glossator of her own text in "Belonging" (2.4), the episode following "Belle Chose." Through a video monitor, Boyd observes Echo reading a book and zooms in for a closer look. This sight prompts Boyd to search Echo's sleeping pod where he finds not only the book but a bookmark—a leaf that Echo has removed from a plant. Realizing its purpose, he says aloud, "So she can remember." As he walks away, the viewer sees what Boyd has missed: the sliding panel on the sleeping pod reveals numerous words Echo has etched into the glass. The etchings comprise references to past imprints (such as "Shoulder to the wheel" and "I was trained to kill") and interpretations of Dollhouse personnel (such as "Dominic was bad" and "Victor loves Sierra").²⁰ The etched notes provide textual evidence that Echo has begun to gloss herself, her imprints, and the people with whom she associates. Her progress toward *self* is visually marked by reading and inscribing text—certainly a step forward from having the text glossed for her in the previous episode. Schibanoff discusses the Wife of Bath as representative of the "new reader" in the Middle Ages. The "new reader" is one "who has access to books and reads privately, even clandestinely," as opposed to the "old reader," who listens to books being read aloud and interpreted by others (105). For Schibanoff, "[The Wife's] literal act of taking the book into her own hands demonstrates the power of new reading" (104). Chaucer's portrayal of the Wife as a reader is, according to Schibanoff, "an achievement all the more impressive because it occurred in an era that could also express the most vigorous opposition to—indeed, burn as relapsed heretics—bookish women who took the text into their own hands" (108). Though Echo will not be burned as a heretic, she is (as are all the dolls) under threat of being sent to "the attic" for moving beyond set parameters.²¹ When Boyd confronts her regarding the book and its bookmark, Echo initially plays innocent asking, "Am I in trouble?" "Not from me," responds Boyd. "But there are people who would be very upset if they knew what you were doing." "Reading?" asks Echo. Boyd then refers to Echo's response to Sierra's painting, which Echo had earlier described to Topher as representing "the bad man." "What you're doing," says Boyd, "could have consequences you can't predict or control." What Echo is doing is reading

and writing—interpreting the art, marking the book, inscribing the panel: glossing the text. In the last shot of Echo in this episode, she opens her book again and discovers within it an “All Access” pass card. Symbolically, she is offered freedom through the text. As poignantly illustrated by one of the series’ final images, Echo has also helped to attain this freedom for others: Victor and Sierra sit together with their young son who is reading a book (“Epitaph Two: Return” 2.13).

[12] The relationships among author, text, and audience offer further playground for glossators. “The authors of some of the most important medieval literature had no concept of self-identity,” Gossen explains to his students. “We think of them as anonymous. They didn’t think of themselves at all.” Though this may have been the case with some medieval authors, it was certainly not the case for Chaucer.²² Indeed, Chaucer plays with his identity as author, constructing himself as both pilgrim and poet in *The Canterbury Tales*.²³ Thus Canterbury pilgrim the Man of Law suggests that Chaucer has already told more than enough stories:

And if he have noght seyde hem, leve brother

[And if he has not said them, dear brother]

In o book, he hath seyde hem in another.

[In one book, he has said them in another.]

For he hath toold of loveris up and doun

[For he has told of lovers up and down]

Mo than Ovide made of mencion / In his Episteles.

[More than Ovid mentioned / In his Epistles.] (MLT 51-55)

Amidst the humour, Chaucer compares his own work to that of Ovid. Similarly, near the end of *Troilus and Criseyde*, Chaucer commands, “Go, litel bok [...] And kis the steppes where as thou seest pace / Virgile, Ovide, Omer, Lucan, and Stace” (5.1786-92). Though “kissing the steps” could be interpreted as a gesture of reverence for these authors, Chaucer is also

placing *himself* in this revered literary company. The references to Chaucer in "Belle Chose" place *Dollhouse*, and by extension Whedon, in the company of the traditional "Father" of English literature.²⁴ Kennedy illustrates that Chaucer "was more than typically aware of the reader's power to recreate the meaning of his text, either by literal rewriting or by creative interpretation" ("Withouten" 30).²⁵ Similarly, Schibanoff argues that "Chaucer accepted the fact that readers read differently from one another and from the author" (102). The same might be said of Whedon, who partakes in fan communities and knows of Whedon Studies scholarship, whatever his opinion of it may be. By means of the Wife of Bath—Chaucer's "acme of moral ambiguity" (Kennedy, "Withouten" 18)—Whedon steps onto the timeline of literary history and offers up *Dollhouse*—thus far, his acme of moral ambiguity—to the glossators.

[13] Glossing is rooted in the terrain of power and, in these two texts, sexual politics. Some readers of the Wife have sought to diminish or limit her intelligence and authority. Some "readers" of Echo have been troubled by the seeming misogyny of *Dollhouse*. As Mary Carruthers claims in "The Wife of Bath and the Painting of Lions," "lion painting is a dangerous sport" (218). The critical reaction to Carruthers' feminist interpretation of the Wife as asserting independence within a patriarchal economy evoked astonishing controversy among Chaucerians, one of whom stated, "such readings spoil much of Chaucer" (Wimsatt 952). To such reactions, Carruthers responded, "I am troubled because in their various ways each writer wants to deny or restrain the one quality which Chaucer deliberately gave to this character in abundance, and that is power" (40-41). The Wife has power not only within the fictional world of Chaucer's creation to interpret texts and speak for herself but also, as Carruthers affirms, the "power to engage the imagination and emotions of readers" (41). Straus asserts that "[t]he mandate of professional criticism would seem to be to take on the role of the knights who need to master, control and penetrate" (550). For Straus, the Wife of Bath "frustrates such procedures"; she is "the uncontrollable voice that eludes interpretative truth" (550). For Geoffrey Gust, the Wife "represents a consciously challenging creation"; her "ambiguous persona is the vehicle for that challenge" (140). "The ultimate secret she reveals," contends Straus, "is that all who think they can control, penetrate and master such texts as

she represents are deluded. All that critics as critics can do is create interpretations" (550). Like the Wife, Echo is a deliberately challenging creation—one both abused *by* and empowered *as* the glossator. Like the Wife's *Prologue*, *Dollhouse* is constructed to challenge the glossators and elicit a multiplicity of interpretations that necessarily shift in response to Echo's progressive self-awareness and empowerment.

[14] So too will interpretations of Echo and *Dollhouse* shift in response to the glosses imprinted upon them over the years. Thus, along with the Wife of Bath, I "praye to al this compaignye" [pray to all this company],

If that I speke after my fantasye,

[If I speak after my fantasy,]

As taketh not agrief of that I seye,

[Be not aggrieved by what I say;]

For myn entente nys but for to pleye

[For my intent is only to play.] (WBP 189-92).

By "referring to what she will say as 'fantasy' [and] 'playe,'" argues Barbara Gottfried, the Wife "points to the power of the speaker to manipulate the raw materials [...] for her own ends" (212). In the opening scene of "Belle Chose," Terry Karrens refers repeatedly to what he glosses as "play" and "game": "Damn it, Aunt Sheila! This is not how we play the game."²⁶ He then bludgeons her to death with a croquet mallet. Near the end of the episode, Echo/Terry likewise strikes one of the women with the mallet and asks, "Ready to finish our game?" Glossing something as play does not necessarily make it so. "The Dollhouse deals in fantasy," Echo explains to Paul "but that is not their purpose" ("Man on the Street" 1.6). What *is* the purpose or "entente" of *Dollhouse*? As Dinshaw reminds us, "It remains for another clerk, the pilgrim traveling on the way to Canterbury and listening to the Wife of Bath, to elaborate on the lived bodily effects of literary acts—the bodily effects on women, and the bodily effects of making literary images at all" (131). The quotation with which I opened this paper refers not only to

the Wife's gloss on the purpose of genitals but also to the reaction of the audience to the gloss—"say ye no?" she asks us. "Belle Chose" asks us the same question: How would *you* paint the lion? How will you play with the Dollhouse?

Men may devyne and glosen, up and doun,
[Men may surmise and gloss up and down,]
But wel I woot, expres, withoute lye
[But I well I know, express, without lying]
God bad us for to wexe and multiplie.
[God bade us to increase and multiply.] (WBP 26-28)²⁷

From the fifteenth-century scribe of the Ellesmere manuscript to the final presenter at each *Slayage* conference, glossators are part of textual tradition. We—the fans and scholars of *Dollhouse*—are among the glossators of the Whedonverses. Through "Belle Chose," *Dollhouse* has *invited* us to gloss its text.

Whan that Aprill with his shoures soote
[When April with his sweet showers]
The droghte of March hath perced to the roote...
[The drought of March has pierced to the root / ...] (GP 1-2)
Thanne longen folk to goon on pilgrimages
[Then people long to go on pilgrimages] (GP 12)
And Whedonites to come to our Slayages.²⁸

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¹ "Telle me also, to what conclusion / Were members maad of generacion, / And of so parfit wys a wright ywroght?" (WBP 115-17). All Chaucer quotations are taken from *The Riverside Chaucer* (Ed. Larry D. Benson). The modern English translations are my own. Though the standard abbreviation for the *Wife of Bath's Prologue* and *Tale* together is WBT, I have used WBP in this paper to refer to the *Prologue*.

² The main premise of *Dollhouse* involves programmable people referred to as "Dolls." Individuals ostensibly volunteer to work as Dolls in the Dollhouse for a period of five years. Each new Doll has his/her original memories removed and, subsequently, replaced with constructed memories using a technological process known as "imprinting." A Doll is imprinted to serve the needs or desires (sexual or otherwise) of Dollhouse clients. Thus, a Doll might be imprinted to be anyone from a hostage negotiator to a dominatrix. The series focuses on a Doll named Echo who, prior to her life in the Dollhouse, was a student activist/terrorist named Caroline Farrell. As the series progresses, Echo is gradually able to remember and control the various personalities imprinted upon her. This ability makes her unique among the Dolls, who are meant to forget each imprint once it has been removed or "wiped" from their brains. Dolls are generally imprinted by the primary computer programmer and technological genius of the Dollhouse, Topher Brink. Other key characters mentioned in this paper include Adelle

DeWitt, head of the Los Angeles Dollhouse; Boyd Langton, head of security and formerly Echo's handler; Paul Ballard, former FBI agent and currently Echo's handler; Ivy, assistant to Topher; Claire Saunders, resident doctor (who is herself a Doll named Whiskey); Dominic, former head of security; Victor, a Doll; and Sierra, a Doll.

³ "Belle Chose" comprises two main plotlines. One involves Echo being imprinted as student Kiki Turner, who is meant to fulfill the sexual fantasy of Dollhouse client Professor Edmond Gossen. The other involves Terry Karrens, a mentally unstable man who has abducted women to represent his mother, aunt, and sisters in his fantasy scenarios. The episode opens with Terry physically positioning the women (whom he has incapacitated with a paralytic drug) for a picnic and croquet match. After beating "Aunt Sheila" to death with a croquet mallet and while out searching for her replacement, Terry is hit by a car, which renders him comatose. Uncle Bradley Karrens (a Dollhouse patron), has Terry moved from the hospital into the Dollhouse in hopes of attaining high-tech assistance for him. In an attempt to locate the abducted women while Terry is comatose, Terry's memories are imprinted onto Victor, who is subsequently interrogated by Paul Ballard. Unexpectedly, Victor/Terry escapes the Dollhouse before revealing the location of the women. In an effort to mitigate the harm Victor/Terry could cause, Topher attempts to erase Terry's memories from Victor using a "remote wipe." However, a malfunction occurs, which causes the Victor and Echo imprints to switch: Kiki Turner is imprinted onto Victor, and Terry Karrens is imprinted onto Echo. After the switch, Victor/Kiki dances at a club until rescued by Paul; meanwhile, Echo/Terry stabs Professor Gossen and returns to the abducted women. Echo/Terry threatens to kill both the women and herself, but Dollhouse personnel arrive on the scene in time to save the day.

⁴ For a variety of images of medieval manuscripts with glosses, visit "The Medieval Glossed Text" Web page of Professor Kathryn M. Talarico <<http://www.library.csi.cuny.edu/~talarico/gloss.htm>>.

⁵ See, for example, *Wife of Bath's Prologue* 26, 119, 509; *Man of Law's Tale* 1180; *Summoner's Tale* 1792, 1793, 1920; *Merchant's Tale* 2351; *Squires Tale* 166; *Monk's Tale* 2140; *Manciple's Tale* 34; and *Parson's Tale* 45. The disreputable Friar of the *Summoner's Tale* announces, "Glosynge is a glorious thyng, certeyn"; he understands that glossing can be used to manipulate meaning and, thus, manipulate an audience (SumT 1793).

⁶ For another discussion of scribal responses, see Schibanoff.

⁷ For specific examples, see Gottfried, who illustrates that the Wife "appropriates the techniques of textual commentators and manipulates, glosses, and misreads texts in order to serve her own purposes" (209).

⁸ Additional examples include the following: When Adelle refers to Dr. Saunders as a "missing employee," Boyd responds, "She's not really missing, is she? She left." Adelle says, "Well, I call that missing"; Boyd then says, "I call that leaving." When Echo is brought to the wardrobe area, employee Franklin says, "Work order—Echo. Echo! Echo! Who's doing that? I am." When Kiki asks him, "Did I win a prize?" Franklin responds, "You are a prize." Later, Paul asks Terry, "Terry Marion Karrens—any part of that a boy's name?"

⁹ Egerton 2684 (c. 1460-80).

¹⁰ Another example in this episode of the interpretation of "text" (in the form of physical data) occurs when Topher interprets Terry Karrens's brain scans and then glosses them for Boyd and Adelle.

¹¹ This line is spoken by Adelle to Caroline (before she becomes Echo). We watch the women not only through our television screen but also through a monitor—the image is slightly fuzzy as if it has been pre-recorded and we are watching a playback or copy of the original.

¹² Both manuscripts date to the early fifteenth century: Ellesmere (c. 1400-10) and Cambridge (c. 1420-40). The images of the Wife are reprinted in Desmond, pages 120-21. They are also available online at “The Wife of Bath’s Prologue and Tale in Images” on *Luminarium* <<http://www.luminarium.org/medlit/wifimg.htm>>.

¹³ Echo, returning from an engagement, is featured wielding a whip in “Spy in the House of Love” (1.9).

¹⁴ To give Gossen a modicum of credit, he did choose to hire someone to fulfill his fantasy rather than to abuse an actual student.

¹⁵ Regarding Echo, I refer primarily to Topher, her programmer/glossator, and the numerous male clients, including Gossen, whose fantasies she is imprinted (or glossed) to fulfill.

¹⁶ “Al sodeynly thre leves have I plight / Out of his book, right as he radde, and eke / I with my fests so took hym on the cheke / That in oure fyr he fil backward adoun” (WBP 790-93).

¹⁷ Thank you to Alyson Buckman for connecting the letter opener to the “issue of inscription” during a SW/TX Facebook dialogue about “Belle Chose” (October 12, 2009).

¹⁸ Kennedy cites the Middle English Dictionary to distinguish the variant meanings of the word “koude” (which is the past tense of the verb “connen”). This verb can mean both “knowledge or understanding” and “ability, capability, or skill” (22).

¹⁹ The word “swynke” literally means “work” but implies that the Wife makes her husbands work during sex.

²⁰ Other phrases include “the attic is bad”; “I was blind”; “My son killed me”; “I’m a believer”; “I have a right to survive”; “...bought me a house”; “Blue skies”; “I love my baby”; “baby isn’t mine”; “women are whores”; “Where is Caroline”; “I am nobody”; “Friends help each [other]”; “Mountains are safe”; and “Topher makes me...”

²¹ For the majority of the series, “the attic” is understood as a place where people are incarcerated for misbehaviour. Not until late in the final season do we learn that people in the attic are wired to a computer system as a means of providing power to the Rossum Corporation’s mainframe computer.

²² Chaucer himself can be understood as both author and glossator. As Schibanoff explores, “some scholars maintain that the Ellesmere glossator *is* Chaucer” (58). But in a more general sense, many of Chaucer’s works are interpretations or reinterpretations of other authors’ stories. For example, *The Knight’s Tale* and *Troilus and Criseyde* are based on Boccaccio’s *Il Teseida* and *Il Filostrato* respectively. The *Wife of Bath’s Tale* has numerous analogues, and the Wife herself is often discussed as a reworking of the character La Vieille from *Roman de la Rose*.

²³ The commonplace tripartite division is Chaucer the Author, Chaucer the Narrator, and Chaucer the Pilgrim.

²⁴ See Gust for a detailed discussion of Chaucer as “Father.”

²⁵ At the end of *Troilus*, Chaucer also prays that no one “myswrite” or “mysmetre” his book, and he beseeches God that it be understood (V 1795-98).

²⁶ At the beginning of the scene, Terry says, "You better watch out, Aunt Sheila, little sister's playing to win." When Aunt Sheila struggles to escape, he complains, "it's not very sportsmanlike to just walk off because you don't like the way the game is going, is it?" Grabbing a syringe out of his medical bag to inject Aunt Sheila with another dose of the drug, he says, "Right when it's my turn to play everyone wants to quit."

²⁷ This paper was originally presented at SC4: Slayage Conference on the Whedonverses (St. Augustine, Florida, June 2010). The conference paper was glossed by a PowerPoint presentation which included, at the word "multiplye," a slide comprising images of numerous book covers of publications in Whedon Studies.

²⁸ Thank you to Jessica Legacy, Marni Stanley, and especially Kathryn Barnwell for helping me to gloss the final version of this text before SC4.